



Shalom Connections

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Interpreting the Present Time



A Support Group for Recovering Hypocrites

An editorial by David Janzen

“You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time.”

Luke 12:54-56

I was shocked that Jesus would call the crowd

that followed him “hypocrites.” So what if they know how to predict the weather but cannot interpret the present time — where is the bad faith in that? I thought hypocrites were pompous pretenders who put on a show of holiness for public effect.

Isn't interpreting the present time, a skill or a spiritual gift, rather than a virtue? How can a lack of skill make us hypocrites?

Or was this one of Jesus' over-the-top

Continued on pg. 3

Hope Fellowship News

Nancy Gatlin
Hope Fellowship

As I'm sitting in the Spring Concert of the Central Texas String Academy in which Gwendolyn and Paloma Matías-Ryan are playing their violin and viola respectively, I'm struck by our own Hope Fellowship and the metaphor that this concert represents. Not unlike these children and youth we at Hope Fellowship have had many opportunities for practice since the last SMC Connections. We, like these students are at all different life stages learning how to walk Christ's way together. This concert as also our church/community life is not a solo recital but an orchestral performance. We are learning to keep our eyes on the conductor so that we might play in sync.

Key to keeping our eyes on Christ has been our year's focus on the hope we have in him. "Let us give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! Because of his great mercy he gave us new life by raising Jesus Christ from death.

This fills us with a living hope" 1 Peter 1:3 This is the affirmation that we are seeking to claim and embrace in Hope Fellowship. Our Lenten journey was "From Despair to Hope". From Ash Wednesday on

we drew, danced, sang and spoke our despair even as we studied Revelation and were challenged to reaffirm our hope in the slaughtered Lamb.

The membership recommitment time on March 30, was a concrete way of claiming that hope as we sat around a dining table and shared refreshments, the cup and bread.

Other signs of hope are Kristi Rowe-Miller and Neil Miller being ready to enter into membership.

The youth at Hope bolster our hope as they continue to mature and have just begun a nine week series on relationships/sexuality. The openness and honesty with which JB and Kristi as youth leaders are leading our youth, is refreshing and encouraging.

We have been spurred on to practice living hope as we have met all year in a peace group that has been studying From Violence to Wholeness. From this group has come the calling of reaching out to the Christians in Waco with the Every Church a Peace Church movement.

We have recently gathered with brothers and sisters from other churches to explore and plan a kick-off event.

After having operated as a single-cell church for 10 years we have found that this is no longer adequate for meeting the needs of the Body and the different people that God has brought into our lives. Because of living hope we are beginning a process to help us divide into Koinonia or cell group families. We covet your prayers for this process — that we might clearly hear God's word for us.

God has given us times to practice at perfecting our love for Him/Her and each other. Many of us were able to practice while helping with The World Hunger Relief's Farm Day on April 30, with Emanuel (11 years old) as he created and worked on his first science fair project, with Analí and the Baylor Students for Social Justice as they work

on a living wage campaign on Baylor campus, and the Easter Retreat at Three Mountain Retreat complete with deep sharing, meaningful worship, "lack of talent show" and a newly developed Hope Fellowship version of Capture the Flag that had us young and old running all over the three "mountains."

We are grateful! God continually leads us forward from disappointment and despair to living hope, and we are tuning up. □



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Shalom Connections

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Hypocrite Support cont. from p.1

hyperboles to shock his hearers into more profound attention? Were his eyes bright with a hope that his listeners would “get it.”

To whom is Jesus talking? I

looked more closely at the context. Offhand, I’d estimate that about 0% of Jesus’ followers had office jobs. Peasant farmer, fisherman, woman in the garden or the market, traveling merchant—nearly everyone’s livelihood in Jesus’ day was affected by the weather. In rural society the first topic of conversation is still the weather. So naturally, people become skillful at predicting rain, frost, or scorching heat. What’s wrong with that?

I looked again: To whom is Jesus talking? He is speaking to The Chosen People. They are supposed to be the world’s experts, with inside information on what God has been doing in the world. It’s their job to wait expectantly for the Messiah. And the disciples, who have been with him these past three years, would by now be skilled in “seeing the kingdom of God.” Jesus has labored to shape them into a school of prophets who can discern the present time.

Seeing God’s rule break into his-

story: Standing among the disciples is One through whom God’s rule is breaking into history, demonstrating for all time, the world-changing power of the Suffering Servant. The disciples’ day of testing is coming. Jesus will be crucified, and they have no clue what God is doing. He meant to shock them. “You hypocrites!”

What makes us hypocrites? In our day, and for similar reasons, we invest immense attention in interpreting the economy, the war, political developments, cultural trends, and especially anything related to our careers. Christians have generally majored in survival and success in this present order. “You hypocrites!” Jesus would say, not be-

cause these skills are unimportant, but because they are second or third-rate concerns.

The majority of Americans pay lip service to Jesus the Messiah, but have been utterly misled by false national prophets about what kind of Messiah Jesus is. They are embarrassed to name Jesus in the same sentence with current events. They have been taught to believe that Jesus’ way of overcoming evil is ineffectual in the real world.

We live in a land whose glory is the freedom to practice any religion so long as it stays individual, private and inward. A worship and faith confined to the “religious dimension” of life gives to ourselves, and others, the appearance of piety and salvation, even while our economics and politics are carried out in the manner of the world. No one is offended by such a witness. It would get no one crucified. To such religiosity Jesus cries, “You hypocrites!”

Those of us with a radical discipleship theology can see that imperialism is not the kingdom of God. But we have a hard time seeing what Jesus is positively doing in our day. How can we participate in God’s new world coming? Isn’t it our job to know what Jesus is doing?

Simon Peter’s transformation: I

look at Simon Peter’s transformation for hopeful clues. On the night of Jesus’ arrest and trial, three times Peter denied that he knew him. Actually, he was telling the truth — he did not know Jesus. He hoped Jesus was the Messiah, but he did not understand what kind of a Messiah, and so events threw him into utter confusion.

But God’s power raised Jesus from the dead, revealing how to read all of Scripture and the conflicts of history in the light of this perfect, non-violent sacrifice.

Then Jesus himself appeared on the Galilean seashore. He restored Peter with forgiveness and a renewed

Continued next page

Hypocrite Support continued

trust to shepherd the flock. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit set the early church ablaze with the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. Now Peter was prepared to proclaim with boldness the meaning of the present events, and the appropriate response for those who believed.

“Therefore, let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified. . . . Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.’ So those who welcomed the message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers.”

A few sign-posts to guide us: If we made a priority of interpreting rightly the present time, what might that look like? Here are a few signs posts to guide us.

a) Not a spectator sport but something we learn by participation:

At the close of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says, “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.” The knowledge of God’s will is not given to those who just say the right things—“Lord, Lord.” But those who do what Jesus taught will be enlightened in the process of doing them. You learn this skill of discernment by practicing it within a discerning community. Riding a bicycle can only be learned by riding a bicycle.

b) A gift given within a prophetic community.

Acts 2 speaks of the converts being of “one heart and mind.” This is not the result of social conformity, but of teaching, reflection and conversation at every level of the community, listening for the voice of the Spirit. Peter spoke in his own voice, but he spoke for the community — not just the present community, but also the

historic community of prophets including Joel, Zechariah, David, Samuel and Isaiah.

It matters greatly who is the “we” for whom we speak? Interpreting the present time is always done from a “we” and for a “we.” In most religious literature I read these days, the “we” is a United-States-of-America “we.” When the church unconsciously speaks in this way, it has brought an idol into the sanctuary.

Every meeting of our church communities, whether in small groups or ecumenical assemblies, should be an exercise in discerning what God is doing, which is the same as interpreting the present time. We should not all expect to be skilled at discerning the significance of world events. But we should be aware of what God is doing in the arena where we are engaged—whether that is family, work, small sharing group, or task team.

Our church community is a support group for recovering hypocrites, persons who are learning how to let Jesus be Lord of all of life, not just of our religion.

c) A Holy Spirit gift activated in worship.

True Christians, of course, worship all the time. But the skill of rightly interpreting the present time needs the Holy Spirit to become active.

Like a battery that has to be charged up to do work, so worship

is a crucial way to get out of this world’s assumptions and into the world that God is bringing from heaven to earth. Worship helps us renew our citizenship in the kingdom of God and get straight for ourselves which is the real world and which is the world that is passing away.

d) Discerning sources of renewal in contemporary social movements:

At our recent Reba Place Fellowship retreat, we made banners of eight intentional communities that have had a strong impact for good in our lives. We prayed blessings on them and on all that we receive from them. Interpreting the present time calls for discerning the spirits of social movements and opening ourselves to what is the genuine work of God in them.

e) Seeing the action of God depends on our social location.

Jesus ate and talked with all classes of society, but he was homeless, and his spiritual family was marginalized. The American empire looks totally different from Valle Nuevo than from the halls of Congress, which is why some of us keep returning to experience Salvadoran campesino hospitality and counsel.

The best news reports I read about Iraq are from Christian Peacemaker Teams. They told us about detention camp abuses before they hit the news, and now that these abuses

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are no longer in the media, we read that they continue under Iraqi management. A preferential option for the poor runs through the whole of scripture, but especially the New-Testament. We need to see our location of privilege from below by doing the cross-cultural work of letting Scripture speak to us and also by opening the ears of our hearts to the poor.

f) Naming and resisting the powers of our age:

In the wilderness, fasting for forty days, Jesus discovered Satan as the force behind three credible and tempting ways to exercise power.

An early Reba leader called the community to resist our civilization's deities of "Mars, Mammon and Me." This is still a useful way to describe what we are up against. But the same discernment of powers needs to take place in every context of our lives—within community and beyond it.

Busyness with too many good things is certainly one center of power that we need to resist with prayer, times of retreat, and discerning counsel from sisters and brothers. I probably need help to resist the temptation to call everyone else "hypocrite." What are the powers we see and need support to resist?

Becoming support groups for recovering hypocrites:

This present newsletter is an exploration of the theme, "Interpreting the Present Time." Our Shalom Connections Camp Meeting at Plow Creek, August 4-7, will meet under the same banner. We have invited a series of persons and groups to share how they interpret the present time in the light of Jesus' challenge.

May God make us support groups for recovering hypocrites, humble to learn, bold to act, and confident to bear witness to the good news of what God is doing in the world in our day. □

News from Church of the Sojourners

*Zoe Mullery
Church of the Sojourners*

I write this news upon returning from a meeting where we discussed the aspect of our financial system we call "discretionary" spending. We began our discussion by watching the news show made about the financial arrangements at Reba, featuring the delightful and articulate Selph family, among others. We all agreed that the show was remarkably well done, and gave a real sense of the spirit of the system, as opposed to just the mechanics of it. It also stimulated thoughts and discussion about the various ways different communities do things, and the pros and cons they inevitably entail—and how, amazingly, God's grace is able to work through our bumbling human efforts. We're grateful to Reba for the witness of the long haul and of the continuing focus on trusting God.

We are looking to see what God is doing in and through the four apprentices who've been our good-natured guinea pigs this year—Jon and IvaJo O. Pedersen, Steven Braney, and Matt Toney. As we come into the last trimester of the first year of our new apprenticeship, birth metaphors are inevitable. Whether this year's labor will result in all four staying around for another year or longer is not yet fully decided, but we trust that good things will be born from the faithful efforts of all involved. We are currently in the process of determining who will be in next year's apprenticeship—it may be as many as six to eight!—as well as imagining just what the next step of "novitiate" will look like. Please remember us in your prayers

as we seek to have helpful, defining boundaries as well as flexibility and pastoral sensitivity in our new approach to membership.

We have split into two groups to do two separate book studies. One group is studying N. T. Wright's The New Testament and the People of God while the other digs into Jack Bernard's book, Grace and Holiness: How To Become A Saint (which we are currently seeking to get published). There is much rich soul-food in both books.

By the time this news come out we will have gone on our annual Covenant Retreat at the beautiful Quaker Center in the redwoods, where we will have welcomed Anne-Marie Saxton into covenanted membership. The celebration will most certainly include chocolate.

In August several of us will travel to Minnesota to attend the marriage of Matt Toney and Mary Vitalis. Mary has been a part of the "Campbell Street Women" flat in the Blue House, comprised of a group of women who are all veterans of the Mission Year program (as is Matt Toney). She and Matt will live somewhere in Sojourner housing (yet to be determined), and will participate in the apprenticeship next year.

Laura Hare continues with her sabbatical from leadership, and has been faithful to use the time to seek God's presence. (For anyone who knows Laura, it will not be surprising to hear that she finished her one-year chronological Bible reading in eight months.) Though it has not been an easy time for her, it is apparent that God has been revealing himself to Laura in new ways. Her deepening roots most certainly bring nourishment to the whole body. Jeff Hare has embarked on a kind of "spiritual fitness program" and is set on deepening his knowledge of and confidence in God's love.

We are fast approaching the departure date of Tim Otto as he heads off this August for two years of seminary at Duke University. We have no idea how we will manage without him, but the brilliant idea we have hit

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upon is that we should trust God to make good use of it, both for Tim and for us. We are fully intending to do that, and would welcome your prayers as we accommodate yet another transition in our body. It will be no small transition for Tim either.

We are in the middle of the beginning of a gift discernment process for Teri Creeger. We're hoping that God will lead us in this to a church-centered version of Frederick Buechner's famous quote: "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." (Of course, gladness and hunger in and of themselves are elements which are not always easy to discern well.) With each person we go through a process of gift discernment with we seek to grow in our ability to build each member up for the sake of the body.



Louise Harris' grandson Austin Jones will graduate from Bridgemont High School in June and we are so glad we have been able to have him amongst us for these high school years (There are a lot of teenagers it wouldn't be easy to say that about). He is currently deciding

what direction he will take next. Congratulations, Austin! He doesn't know this yet but his mother is planning a surprise trip from Belize to be there for his graduation. Dan and Kelly Zazvorka plan to attend as a surprise as well. Louise recently returned from a two-week visit to Belize where she got to bask in the love of her family, including a new granddaughter.

Watch these pages in the future for poetry from Jose Guatemala, age 16. I hear he has written some beautiful poems and hope to talk him into letting us print one.

Kamesha Sullivan, our beloved Sunday worship babysitter, will be moving in July with her husband Joe to Los Angeles to be closer to family. She/they will be greatly missed, and we hope they will return someday.

Dan and Katie Piché have finally moved in to Sojourner housing. After months of patiently waiting for us to figure out what we were doing, they moved out of their apartment and into a guest room with the Creegers and Gishes. A larger Sojourner move is imminent as we incorporate new apprentices and accommodate other changes. Moves are always stressful, so all you prayer warriors out there who read the SMC newsletter looking for things to pray for (thank you, Ivy Otto!) could pray for patience, good humor, and mutual affection amongst us as we sort out where we will all be come September.

Rebecca Gish's adoption was finalized May 2! We celebrated with cake and balloons. Her first birthday will be June 30, which may entail more cake and balloons, which I'm sure she won't mind.



A close friend from high school of Jenny Lockie's, Beatriz Hammack, died of lupus on April 19 at age 32, after a long struggle. She and her husband Jimmy had been married by Jack Bernard, and have both been good friends of Sojourners through the years. We were able to show our love to Jimmy in doing her memorial service, and have been gratified by his presence in the Jack's book study.

Edith Bernard walks or buses three afternoons a week across town to offer her friendship and service to an elderly Chinese woman in hospice care. It is beautiful to hear about the way Edith has been able to share God's love with a stranger in need. A real friendship seems to have grown between them in a short time, as Edith puts to use her special gift of loving service in this context.

It seems appropriate to conclude this bouquet of news and activities with a little reminder of the essence of things, taken from Jack's book:

Faith is the practical adherence to the trustworthiness of God.

May we be living embodiments of that wisdom. □

Rogers Park News

Sally Youngquist
Reba Place Fellowship

Fellowship of Rogers Park member Lisa Selph felt frustrated with herself after addressing a visiting group from Greenville College. There were things she wish she'd said, and she felt inarticulate. A few weeks later she prayed with a church friend for

more opportunities to share what she believed and why she lived the way she did.

God surprised her with an immediate answer to that prayer. A local parent friend who works at Chi-

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cago's public television station asked her if she would be open to talking about her life in Reba Place Fellowship in a series focusing on "Money Matters." Several conversations with her family, RPF members and TV staff members later, a television crew arrived at her doorstep to film the Selphs' family life. They focused particularly on how family economic decisions like standard of living, children's music lessons and family travel are handled within the context of a common purse community. Lisa and Doug spoke candidly on why they do what they do, as did RPF leaders Virgil Vogt and David Janzen. We were all impressed at the sensitive job the television crew did in capturing our life in community. [Check the RebaPlaceFellowship.org website, and click "what's new" to view the 14-minute segment for yourself.] To date, Lisa has received an offer of help to secure a violin for daughter Hannah and achieved "celebrity recognition" from a fellow customer in the grocery store. Be careful what you pray for!

Cash and volunteer labor needs for the new Living Water Community Church meetinghouse have brought Plow Creek and Rogers Park folks together a number of times. The weekend of April 9-10, Sally Youngquist traveled downstate to speak about LWCC's missional focus to a combined gathering of Plow Creek Church and Willow Springs Mennonite Church congregations. The LWCC youth group joined her by taking an outing to the country to return an earlier visit from the Plow Creek Fellowship youth group. Intergenerational conversation during Sunday School hour surfaced country folks' fears of the city (traffic, crime, congestion, getting lost) and city folks' fears of the country (too dark, scary noises, wild animals, and getting lost.) The same week, PCF's Fitz family and, a few days later, Rick Reha, joined volun-

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Peak Oil

Financial Collapse and Living the Future Now

Douglas Selph

Reba Place Fellowship

We humans are killing each other and the planet. Or put more accurately, the industrialized peoples of the world are placing an unprecedented strain on the world's limited resources. This is not only killing the planet, but denying those resources to those who most desperately need it.



Right now the planet's population is something on the order 6.5 billion people, with an increase of roughly 100 million people per year. A billion people, or 1/6 of the world's population, are living in *extreme poverty*, defined by the World Bank as having an income of less than \$1 a day, and thus are starving to death. This translates into the staggering number of 8 million dying from malnutrition per year, or 20,000 people per

day.

If 1/6 the world's population is starving to death then that means at least 1/6 of the world's *Christians* are starving to death. God is calling the church to have right relationship to each other. This includes not only our local Christian family, but the global Christian family as well.

One way to think of the current age the industrialized world has been living in (the last 100 years or so), is to describe it as an *Age of Abundance*. The chief resource in this age has been oil. With it, the industrialized nations have been able to prosper. But it's being over-consumed. And America is over-consuming a disproportionate amount of this resource compared to the rest of the world. The depletion of this resource will usher in a new age. Attribute it to the judgment of God if you wish, but the industrialized world could be entering the beginning stages of an *Age of Scarcity*.

Peak Oil: It is generally understood that the production of oil will follow a bell curve. That is, on the increasing side of the slope, more and more oil is produced. But on the other side of the slope less and less oil is produced. Now as long as civilization is on the increasing side, it can "grow".

However, the problem is that because of the way our industrial society is set up, our *need* is actually increasing. And we aren't prepared to make the kind of switches necessary to other forms of energy in anywhere near the time frame needed with approaching the loss of cheap oil.

This problem isn't going to be solved by simply switching to different energy sources. Coal is one of the more efficient replacements of oil, the economic value being roughly half of oil, but it pollutes big time, destroys the environment, and is non-renewable. Natural Gas is also non-renewable, peaking opti-

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Valle Nuevo: Two Responses

David Janzen and David Hovde
Reba Place Fellowship

I) David Janzen

I have the joyful and impossible task of explaining how five men (aged 22 to 64) from Reba Place Church were changed by our visit with our sister village, Valle Nuevo in El Salvador. (Valle Nuevo is a village of about 900 persons within the larger municipality of about 5,000 persons called Santa Marta that we have visited annually since 1992.)

In one day, on March 12, we were transported by air, highway, and (you-gotta-feel-it-to-believe-it) rocky mountain road from:

--snowy winter to tropical dry season.

--urban Anabaptist intentional community to Catholic campesino village.

--homes where each of us has our own bedroom to homes where six persons of both sexes and all ages sleep in one room.

--flush toilets to outhouses.

--hot and cold running water faucets to an outdoor *pila* where once a week the scarce water runs into an open tank from which the family dips what they need for dish-washing, clothes-washing and personal baths.

--sleeping in our own bed to sleeping in the best bed in the house because the whole family is doubling up in the other room.

--institutions that work smoothly in our favor to anguished stories of murder, flight, refugee status, and the struggle for life against a hostile government.

--universal schooling as a right to meeting amazing young people who have labored to earn university de-

grees and develop a K-12 school for 900 students from almost nothing.

--flying to El Salvador for \$500 (round-trip) with passport in hand to be served by a host whose family survived and built a house because he entered the United States illegally under a truckload of tires for a \$3,000 one-way fee.

--loving family and friends we do know to loving family and friends we did not yet know but soon would in that great family of God.

The list of contrasts could go on. But we have to testify that these differences turned out to be just

samples of the rich diversity in God's world, not barriers that divided and set us against each other. Yvonne Dilling, our dear long-term friend in El Salvador, had made advance arrangements and was at our elbows with translations and cultural explanation at all the crucial moments.

It is clear that our hosts valued our visit immensely and expressed their concern that, since there were only five of us, these encounters might be coming to an end. Their desire for relationship, to not be forgotten, came through in every conversation. It had very little to do with their hope for any specific help—even though they have many obvious needs.

On March 18, following the community celebration of the stations of the cross recalling their fight into exile, and following the evening mass,

everyone stayed on while I presented a slide show from the history of our relationship with Valle Nuevo and the municipality of Santa Marta, 1992 to the present. At the conclusion of the show Tomasa Torres gave an impromptu sermon. She said. "These internationals come to us and they value all that we are doing even more than we value it ourselves. In their eyes what we have done is significant. There are five communities and hundreds of people who will hear their report. They help us remember why we are a community and what we struggle for. God has sent them to us and

we should be grateful!" After a sermon like we can only say – God certainly has made it clear that we can not forget our community of friends in Valle Neuvo. We are moved to pledge ourselves to come again.

It has always been important for us to keep maintaining our relationship as brothers and sisters in Christ foremost. Projects are secondary, but projects do help us focus our relationship with specific commitments. We came away from our visit talking about three (or possibly four) projects that deserve our

ongoing attention.

- 1) Permanent homes for the poorest families:
- 2) Scholarships for high school graduates:
- 3) Pastoral care initiatives by Padre Luis in Santa Marta:
- 4) Supporting the Valle Nuevo



“diaspora” in the U.S. with spiritual resources and community connections, including an invitation from Yvonne Dilling for them to attend the Shalom Camp meeting at Plow Creek.

As you can see, we felt moved by the Spirit to step out on several limbs. We are eager to share the inspiration we felt in this visit and hope you can be part of it too by your responses.

David Janzen de parte de Allan, Joseph, otro David, y Yesse.

II) David Hovde

At the 2004 SMC Conference in Waco, I was moved to hear Tomasa Torres, Salome Ascencio, and Margarita Aviles’s stories of their people’s suffering during the Salvadoran civil war in the early 1980’s. After they spoke, translator Nancy Gatlin encouraged us to ask what it meant to be sister communities with Valle Nuevo. It meant that we were interested in what was happening in each other’s lives. It meant that we would write and visited each other. After hearing this, and because of the encouragement of others, particularly Jim Fitz, and my father, I decided I wanted to visit Valle Nuevo in March, 2005.

On our delegation’s first full day in Valle Nuevo, a group of youth put on a play for us, acting out the army attacks and their people’s flight across the Lempa in 1981, before most of them were born. Afterwards, we listened to stories from the youth and adults present – horrible stories of violence from that time. We heard of people’s relatives tortured and killed. We were told that everyone in town had stories like these. One young person told of her grandmother, who was pregnant at the time, being killed along with her unborn child.

We ate dinner in the homes of different families each evening. Each evening the families told us their stories of those times. I felt trusted

and privileged to hear such honest and vulnerable sharing. I was grateful for our translator, Yvonne, who made it possible for us to understand and ask questions of our hosts.

We went with a group to San Salvador to visit the chapel where Archbishop Oscar Romero was killed in 1980. We also saw where he was buried in the basement of the cathedral. We visited the Jesuit university, where six priests were murdered by the Salvadoran military, along with a woman and her daughter. We saw the memorial wall with the names of more than 30,000 non-combatants killed during the war.

Back at Valle Nuevo, we participated in the stations of the cross march through all the neighborhoods of Valle Nuevo and Santa Marta. At each station, the sufferings of Jesus paralleled a point where the people suffered in their flight to Honduras. Ending at the church, rain poured down against the tin roof, though it was the dry season, as several hundred people listened to the priest read the names of relatives who had died in the war.

When I was thirteen, my family moved to Ethiopia, to work with

Mennonite Central Committee. I witnessed much poverty. Barriers of culture, language, and privilege were overwhelming to me, and I did not get to know any Ethiopian people on a deep level. I felt strongly the discrepancy between my standard of living and that of others, but didn’t know what could be done about it. Visiting Valle Nuevo was a healing experience for me. We were welcomed deeply into the lives of the people, stayed in their homes, and recognized our common bond with them.

Toward the end of our visit, I asked one of our hosts, “Why do you want groups like ours to come?” He said that they have had other sister community relationships besides ours. During the war, and the flight to Honduras, it was the internationals who came alongside them, when the armies of El Salvador and Honduras were attacking them. He said that, when he saw how small our delegation was this year (five people), he was concerned that our visits would eventually fizzle out. At the end of our time there, each of us on the delegation expressed the desire to remain in contact with the people of Valle Nuevo, and hope to visit again. □



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mistically within 20 years, is much more difficult to transport than oil, and has a lower energy in/energy out ratio than easily accessible oil. Ethanol, a gas which is made from corn, optimistically has an energy in/out ratio of just about 1.23. Nuclear energy requires uranium, which is limited, produces radioactive waste, and the plants are very expensive to build. Solar Power is renewable, but difficult to make, and extremely inefficient compared to oil. Wind Power is renewable and at this point is considered the most efficient renewable replacement for oil. But we don't have nearly enough to make up for the expected energy shortfall due to the loss of cheap oil.

And keep in mind it takes energy to get coal, natural gas, build solar power panels, make wind turbines, and develop other alternatives. If the price of oil goes up, so will the price producing these alternative forms of energy.

"The effects of even a small drop in production can be devastating. For instance, during the 1970's oil shock, shortfalls in production as small as 5% caused the price of oil to nearly quadruple. The same thing happened in California a few years ago with natural gas: a production drop of less than 5% caused prices to skyrocket by 400%." The 1970 oil shock was caused by a political event which we were able to recover from by turning to other sources of oil. But in the coming crisis there will be no other sources to turn to.

Note here that there isn't any controversy over if the peaking of the oil price will occur. Very few people are saying that. The controversy that exists is when. And the ranges estimate between 2005 and 2020.

The problem is that after the peak has occurred, not only will we be forced to turn to alternative forms of transportation, but alternative ways of heating our homes, providing light, keeping our computers run-

ning, and making all sorts of things. And here is the kicker: providing our food.

"Ten calories of fossil fuels are required to produce every 1 calorie of food eaten in the US. " Most of the food distribution networks we currently rely on are dependent on oil. If you live in the US, the food you eat travels, on average, 1,500 miles before it reaches your plate. Since our oil is necessary to produce the food we eat, we are in effect eating oil.

"Ten calories of fossil fuels are required to produce every one calorie of food eaten in the U.S."

The resource of oil is not only important in preserving the lifestyles of those in industrialized nations, but also is directly tied to the value of the US currency itself.

Money: OPEC currently only officially accepts US dollars in exchange for their oil. Everyone, in order to buy OPEC oil, needs US dollars to do it. This in effect ties the value of the US dollar to oil, which makes it quite valuable. The US dollar for decades has dominated the world economic stage because all developed countries need oil and because of the perceived stability of the US.

But these days there is a new player in town, the Euro dollar. The EU consumes much less energy per capita than the US; it also is much closer to Russia which has oil reserves. Europe is close to the Saudis so they are able to utilize pipes for their transportation of oil, while the US must rely on tankers. The Euro therefore can be seen as a viable competitor to the US Dollar as the

dominant world currency.

There has been a lot of talk in the OPEC countries about accepting the Euro in exchange for oil. In fact, back when Saddam Hussein was in power that's exactly what he did. He accepted the Euro instead of the dollar. It was a direct attack on the US economy.

The US has an unimaginable amount of debt to other countries at this point. We are paying them now using US dollars. But at some point if those countries no longer need US dollars, if instead they want Euros, then the US Dollar is going to devalue.

This means that a fear driving a lot of people in charge of our impressive military might, is not just the fear of losing some oil, although that is important. But in so doing they are also preserving the value of US dollar. And if the dollar loses value, panic could set in, the Stock Market could crash, and the US economy could very well implode., thus causing a major US recession.

But if such a recession hits the US, I must admit, part of me would consider it the apt justice of God.

What can we do?

The topic of Peak Oil may prove to be a useful tool in order to spur non-Christians on curbing rampant consumerism. Because the effects of Peak Oil will affect everyday life, it will perhaps be a more approachable topic to non-Christians than that of, say, the justice of God. Because the required changes that need to happen must ultimately be

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done on a societal based level, we need to be telling as many people as are willing to listen: the folk you work with, your family, friends, anyone you meet.

Christian intentional communities are called to be prophetic, not just in our analysis and words, but in the way we live. With our own common life and shared economy, we are called to pioneer the ways of living that will make for peace – to begin living now the future that will soon make sense for the whole planet.



Demonstrating how to live in the age to come right now might mean buying or growing more of our food locally. In the future, travel will be a luxury—begin living this reality now. Taking a pleasure trip? Tithe 10% of the cost of travel toward an organization supporting renewable energy. Going out to eat at an expensive restaurant? Tithe 10% of the bill to support Heifer International. Extending your house? Tithe 10% towards

the support of housing in poorer countries.

Minimizing the use of energy points to a sustainable future. Places like Plow Creek will increasingly be seen as valuable. Unless public transportation to places like Camp Lake (a retreat place for Reba) is established, then in the long run it may turn out that it's just too expensive to drive there. Living with the future in mind could be a workshop at the coming SMC conference. Finally our non-violent commitment is criti-

cal. If when disastrous scenarios come into play, I think we should all be spiritually prepared to not resort to violence, nor pay others to protect our own lives. We should continue to resolve to demonstrate Jesus' example of generosity and reciprocating in kind with love.

May God's peace be with you, and not as the world gives, but the true peace which is found only by residing in Him. □

<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2003/jul2003/unpo-j28.shtml>. See also *The End of Poverty* by Jeffrey Sachs.

2. The US, for example, in 2003 consumed roughly ¼ of the produced oil in the world.
3. The forces of consumerism and the assumption that an economy must always grow.
4. <http://www.lifeaftertheoilcrash.net>.
5. A quote from Matt Savinar. See also <http://www.energybulletin.net/5045.html>
6. <http://www.lifeaftertheoilcrash.net>
7. For an illuminated read, see Richard Heinberg's article at <http://www.museletter.com/archive/149.html>.
8. The Organization of petroleum producing countries: Algeria, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Nigeria, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Venezuela. See www.opec.org.
9. It is interesting to note, that this, as far I as know, was never published in the US media.
10. You can purchase videos challenging the lifestyle of the US at www.endofsuburbia.com.
11. For example, in Illinois, PIRG is pushing for Wind Power. Most of the energy in Illinois comes from nuclear.
12. Reba, for example, is reserving 10% of the cost to upgrade their Camp Lake house, to send to Valle Nuevo for the purposes of re-building their homes.

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teers from Reba Place Church and Fellowship and LCC to work on LWCC's new building.

Several of our weekly cell group meetings, Saturdays and Memorial Day holiday time have been dedicated to dry walling, mudding and taping activities – a new way to experience community with one another. FRP members Ronn and Nina Frantz contribute massive hours of their time supervising and feeding workers. We look forward to hosting many visiting youth groups this summer, sharing our life in community with them as they share their labor with us. Through this process, God is not only building a visible "prayer house" on the corner of Pratt and Ashland, but is building up the body of Christ. Please keep supporting us with your prayers! □

Grain of Wheat News

*Marcus Rempel
Grain of Wheat*

After a glorious spell of warmth we should have known not to trust in early April, we've been back to jackets and warm hats for a couple weeks. But one can sense the pressure building up in buds and tight-bound blossoms. Throw a little heat on and life will explode here any minute now.

Other potentialities have been quietly developing over the winter and may be about to reveal themselves in visible form. The Housing Ministry group, which has been discussing proposal papers for an affordable housing ministry all winter went out this week and looked at a house they might buy. The rural seed group has also been looking at property. They toured a beautiful riverside quarter section on the Brokenhead River outside of Winnipeg this week. They are looking at creating a legal entity and combining funds to be ready to make a purchase, possibly this summer.

As a whole body, we are seriously exploring throwing some of our money into a common renovations project with the parish of St. Matthew's Anglican, the building where we now worship. It wasn't our first choice to come here, but now we're looking at calling it home for the foreseeable future and forging a more serious partnership with the owning congregation.

Grain of Wheat has a history of launching joint capital ventures, including the Jubilee Fund through which members helped pay off each others' mortgages, and a rural farm community called Norfolk. Both were eventually dissolved, the Jubilee Fund because of broken promises, and Norfolk because of an eventual breakdown in relationships.

Hopefully we're a little wiser for those experiences. We've learned some trepidation, to be sure.

And yet, our imaginations keep being re-captured by the Kingdom of God - that political, economic, social, spiritual reality that Jesus says is at hand, now, in the messy, tangible present, not only in a heavenly, distant future. So we're at it again, daring to trust each other enough to open up a space for the Holy Spirit in our mundane, non-Sunday lives, inviting it to form us into the living body of Christ, a corporate reality that lovingly touches a wounded world.



Not that the reality of Christ's body has been dormant all this time. I do not have space here to give testament to the works of healing, mercy, justice and love that Christ has been bringing forth in the corporate and individual lives of GoW since those last joint economic ventures. It's just that when we start throwing our personal monies into common pots, we cross a threshold into a territory where certain new wonders can be achieved and certain new wounds can be inflicted. Please pray for us. □

The Present Time

*Joe Gatlin
Hope Fellowship*

"He also said to the crowds, When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, "It is going to rain"; and so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, "There will be scorching heat"; and it happens. You hypocrites!

You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?" Luke 12.54-56

In central Texas, we look at the calendar not the skies. May through September? That's easy - scorching heat. October through April?

Well, despite our advantage of Doppler and dozens of other forecasting innovations, maybe clouds in the west and south winds were just more of a sure thing in first century Palestine. Apologies to Jesus, I would rather take my chances interpreting the times.

If the purpose of reading earth and sky is to forecast the weather, then the purpose of interpreting the present time must be to make some predictions about the future so one can live accordingly in the present.

Christians have rushed to embrace futurism (a science even more imprecise than meteorology). They forecast new trends and developments so that they can contextualize their messages for appropriate settings and adjust their long-range plans in order to accomplish their goals.

Churches, mission agencies, and para-church Christian ministries have learned a dizzying set of skills and recruited competencies in order to not just predict the future, but to control it and even to conquer it. They sharpen their images; they create media opportunities; and they

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rephrase their vision so it can serve as a sound bite.

See the clouds? Feel the south wind? No big deal. We have not only mastered our present time, we now are engineering the future.

Forget the simple-mindedness of the question, "what would Jesus do?" Instead, given our access to power, wisdom, and money, we ask, "How can we accomplish the kingdom of God?"

Would he not want us to make the message relevant to the present time? Would he not want us to be effective in spreading the gospel, anticipating the movements of cultures, societies, and history? Would he not want us even more to engineer success, to build the new city of God?

Effectiveness, success. These are the results Jesus wanted. This is what it means to interpret the present times. Yes? No?



For the Apostle Paul it was both yes and no. Yes to relevance, effectiveness, and success. No to the popular spin put on these goals. "For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and a foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God ." (1 Corinthians 1.22-24)

For Paul, proclaiming Christ crucified, was not simply describing a historical event, it was also the declaration of God's ultimate victory over the principalities and powers. And in the dawning of that new age of cross and resurrection, Christ

crucified became the current reality, an innovative yet ageless plan so to speak. (2.7-9) In the new time, the time Jesus was urging the crowds to properly interpret, "God's foolishness [the cross] is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness [the cross] is stronger than human strength." (1.25)

Paul lived out this ethic of life from the larger scope and purpose of life to seemingly trivial, everyday communications and actions. He reminded the Corinthians how he had first visited them, "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. My speech and my proclamation were not with persuasive words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God." (2.2-5)

The cross and Christ crucified are not empty words or flat religious language.

Christ crucified is not just the message, it is also mission and methodology. It is not just a sermon, it is strategy and even style. To the world, the cross looks shameful, weak, and appears to be a failure. To those who follow Jesus, the cross is God's power.

This approach to life is extremely challenging to us in Hope Fellowship. When we gather to discern how to shape and live our life together, we are tempted to depend on our own experience and the wisdom of the world. Paul wrote though, "Consider your own call," (1.26). That call that Jesus has extended to us is not to follow the fears and delusions of our own minds; the call is not to be swayed

and persuaded by the folly and greed of the world. Paul went on to elaborate the calling.

Effectiveness. "God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong." (1.27) In the honor-shame culture of the Greco-Roman world the only thing more scandalous than asking the strong to accept and welcome the weak was to declare that God actually favored and honored the weak to the shame of the strong.

In those local churches, Paul explained, there could be no enclaves of Jews or Greeks, males or females, slaves or free. Rather, in Christ a new humanity was created.

In Christ inclusiveness was without bounds and dividing walls were obliterated into insubstantial dust.

In Hope Fellowship we are attempting to live a new culture in Christ, bringing Hispanic and Anglo together. Daily we are aware that this vision is in danger of being defeated by our insensitivities and our deep-seated, deceitful prejudices. At the beginning of each day we recognize that the invitation to bear the cross is again extended to us.

Successfulness. "God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are." (1.28) For Paul, the things that were great in the world, the power of sin, the principality of the emperor, the idolatry of a materialistic and hedonistic culture, had already been defeated by the faith of Jesus Christ in accepting the cross. The only culture of success in the New Testament churches was that which was visible in faith, hope, and love.

In Hope Fellowship we have no trouble recognizing that we are failures. We deal with depression; we fall into judgment sometimes failing to speak gently to each other; we struggle constantly with organizing our life to have adequate time for worship, fellowship, discernment, nurture and education of children,

Continued on next page

accountability, and Bible study; and we just can't seem to get our meeting house repaired! Yet in Christ, in the great economy of God, we know that even these things are brought to nothing in the cross. We seek to keep our attention on Christ Jesus, the source of life, so that we may boast in the Lord. (1.30-31) As Paul in another letter encouraged the believers, we desire not to be obsessed with our failures, but to think on those things that are true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellent, and worthy of praise - namely the grace and love of Jesus Christ. (Philippians 4.9) □

Reba Place Fellowship News

*Eric Lawrence
Reba Place Fellowship*

Chairs surround the perimeter of a table-less room where paintings from various Reba members festoon the walls except the side that sets a background to Julius Belser. Julius is sitting comfortably on the lone couch with his hands folded behind his head, elbows up, forming an "M".

Under the hypnotizing drone of the hum and tick, I asked Julius what is happening in the greater community around us, especially concerning housing for lower-income folks, and how he works at solving the problems. He responded with a narrative of his experience in his work, expounding on his reflections for an hour, gesturing and laughing in the most peaceful of ways. The assessment of what he sees is candid and realistic, yet tinged with a mysterious hope.

David Janzen and Julius work together on two separate community development associations and see the importance of helping organi-

cally to raise up leaders from the black churches who have big visions of changing our surroundings to support poor folks by giving them access to quality housing.

Julius ends by saying, "But you can't put any of that in the newsletter," then throws up his arms, laughs, and gives me a hug.

I love that guy. He is right. I can't put what he told me in the newsletter, and I don't even know why, but it would be inappropriate. Julius reminds me so much of the importance of having real servant leaders to look up to and follow who speak honestly to those who need to hear it. I walk out of the conference room and think, "How did he become so peaceful?"

Now for no segue whatsoever.

A real surge of energy has been sent through the Fellowship over the past months. So much is happening right under our noses with the change from winter freeze to spring and summer warmth seems only as if it is a seamless transition of God's blessing for his people. I have heard two of the older types, those in their late seventies and early eighties say that these last ten years have been some of the most fulfilling of their lives. It isn't often that you hear those in the late stages of life speak of appreciation and wonderment. I expect to hear that there is regret, depression, and boredom in the twilight of earthly existence, realizing all that was gained was but a chasing of the wind. But being a part of God's people doesn't have to be that way.

It has also been said that God is answering many prayers with the recent flood of interest in community. Christianity Today and Christian Century, who are interested in writing articles on Intentional Christian Community have contacted us. Even more illuminating to the answer of prayer is that WTTW channel 11's (Public Broadcasting) highlighted the Fellowship on their show

Chicago Matters in a segment entitled, "Money Matters." The segment featured Reba's unique way of thinking about money. Lisa and Doug Selph's family were the focus and you can read more about that experience in the Rogers Park news. As a result of the program, one fella has been prompted to visit Reba Church and come to the Fellowship's Monday night seminar/potluck. Certainly, there is deep spiritual renewal within the community and within the culture of Christianity where even those outside see something special and worthy of investigation.

But the most amazing part is the stream of young people looking to live radical discipleship. The intern program has experienced a boom in interest with ten interns signed on for the summer. We've even had to turn one away who applied too late. Fortunately, Katie Dahlseng, an intern from this last year, along with David Janzen, have been faithfully directing the program and have come up with a slew of activities for the interns. Included in those activities is Katie's "Hope Street Theater" team.

Katie will be meeting with the other interested interns to pray over the specifics and collectively put their gifts to use for children in Rogers Park and Evanston. The Hope Street Theater team will do re-enactments of the gospels and perform multi-cultural music, mainly hip-hop, that focuses on God's promise for each of the children's lives. With fomenting gang tensions and the despair of urban culture abounding, the Hope Street Theater team aims at delivering a message of non-violence and love where the kids will dance in God's love and promises.

Interns will also help in an effort to launch a new Reba business, *The Recyclery*. This non-profit business will focus on refurbishing used bikes and integrating community-building

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A Day Serving and Learning Together

Hannah Zazvorka
Church of the Sojourners

I awake each morning to the light filtering through the curtain, which forms my bedroom door and to the sound of my neighbor's radio singing out a bit of Cumbia, or the cries of Ranchera music.

As I put water on the stove to heat for my bath, the heavy breathing of the other 6 people sound asleep in the house gives me a sense of peace. I open my Bible to the book of Psalms and thank God for His newness every morning. After bathing from a bucket and dressing in my work uniform, I open the front door to the world outside.

The world I walk out into every morning is one of beauty, tranquility, and history. I live in the "Via" of Cuernavaca, Morelos, in the middle of the great country south of the United States we know as Mexico.

The Via is a long strip of dirt road once home to the train tracks running through the city, but now home to many families who decided to build their homes and families here. It is a place where the mornings are filled with women waking to do their daily wash, to sweep the dirt out in front of the house, to bath their children and send them off to school. It is a place where strays dogs lay lazily in the road, or fight over the scraps of tortillas thrown out the windows of the homes; a place where roosters crow, people fill their carts with atole and tamales to sell to the morning workers, men clean their taxis getting ready to collect a days wages for their family, and a morning smiles as I walk down the Via towards The Buena Tierra, the school where I work.

As I open the gate to The Buena Tierra, I am greeted with more smiles and kisses on the cheek from the other teachers who make this place possible.

We set the tables for breakfast and prepare for the children to arrive.

When everything is ready, we open the gate and invite the world outside to come in and join us. Each child enters freshly bathed, hair combed just right, wearing a perfectly washed and ironed uniform. I receive a kiss and a "buenos dias" from every child as they enter eager to learn new things. After all the children are seated, they fold their hands, close their eyes, and we thank God for giving us a new day.

A breakfast of tacos de frijoles, or huevos con salchichas, is served and the kids eat heartily knowing this breakfast is what will make them strong. After breakfast the children divide up into their appropriate classrooms and the day of lessons begins. As I look around the classroom I see the big beautiful brown eyes of each of my eleven students looking to me for instruction. After I explain in Spanish what to do and disperse the materials, they begin and look to me for approval as they go.

Throughout the day I find delight in testing them on their colors, helping them learn their shapes, reading stories to them, and watching them at recess as they share and play together. My eyes are filled with beauty throughout the entire school day and my heart bursting with love for these perfect gifts God has placed in my care. At the end of the day we sing "Las Bendiciones" (the blessing song) to close and once again I receive a kiss on the cheek and a "hasta mañana" from each child as they leave. After preparing for the

next day I head home, once again walking through the Via, greeting my neighbors with a smile and a "buenas tardes".

As I walk into the house the rich smell of mole fills my nostrils and a pile of hot tortillas on the table awaits me. My stomach sits content with the delicious food inside. I thank Juana, my host mom, wash my dishes and retreat to my room where I pull a novel off my bookshelf and take a little time to rest. In the evening the children return from school and the house is filled with life. They tell me about their day as we sit eating quesadillas together and they eagerly ask me to teach them a word or two in English. After supper I relax on the couch with the women of the house and we watch our favorite novela on TV.

After spending time with the family and thanking God for a good day, I close the curtain to my room, climb into bed, and dream of tomorrow. This is a little glimpse of my life here in Mexico. I am spending a year here living and serving in the Via through a program called SALT (Serving And Learning Together) with Mennonite Central Committee. I have enjoyed every bit of it, but more importantly it has been an amazing opportunity of growth and an eye-opening time for me. I have learned so much about God's love for His people and I am thankful that I will be able to return home a changed person. □



Church of Sojourners kids are raising money both for La Buena Tierra and a community play place.

Reba News continued

efforts into the business plan. Unfortunately, the other Reba business, Plain and Simple has not been able to make it and will be closed down over the next 3 months. Also, the Ekklesia House will be taking a one-year break after

an expectedly rough start. There is still hope that this will take a stronger form in the future when the program continues.

Moving on to Plow Creek for the summer and then the Catholic Worker House in Champaign, Illinois will be Heather Munn, former director of the program and beloved sister in Christ. Heather did a wonderful job of bringing the Fellowship and outsiders together to share in the history of Reba Place Fellowship in the Monday Night Seminars and was key in opening up the Intern Program to the point where we now have ten people involved.

Allan Howe has expressed his deep gratitude towards GHLAD, the leadership team, saying that they are “a gift to the Fellowship and a gift to me.” They meet three times a month for two hours and prayerfully attend to the needs of the Fellowship members. They recently went on an all-day GHLAD retreat, which Lisa Selph said was a “very good day being together, talking about some of the broader issues that can easily get squeezed out by the ‘urgent,’ and eating quite a few chocolate chip cookies.”

Before the GHLAD retreat, the larger fellowship went on their own retreat. Sally Youngquist facilitated our discussion and did a great job keeping us focused on our mission as a fellowship. It was a real blessing for all involved.

If you get a chance, check out new website, and then thank Doug Selph for a great job. □



Summer Interns (from top left) Chico Fajardo, Jesse Miller, Tim Shenk, Katie Dahlseng, Eric Lawrence, Tatiana Heflin, Matthew Williams, Marilisa Byler, Annie Spiro, and Sam Nigh enjoy a day at the beach.

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