

## Join March 2006 SMC Delegation to Valle Nuevo

Youth and adults are invited to participate in the March 11-20, 2006, Shalom Mission Communities delegation to our Salvadoran sister community, Valle Nuevo. Travel dates are still tentative, but our visit will include the annual March 18 celebration of the community's providential deliverance from an army massacre in 1981—25 years ago—and flight into exile. As in other years,



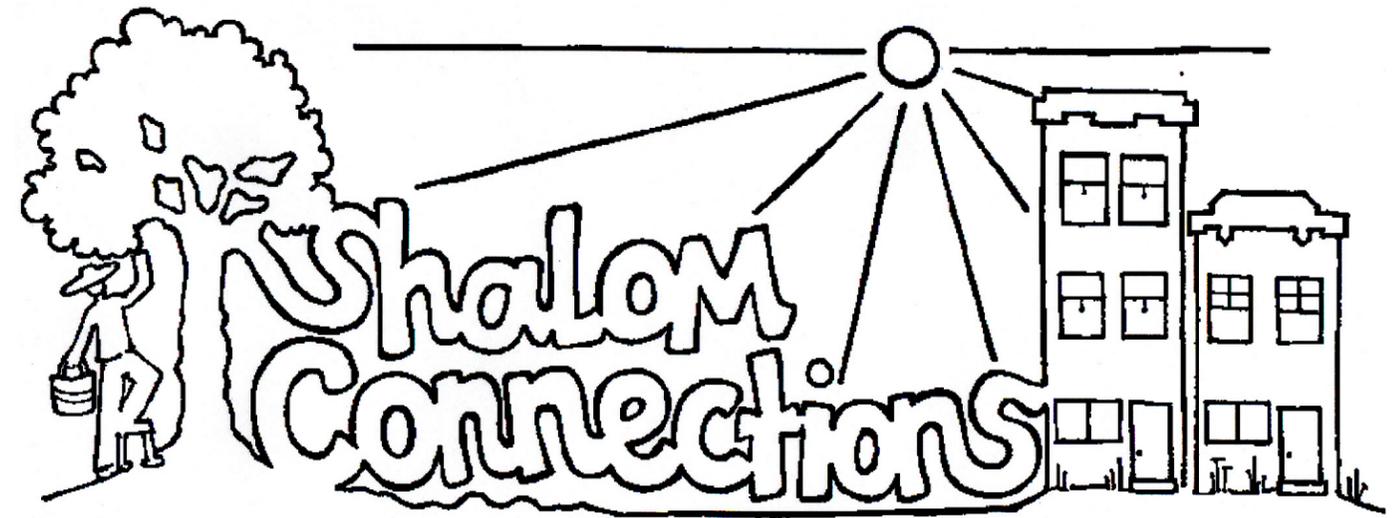
*Valle Nuevo with Yvonne Dilling and last year's delegation*

Yvonne Dilling will make local arrangements and help translate for our group. We hope to help in the construction of a few homes for the more needy families of the community.

Costs for the trip will be about \$1,000 per person, depending on air-fare and the number of participants. Ask for an application form and a packet of orientation materials.

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## Like Watchmen Waiting for the Dawn

*--An editorial, journal, book review, dawn report  
By David Janzen*

Like a watchman waiting for the dawn, I have this usually-discouraging habit of scanning news headlines on the web, looking for signs of the kingdom of God's appearing. I'm waiting to see "Confession and Repentance Breaking out in High Places," or "Thousands of Soldiers Dropping Weapons and Walking Home," or Prince of Peace Not Crucified on Latest Visit." I should know better, and yet I hope.

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem two thousand years ago, that was an epoch-turning event, a cosmic dividing line marking Before and After. But what of that story would have made news headlines? Nothing, certainly, on the front page. Somewhere in the back section we might have found a sardonic interview with a few magi from Babylon on a strange



quest. And the slaughter of infants in Bethlehem by Herod's troops would be described as collateral damage in a raid on a terrorist hideout. The real kingdom of God events usually happen beneath the military's radar and against the grain of the media's ability to comprehend. But we are watchers of the dawn, announcing signs of the Messiah's coming.

I've checked several times today for news of the four Christian Peacemaker Team hostages.

*Continued on page 6*

# Hope Fellowship

Joe Gatlin  
Hope Fellowship

"I wait for the Lord, my soul waits and in his word I hope;..." Psalm 130:5



In Spanish "esperar" means to wait as well as to hope. We in Hope Fellowship have focused 2005 as a "Year of Hope". As we enter into Advent, our hoping and waiting become one.

This fall has found us waiting hope-

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## Watchmen Waiting for the Dawn

fully for God's realm to be more evident among us. One of the ways we are attempting to witness to God's shalom is by establishing a Christian peace group in Waco. After postponing our original event, "Seeking Peace in the Footsteps of Jesus", due to Hurricane Rita possibly hitting Waco, we have found a new date which is Jan. 14. Unable to wait until Jan. 14, we had a smaller meeting to kick-off this Christian peace group. We are hopeful that this group will be an encouragement to brothers and sisters from other churches who may feel lonely in their understanding that the gospel calls us to non violence.

**We seek to give a peace witness in Waco with a Christian, politically non-partisan face.**

We seek to give a peace witness in Waco with a Christian, politically non-partisan face.

As we wait we long to be faithful with our finances and relationships with brothers and sisters. This fall we've agreed to begin redistributing wealth so that one of our sisters can have a living wage. We are learning how to make good on our desire that "none should be in need" among us.

Also, we are beginning to explore the varied ways that we as a body can be a part of the fundraising for the housing project in Valle Nuevo. After e-mails and many phone calls, we are thankful to report that Habitat El Salvador has met with the directiva in Valle Nuevo and budget and building plans are now moving forward.

Laura and Alan Caruthers were blessed this past summer, as were we all, by the adoption of their new little boy, Samuel. Yet, God in his/her divine wisdom and humor

has doubly honored their waiting and hoping. Laura and Alan are now pregnant and due on June 5th, 2006.

As we wait we have had the opportunity as a body to care for and walk alongside Ría Snyder in her surgery and recovery and Jim, her husband. It's been a joy to see how we have all grown through this experience of caring and loving.

The 1 John 3 campaign on Baylor campus continues to gain support for a living wage for all employees. Awareness is being raised through a concert, many class presentations, flyers, t-shirts, etc.. The outgoing interim president is setting up a task force of students and administration to explore how to bring a living wage to Baylor. Analí Gatlin will be leaving in January for studies in Spain but hopes to return to this effort next fall.

This fall we have also plunged into the study of scripture concerning homosexuality. We, as Hope Fellowship have never undertaken this issue as a body. Though we have not concluded the hermeneutical process, God has been with us as we've wrestled with the scriptures, learned to listen to each other and the Spirit and been stretched by each other's comments and understandings. More than the particular issue of homosexuality is the important work of the body together hearing God's word. This subject matter has seemed to attract several young couples and singles who are becoming a part of our lives.

The four cell groups that began to operate in September are continuing to mature and develop. We are grateful for this smaller context to grow in fellowship and discipleship.

Through Advent we will be culminating our "Year of Hope" by delving into aspects of hope: persistent hope, surprised by hope, radical hope, courageous hope and living

*Hope News continued on page 8*

## SMC/Valle Nuevo Partnership: Permanent Homes for Ten Families Most in Need

One year ago, at our Shalom Camp Meeting in Waco, Salome Asencio earnestly invited us to develop a housing project with Valle Nuevo where the ten poorest families could achieve permanent homes. While some families with relatives in the "States" have built cement block and tile houses, the poorest families are still living in temporary shacks of wooden boards and tin roofs built of materials salvaged in the late '80s from their refugee camp in Honduras.

As all of us who have visited Valle Nuevo can attest, these homes are about to fall down from age, rust and termites. Permanent dwellings will give assurance to campesino families that their homes will not fall down on their heads in the next windstorm or earthquake.

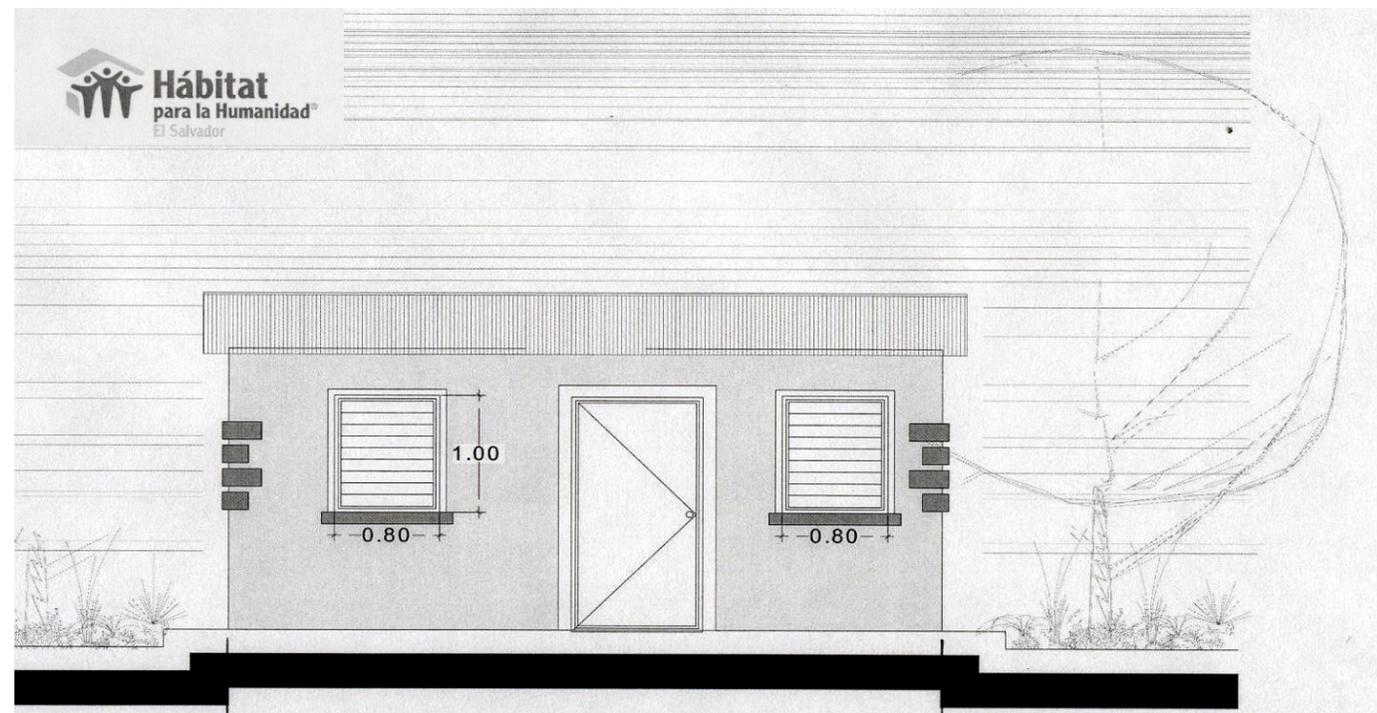


In the past year Nancy Gatlin, from Hope Fellowship in Waco, has negotiated a SMC partnership plan with the Valle Nuevo Directiva. In community-wide assemblies ten families were selected, based on their need for housing and the volunteer services they have provided over the years to the community's welfare. Each family selected will provide the construction labor and pay about \$300 for the mason who also serves as construction foreman.

Carlos Avalos, from Habitat for Hu-

manity in El Salvador, as the Directiva's consultant, developed modest 30-square-meter house plans and has agreed to provide oversight and outside accountability to the project.

Shalom Mission Communities, in this South-North partnership, will pay for the building materials costing an estimated \$4,000 per house. SMC has enough money in hand to build at least four homes in 2006 and is raising funds to build the rest in 2007. Pledges and contributions are welcome. □



*A Habitat for Humanity design for homes at Valle Nuevo*

# Location

They say I'm brave to live here  
A courageous soul, more so than most  
And I believe that they intend it  
As a compliment to me  
But what they fail to understand  
Is the grave insult implied  
To those I choose to live among  
If being their neighbor  
Makes me a hero

Why should it be harder  
For me to dwell beside  
A family who differs from mine  
In hue and size of paycheck  
Than it is to share a street  
With those who show no sympathy  
For the differences and weaknesses  
Of others?

What would they say  
If they knew the truth—  
That the suburbs with their perfect lawns  
Their swimming pools and soccer moms  
Terrify me  
Far more than the dangers  
(Real and alleged)  
Of my beloved 'hood  
What would they say  
If they discovered this fact—  
That I am not brave at all  
Just more at home  
Where I can be  
As broken as the next?

From *Urban Verses* by Alexis Spencer-Byers who has been working with non-profit development organizations in Jackson, Mississippi for the past decade while attending Voice of Calvary Fellowship church. To view excerpts or to order your copy of *Urban Verses*, visit [www.urban-verses.com](http://www.urban-verses.com), or call 601-209-2211. □

## Shalom Connections

Shalom Connections seeks to glorify God and provide a means of fellowship and inspiration among sisters and brothers of the member churches of Shalom Missions Communities and the wider network of intentional Christian Communities. Shalom Missions is published quarterly in Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter. Subscriptions are free. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the official position of Shalom Connections, Shalom Mission Communities, or its member churches. **Postmaster:**

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## Church of the Sojourners News

Zoe Mullery  
*Church of the Sojourners*

Church of the Sojourners celebrated Thanksgiving in a big way this year, taking over the entire grounds of the Quaker Center nestled in the redwoods for three days. Our feasting table on Thanksgiving Day held somewhere around sixty—meaning there were just about as many guests as Sojourners, including family members and old and new friends of the church (I think I deserve some acclaim for having the most family members come—seven!).

We had to have two entire tables just for the pies, and you can use your imagination on what the rest of the spread was like. The rest of the time included many activities which included children being kidnapped by friendly pirates. While singing we had a surprise visit

from Peter Blood and Annie Patterson, the editors of well-known sing-along book *Rise Up Singing*. They were having Thanksgiving with Quaker Center people as well.

Art and Peggy Gish were with us and gave a talk on their involvement in Christian Peacemaker Teams just a day or two before the news of the CPTers in Iraq having been kidnapped. I pray that by the time this article is being read that situation will have resolved peacefully.

Though we're not directly involved in agriculture, there still was a feeling of celebrating a harvest of some kind—the feast at the end of a year of hard work, and enjoying the relationships which have been growing and bearing fruit over the past year or years. The first Sunday of Advent somehow felt appropriate following such a holiday.

In October, we continued our new tradition of “household retreats,” which will now be apart of our annual calendar. This is a time for households to either get away or to stay home and spend some time being together, doing what households do. We also had our “Celebration of the Faithful” this

*Sojo's continued next page*



*Bay window and painter—Photo by Tim Otto*



That's one cute Locke baby! -Tim Otto

visiting her daughter in England over Christmas.

We have been working through a gift-discernment process with Teri, all-be-it in a very start-and-stop manner; hopefully, the outcome will be worth the bumps.

Jeff has completed his "spiritual fitness plan," and is doing much better; he has given a couple of sermons of

meaty content which arose from his studies and struggles with grief and suffering and will begin teaching a series on the Old Testament in the spring.

Laura continues to be on a sabbatical from leadership and is doing lots of kid-oriented things, as well as mentoring several people.

Jose was robbed at gunpoint, and present in a sandwich shop when an altercation occurred in which someone was shot in the leg. Please pray for his safety in this neighborhood. Austin is attending City College and has a job as a security guard.

The apprentices continue to meet and encourage each other, and to discuss what it means to share fi-

year, including a "come-as-a-faithful-person" costume party around Halloween. Debbie and Dale traveled to Church of the Servant King in Eugene where Debbie did a cameo on Brother Roger, the founder of the Taizé community in France who was murdered earlier this year.

Laura and I went up to Portland to lead a of study on the topic of Sabbath with the Refuge of Christ community. Soon after, Jenny Prosa from that congregation moved down here and will be spending at least a year amongst us—a treat for us.

Edith is still ministering faithfully to the elderly woman in hospice care who continues to live far beyond medical expectations. She will be



Sojo pirates and their undaunted hostages -Tim Otto



Golden Gate Bridge -Tim Otto

nances, keep a common calendar, and other not-always-thrilling but essential issues of community life.

Judy sends encouraging news from her life in Taiwan, and the many things she finds to be grateful for—most especially the students—even amidst all the hassles and stresses of her life there. She is planning on accompanying a team of students on a mission trip to India in February, working hard at learning Chinese: she writes, "If you say Judy, teacher with just the right tone, it comes out meaning teacher belonging to God. Great, until a friend pointed out that if I get one tone wrong I end up being the pig's teacher. Oh, well." She values your prayers.

And last but not least, we got to have TimO back amongst us for Thanksgiving. It felt absolutely ordinary in a great way. He has done a good job of staying in touch during his time at Duke, including sending his very interesting papers, and his occasional updates are always worth reading. Here's is a recent story from Tim's life at Rutba House in typical TimO style:

Sojo's News continued from page 4

"I volunteered to do the sign-up sheet for dishes [during a New Monasticism conference]. Dinner was over, and the dishes from twenty-plus people were stacking up to be washed.

I was signed up to wash dishes along with two other people. Only one of them showed up: Andrew. Andrew started washing the dishes one by one by running water over them and squeezing some soap on each one. He would then set each dish in the dish drainer haphazardly, like he was making a pile. The plates didn't go in the slots, or the silverware in the silverware holder. It was evident that he had never done dishes before.

I felt smugly superior. I had been doing dishes all my life, what kind of person could get into his early twenties without having done dishes?

"At the same time, I was beginning to panic. At this rate we would get done sometime around midnight. Yet, he didn't know where the dishes went, so it made some kind of sense to have him keep washing.

Finally, another person showed up. I suggested the new arrival start washing and that Andrew dry. Andrew, sensing that he was getting a demotion, reminded me of what I had said the day earlier when introducing the sign-up sheet. I had quoted Dorotheus of Gaza who said, 'I would much rather do things with others and have them come out wrong than do them by myself to make sure they come out right.'

Rather than celebrating Andrew's first time doing dishes, I had communicated my frustration with him. Andrew called me out, and reminded me of one reason why I think it is so important to live in community."



Dale and Debbie Gish with daughter, Rebecca

## Gishes ready to adopt again!

With great joy we welcomed Rebecca into our family in June 2004. And it was an additional joy that the connection with her birth family came through the SMC newsletter. They are part of the SMC extended family! That being the case, we want to ask you to keep us in mind since we're hoping to adopt again and

give Rebecca a little brother or sister.

Should you know of an expectant mother who is considering an adoption plan for her baby, we would greatly appreciate it if you would share our contact information with her. Thanks so much for your support and prayers!

Dale, Debbie & Rebecca Gish  
1-800-347-7093  
daledebgish@yahoo.com

Mission year continued from page 11

At this time when I am missing home and all the people who make it thus, I am emotionally warmed to know that our neighbors want to have us help them eat turkey.

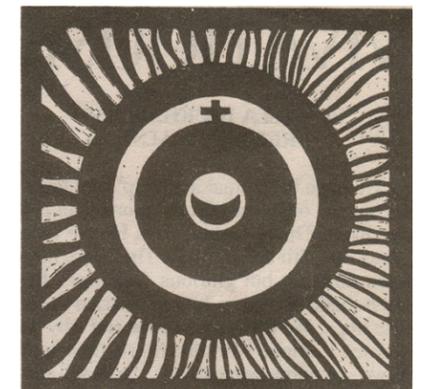
Thank you all so very much for helping me along on this great learning and working journey. I am grateful for all that God is showing me and am pleased to know that he is doing it through his people. Thank you for loving me.

Love, Matt

Matt's address is:

4640 W. West End, Chicago, IL 60644

Information on Mission Year can be found at: [missionyear.org](http://missionyear.org)



# Plow Creek News

By Erin Kindy,  
as told to David Janzen on 11-29-05  
with kibitzing from Lyn and Rick Reha,

Rich Foss was in the hospital three days with double pneumonia. He is healthy enough to come home to-night, but not so healthy that we should stop praying for him.

Erin, a long-term Christian Peace-maker Team member, has been closely following the news of the four CPT'ers abducted in Iraq. She says the Toronto Star is, perhaps, the best source of news on their situation. Also we should keep praying for Jim Fitz with CPT in Colombia until his return on December 12.

Sharing groups have been reorganized, including a Bible study group, a regular sharing group, and a women's playgroup.

The farmers and their helpers are mulching strawberries. The Case



Breaking Dawn— Megan Rhea

## Watchmen Waiting for the Dawn

tractor will be fixed by the end of the week. Kevin Behrens, Neil Horning (from Plow Creek) and Doug Selph (from RPF Rogers Park) have been on the phone weekly making plans for a Community Supported Agriculture link in 2006 between Plow Creek on the farm and Reba in the City.

Around Halloween, Plow Creek had a lantern festival that was, if not out of this world, almost off the planet.

Kelly and Jenna, two North Park University students, came for a weekend visit to experience a rural intentional Christian community. (They are in the NPU class that attends the Monday night Reba potluck.)

On the recommendation of a recent visitation team, Plow Creek Fellowship has taken the first of two retreats—one on November 19 and



Wheels—Megan Reha

the second on January 21. The impact so far has been profound.

Thanksgiving celebrations were clustered in three households around long dinner tables. The Grahams had, at one point, thirty-two persons in the house, where it was friendly, crowded, full of games, and the people full of good food. The next day most everyone turned out to cut wood in the traditional after-Thanksgiving workday. "Through the years, Plow Creek has been blessed with lots of well-organized, lively, productive, interactive, intergenerational, mirthful, edifying, spine-tingling, and breathtaking community work projects," says Rick Reha.

In the first Sunday of Advent drama, Martin Graham appeared as Jesus' forerunner in a deerskin--John the Baptist meets Clarence Jordan, sort of. □

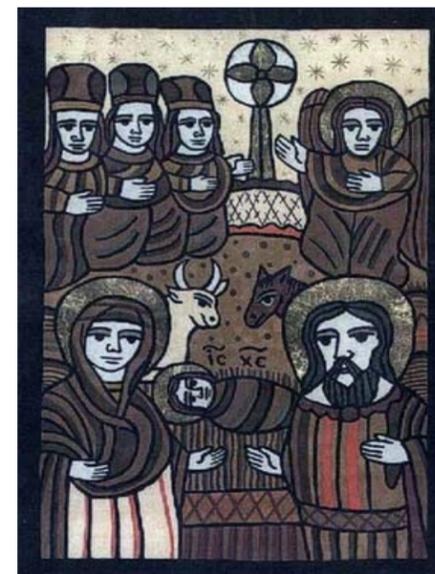
## The Psalters: Nomadic community assaults apathy with all-out worship

Eric Lawrence  
Reba Place Fellowship

The first time I saw the Psalters was largely by accident. I was wandering around Cornerstone music festival four years ago and happened to stop at a stage. I perused my schedule and saw that a band, "Psalters," was performing. I thought, "Ehhh, Why not?"

Like a voice in the wilderness, this was a real rag-tag bunch, wearing garb that hung off their bodies, with dreadlocks and a fine layer of dust and sweat covering them. These were people with a mystique, one that reminded me of gypsies caravanning across the country with fiddles and guitars and Eastern instruments I've never heard of.

They passed out pamphlets with lyrics to their songs, but the lyrics weren't like anything I had seen from a Christian before. They were angry and spoke of revolution and social oppression, for crying out loud! Yet, I was not prepared for what was to ensue.



Battle footage of The Psalters

They invited us to be completely open to the Spirit of God, to let go and worship in fullness, which was immediately followed by electronic noises, at times resembling a Nintendo game soundtrack, along with samples of news reports about the civilian death rate of Iraqis under the U.S. economic sanctions. Soon Scotty's voice overwhelmed the sounds, belting out a series of long-winded groans from his heart, appearing to use an eastern, possibly Jewish scale in his inflections and range of notes. Then a powerful rhythmic section led the music, and the spirit led the crowd.

I cannot remember ever being so given over to the Spirit while worshipping even to this day. It felt as if the hand of God had slapped me to the ground. It was new and exciting

to be part of such spirit and people.

The Psalters, a nomadic Christian worship group, are blazing a new path amongst the tired, boring, and sometimes trite, legacy of contemporary Evangelical worship music. There, I said it. I am saying that there is an apathy that lies at the heart of American Evangelical music. For a long time I have felt this way, but the Psalters have allowed me to express that frustration because they presented an alternative—a fierce burning alternative at that. Their songs are steeped in the traditions of the oppressed, with whom they seek to identify, ranging from Jewish and Gypsy music, all the way to modern African-American spirituals. Their mission statement is a fiery pronouncement of their vision:

**WE ARE THE CRY OF THE EXODUS  
THERE IS NO HOME FOR US HERE.  
WE ARE A NOMADIC TRIBE OF PSALTERS  
WALKING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ANCIENTS PAST  
TO THE FAR CORNERS OF THE PRESENT,  
UNITED AS ONE VOICE AGAINST THE  
OPPRESSION WITHIN AND WITHOUT.  
ONE MORE ECHO IN THE ETERNAL SONG OF OUR  
FIRST LOVE, OUR HOPE, OUR PILLAR OF FIRE.**

*Watchman continued from page 1*

**By his example John Perkins has bound the Strong Man so that hundreds of CCDA's are plundering millions of dollars from the capitalistic system...**

Yesterday the kidnappers extended the execution deadline two days. That made headlines on an article about other acts of violence and threats of violence in Iraq. But in following up with further links I learned of an amazing chorus of Muslim voices calling, in the name of Allah, for the release of these people who are "our friends," who have suffered with us the oppression of Israeli and American occupations. They are calling for all hostages, all civilian prisoners to be released.

An improbable peace movement is sprouting. And it grows out of the seeds that have been planted over years of faithful participation in the



*The Rutba House crew.*

suffering love, patient truth telling, and humble service of Jesus. There are, it turns out, many followers of Jesus who do not even call themselves Christians. The willingness of peacemakers to die is a sign of the dawn for those with eyes to see.

Another sign of the dawn was the November Christian Community Development Association conference in Indianapolis where 2,000 community activists, pastors and development workers gathered from hundreds of organizations around the country. The morning Bible studies led by CCDA founder, John Perkins were the highlights for four of us representing Reba Place Development Corporation. Zechariah 8 was John's text, a vision of Jerusalem restored from its ruined condition, becoming a place where old men and women will sit with staff in hand and pass on their wisdom to children who play in the streets. "The kingdom of God is like a city park," John said.

John Perkins is a living miracle of our day, a prophet whose story has no other explanation than the power of God. A third grade drop-out from a victimized and victimizing southern black family, an enterprising factory foreman in California with hopes of "making it in the system," a convert in an evangelical fundamentalist white church, called by Jesus to return with his family to Mississippi and bring salvation to his people, a tent-meeting evangelist who discovered the holistic gospel of community and human development modeled on the life of Jesus with his disciples, a civil rights activist who was beaten by a white sheriff and his deputies within an inch of his life, a man convicted by Jesus to forgive his hate-crazed torturers, a



*John Perkins urging blacks and whites to join Jesus in holistic community development*

mentor who raised up a generation of African-American leaders in church and community development, and now is the founder and inspirational leader of a nation-wide community development association based on minority leadership and integrity of life that comes from following Jesus. (Jesus seems to keep showing up in this story.) John Perkin's wounds give him the authority to call others, black and white, to partner in the three "R's" of holistic community development: Relocation, Reconciliation, and Redistribution.

By his example John Perkins has bound the Strong Man so that hundreds of CCDA's are plundering millions of dollars from the capitalistic system, thousands of run-down houses and apartment buildings from urban decay, countless lives from drug abuse and hopelessness. Thousands of folks born to privilege, caught up in the pursuit of personal wealth and status, now are transformed by relationships with the poor finding dignity as brothers and sisters in the family of God. John Perkins, a 3rd grade drop-out has

## A Letter from the Depths of Mission Year

*Matt Creeger  
to Church of the Sojourners*

Dear brothers and sisters,

When I started this year I had a few expectations. I went in supposing I was at least semi-prepared. I hoped that, without too many false expectations, I would be able to avoid the frustration of failing to do whatever grand thing I had planned for Chicago's inner city.

Lo and Behold, I did have some unrealistic ideas within me after all. Now is the time of the year in which those ideas are being bashed against the harsh and mundane reality of the West Side. In the battle between my presupposed ideas and reality, my ideas are sure to lose, and I am forced to bring my mindset from lofty to low. I notice a bit of irony as I remember how I thought I was humble.

In this past week in particular I have been discouraged and have noticed that I have grown weary of being so very much out of my element. Yet, I have hope... and encouragement from people who have been down this stretch of road before. I have realized that my victories will be small. Still, the difference between small and unimportant is vast, and from this thought I take comfort.

In spite of my failings and my ever-persistent desire to be comfortable, I am learning much about life and God and things more meaningful than the question of whether or not I will get enough sleep tonight to make me happy. It is still difficult to do my dishes and my chores faithfully, but my teammates are much obliged and remind me that I am indeed fighting the good fight.

Apparently, I'm changing. I may not

continue the relationships I am starting here for the rest of my life, but I will from now on be more of an advocate for the weak and less able to ignore the suffering of the poor. It may not sound like much, but in the face of the sin that is in me, it is something almost tangible. Apathy has been a major enemy for me in the past. Happily, the longer I am here, the more it feels like my own neighborhood and finding the motivation to be a positive influence here becomes easier.

***In the battle between my presupposed ideas and reality, my ideas are sure to lose, and I am forced to bring my mindset from lofty to low.***

My accomplishments, not that there are too many yet, seem to matter less as the desire to be a part of the people of God and help those in need matters more.

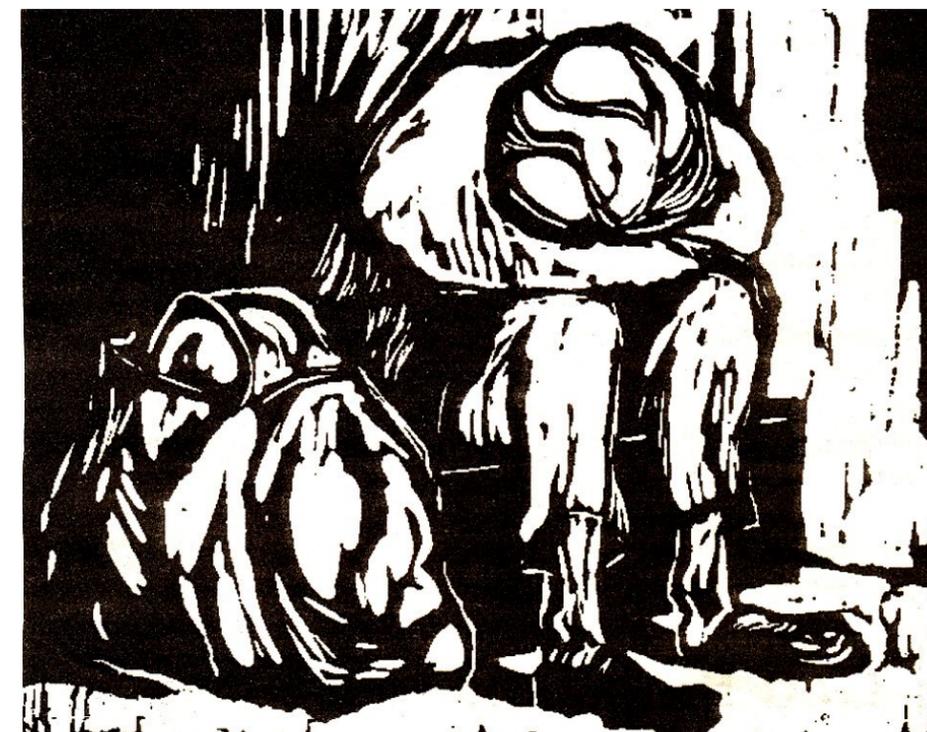
Never before have the issues of race and class been so apparent in my life. I have lived in a Spanish

neighborhood and attended an urban high school, but here now I can't just go home and pretend I have nothing to do with the problems of this world. Do I think I am becoming a radical activist? Not really; just a conscious participant living in and bringing about the Kingdom of God.

The thermometer is jumping up and down these days and despite the predictions of 28 degrees F. as the high temperature for this Friday, I am excited. The dramatic changes in my environment are a constant reminder of changes happening within me. All the leaves are gone and sometimes I, the California boy, get to watch frozen puddles react to my experimentation. The way air bubbles up under the surface of ice after I plunk a rock through the top layer is amazingly fascinating. Somehow I feel this winter will bring out the six-year-old in me.

As Thanksgiving is almost here, we six volunteers bivouacked here on the West End look forward to spending time with our pastor's family and our friends in the hood during the holiday.

*Mission Year continued on page 13*



financial practices, revising them to better fulfill our mission. Though talking about accounting could make a meeting pretty dull and confusing, we are all on board with this serious issue. In our December meeting there was full support for GHLAD's recommendations about ways to bring better order to RPF's multi-directional economic resources and further directions.

One answer to our financial woes is "On a L'arche Archery", a Clark family project (Greg, Micah, Ransom) to weave bowstrings for archers and sell them on eBay. Their materials cost one dollar and the bowstring typically sells for \$8. Sales have doubled each week for the first three weeks (1-2-4 etc.). Watch out, Microsoft!

In addition, Joseph Marshak, the fellowship's most recent convert, has finished his Clinical Pastoral Education in the Uptown neighborhood of Chicago and is currently applying for a position as a hospital chaplain.

That should give y'all a good picture of what is happening here. "To Hope" this Advent season—and pass it all around. □



## Cream of Wheat from Winnipeg

By Irene Wiens  
as told to David Janzen

I called Irene Wiens at Grain of Wheat Community to make plans for the January 13-16 retreat of SMC leaders in Winnipeg. Why would folks from San Francisco, Waco, Tiskilwa IL and Evanston want to go to the land of ice and snow in mid-winter? To enjoy the warm hospitality of Grain of Wheat community and get more acquainted with friends there. And because we're nuts.

Irene also passed on a few community news stories that rose to the top—"cream of wheat" you might say.

St. Matthews, the large and decaying cathedral where GOW shares meeting space with an Episcopalian congregation, has undertaken a demolition and renovation of their



basement. GOW folks are adding lots of volunteer effort to this much-needed project. The partnership with St. Matthews is growing at the same time.

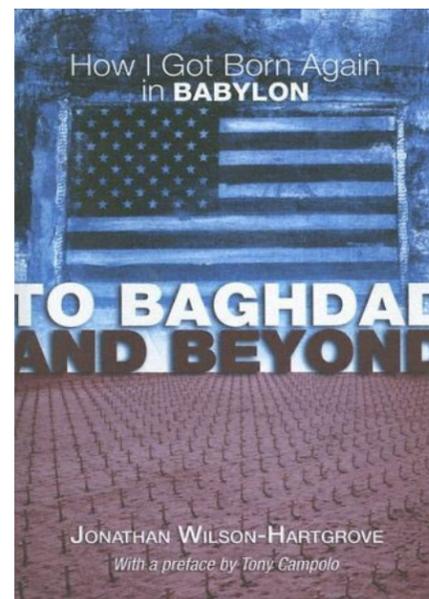
Plow Shares is the new name given to a farm just purchased by two GOW families, along with a few other partners, in preparation for a move into the country this spring. They plan to pioneer a more ecologically sustainable way of living and to grow food for their city friends.

The Housing Initiative seed group takes possession on December 9, of a house in the depressed "north of Portage" neighborhood. They anticipate lots of fix-up work in the coming months. This is their first project as they actively explore what directions to take in an affordable housing and community development ministry.

A new leadership group began serving on July 1 and is gradually coordinating their schedules

Irene signed off by saying, "The temperature is minus 20 degrees Celsius." (Celsius sounds a lot colder than Fahrenheit to me.) "Bring lots of layers." (I think that means clothes.) □

about seven honorary doctors degrees by now. In addition, I propose that SMC nominate him for "Audacious Stong-Man Binder and Rapacious Plunderer for the Kingdom" at the pre-millennial awards banquet. Or at least claim his work as a sign of the dawn.



I want to offer another sign of the dawn in the form of a book review. I've just finished reading Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove's, To Baghdad and Beyond: How I Got Born Again in Babylon. I've known the author since his invitation to speak at a New Monasticism conference in Durham NC, June of 2004. Rutba House, an intentional community of hospitality, founded by Jonathan, his wife Leah, and a few friends, was our home-base during that conference. (Tim Otto, from Church of the Sojourners, now is a member of Rutba House while studying at Duke Divinity School.)

In Baghdad and Beyond, Jonathan tells the story of his theological education from conservative evangelical church beginnings (baptism at the age of seven, teen mission trips, and a stint as page in the office of Senator Strom Thurman) to prophetic non-violence and unofficial leader of the New Monasticism movement. Along the way we get to meet some of his mentors—John

Howard Yoder, Gandhi, Jerry and Sis Levin, Jim Douglas, Christian Peacemaker Teams, Stanley Hauerwas, and Shane Claiborne. Even more than 12 Marks of the New Monasticism, this book tells the story of that movement and its theological underpinnings.

The turning point of the book came when Jonathan and his wife participated in a CPT delegation to Iraq just as the war was breaking out. As their delegation caravan was speeding to leave the country a car accident severely injured a couple of travel companions. In their moment of desperate need they were welcomed and cared for in a hospital that had already been bombed by American planes. The life-saving hospitality of hospital staff for the "enemy" is the point where Jonathan was "born again." The hospitality of a muslim town named Rutba inspired the name of the community that Jonathan and Leah helped to found a year later in the black neighborhood of Walltown in Durham NC.

***As communities recruited by the Prince of Peace, we are called to watch for and announce a dawn not of our own making.***

Elijah and Elisha were leaders in communities of prophets that the Lord used to sustain an oppressed people and to speak truth to power. Baghdad and Beyond shows what communities of prophets look like in our day. No grandiose visions here of movers and shakers forcing change on governments and armies. Rather, we find courageous, persistent, small communities of prophetic action and solidarity with the poor, sustaining quasi-monastic spiritual disciplines, submitting their visions to sisters and brothers for discernment, acting as teams of mutually submitted members. I find the book tremendously reassuring and

encouraging. Here is a low key kingdom worker who leads without status, who teaches without bombast, who inspires without manipulation. Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove shows his struggles to practice critical self reflection and contemplative prayer, but God blesses that low road to fruitful action.

America is currently led by those who believe in the toxic myth of a messianic nation with nothing to repent of in its crusade to destroy evil. This was the Messiah's strongest temptation, pressed on him from every side. "To begin in Jerusalem or Rome might mistakenly suggest that the fundamental problem with humanity is political. Not so, Jesus says. Beneath the corruption of politics, the oppression of economics, the lies of the media and the perversion of bigotry, the dysfunction of families and the neuroses of individuals—beneath all these manifestations of evil lies the same spiritual root. To confront it we need only to look honestly at the darkness within each of us. 'The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse,' Jeremiah confessed. 'Who can understand it.' Contemplation is an intentional effort to . . . look into the darkness of one's own heart and see the whole world go black, like Jerusalem on Good Friday." (Baghdad and Beyond, p. 51).

It is hard to explain why I find a passage like this so paradoxically heartening. This is the darkness that leads to a true dawn. This is our solidarity with the world and with all people who know they need a savior. Without this starting point we are only recycling our fears into new cycles of violence and revenge.

As communities recruited by the Prince of Peace, we are called to watch for and announce a dawn not of our own making. Like John the Baptist, we "testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was [and is and will be] coming into the world." John 1:9. □



*Psalters continued from page 5*

"The apathy of our worship and art as Christians reflects and perpetuates the apathy of our culture," Scotty recently reflected as he addressed us before a concert at the Reba Place Meeting House on November 14th. This is an apathy that Scotty, the band organizer, felt during his college career at Eastern College as he hung around people like Shane Claiborne and listened to Tony Campolo. Soon Scotty felt a calling to find a new way to worship the Suffering Servant who cares for the marginalized. The seed began to germinate and a base of visionaries solidified.

Jay, a band mate with the deepest voice since Barry White, expressed a similar sentiment as he recited

## Watchmen Waiting for the Dawn

Amos 5:21-24 where God no longer wants Israel's pious supplications, music, or offerings. What God wants is for "justice to roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

The Psalters are currently living on a long black bus and care for one another out of a common purse. For them there is no place to go back to or call home. This represents their belief that we are aliens in this world, refugees of this land. But they are under the authority/mentorship of Circle of Hope, a Brethren worshipping body in Philadelphia to whom they stay accountable.

The road ahead is difficult, they admit, with personal squabbles and the usual list of annoyances that accompany living together, but they feel the Spirit leading them to a commitment. And they really allow the Spirit to lead, shying away from structures and rules they fear will bind the Spirit. "We would rather crash and burn than have rules corrode our relational lifestyle. It may be naïve, but that is our belief." Scotty remarked, as if this has been a major contention over the years.

They would like to be the seed of a new movement of nomadic worship groups, more psalters to cover the Earth. As their fan base grows among youth and mainstream churches. . . Eh, Why not? □

*Hope News continued from page 2*

hope. We'll be reviewing the biblical narrative and finding ourselves in the story. 2005 will come to an end, our emphasis on hope will end, yet our challenge to be a people of hope in the times we live in only moves forward even as we await the fullness of God's realm.

**...we will be culminating our "Year of Hope" by delving into aspects of hope: persistent hope, surprised by hope, radical hope, courageous hope and living hope.**

"But it is not just creation alone which groans; we who have the Spirit as the first of God's gifts also groan within ourselves as we wait for God to make us his children and set our whole being free. For it was by hope that we were saved; but if we see what we hope for, then it is not really hope. For who of us hopes for something we see? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."

Romans 8:23-25 □

## Reba Place Fellowship News

*Eric Lawrence  
Reba Place Fellowship*

(November 20, 2005)

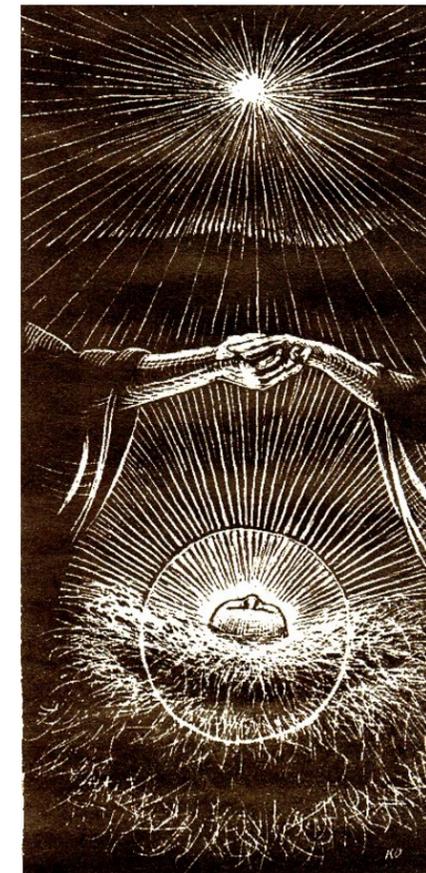
As I wandered into our living room with housemates and fellow interns for Morning Prayer, we were astounded to witness the first real snowfall of the season coming in November. Tumbling down in pasty clumps the snow lightly layered the frozen ground under a thick gray sky. We stared out the window in silence for a couple minutes before we could address each other and begin to pray. Snowfall in Chicago is beautiful and can bring out the excitement of living in the city, but it also raises anxieties—or maybe that's just me. It means that it is going to get really cold very soon for a long time and grow darker already at 3:30 pm.

'Tis the season for lots of reading under a blankie. St. Augustine advocated sacred reading, and during the winter months would dedicate five or six hours of the day to it, so I might as well give it a shot. I wonder if bundling up under a thick afghan like a coddled infant, with a cup of warm tea, in order to do this sacred reading, would count as a spiritual discipline?

This cooling down period has presented a challenge to our newly forming fall intern group, due to changes in people, schedules, and weather. We were feeling the burn of busy schedules and close quarters that some of us share, while others not living in the same space were feeling the burn of living separated lives. But under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the surrounding Reba community, we are finding

space for honest sharing and worship, recommitting to each other in love and grace.

Both the intern community and the Fellowship have shared with several visiting community groups and individuals interested in more Christian community. Tatiana Heflin, a summer intern and faithful Reba on-hanger, arranged for a nomadic musical Christian community, The Psalters, to give a concert in lieu of a Monday night seminar. (See article on the Psalters.) We greatly enjoyed their presence and friendship till their communal bus pulled out the following day.



A dozen Fellowship members jumped on an invitation from summer intern, Matt Williams and his family, to ride together to Greenville College in southern Illinois to watch Matt perform in the lead role of the musical *Godspell*. Matt was great and had hugs for all of us in the intermission. The charter bus, owned by Matt's parents, was full of family

and friends, and we didn't arrive back home until three in the morning.

The larger Reba tribe is engaging with some serious seekers of Christian community, namely Tim Baehr and Joanna Wiebe from Windsor, Ontario. They came with their moving van and stayed overnight with Cana household, expecting to move into a vacant apartment across the street in the morning. But the comfort and fellowship of Cana hosts quickly led to the decision to join the Cana household with Dave and Penny Lukens, Anne Gavit, and several large cats who did not get to vote. Tim is a skilled and industrious carpenter who walks outside in the cold without any shoes on. Joanna quickly went to work as an "information architect" with Orbitz, the travel company. They are settling in and taking time to discern what their relationship with Reba will be longer-term.

In the same vein, C. J. Wagener and her daughter Amy are moving to Reba from Milwaukee to become intentional neighbors. They were part of a Daystar Christian community in the Indianapolis area from 1976 to 1985 and desire the familiarity and closeness of intentional community again.

Not all community initiatives live happily ever after. RPF and the Ekklesia Project have decided to close Ekklesia House, a residence for seminary students to participate in Christian community. Our relationships with Ekklesia Project and the persons who had lived in the house are good and continuing. Meaningful community life takes more time than a typical seminary schedule allows.

Years of shared economics in community has set the stage for an in-depth review of fellowship financial practices this year. GHLAD (our leaders team) has spent many an hour bunkered down reviewing the



*A vision of eco-friendly community taking root in the city—Chico Fajardo*