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Immigrants, Aliens, and the New Creation

Immigration in a Time between the Times

An editorial by David Janzen

Shacks replaced by permanent homes: In 1989 the original houses of Valle Nuevo, our sister community in El Salvador, were constructed of wooden boards and corrugated roofing stripped from barracks where they had lived in the Mesa Grande refugee camp. In other words, these homes built for a village of 700 people were already old when they were new.

Since then, the population of Valle Nuevo has grown to about a thousand, but scores more have gone to “El Norte” to provide for their families. Meanwhile, one by one, most of these temporary houses have been replaced by modest permanent dwellings with cement-block walls and tile roofs paid for by remittances from sons, daughters and husbands who have entered the United States illegally. Sixteen percent of the Salvadoran economy—by far the largest sector—comes from money sent home by relatives in the States. In Valle



Nuevo, that percentage is, no doubt, much higher.

Pedro Mebreno, who married his sweetheart, Angelina, in the refugee camp, has been to the United States three times to work on construction sites in Virginia and Washington, D.C. gradually enlarging his house for a family of eight. But we remember how thin and haggard we

Continued on next page

found the children and Angelina who almost starved the first year Pedro was gone, before he found steady work. His three oldest sons followed in his footsteps and now are starting families in the United States. They would love to return and build homes alongside “mami” and “papi,” but they are unlikely to risk a border crossing until their status can be legalized. Meanwhile, they dutifully send money, when they can, for the rest of the family.

The dream of getting across the border and finding steady work is a

“We enjoy cheap goods, but the low wages paid do not begin to heal the wounds to body, soul and family systems.”

huge gamble that pays off for less than half of those who try it. Now-a-days the Salvadoran extended family must come up with at least \$5,000 to pay a coyote to facilitate bribes and transportation and passage for one person to cross the borders.

There are many ways the dream crashes. Undocumented migrants get ripped off or abandoned by unscrupulous coyotes, die when two gallons of water aren’t enough to walk across 60 miles of Arizona desert, or somehow survive for 48

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hours in the bottom of a truck-load of tires when the driver is arrested. Some have worked for weeks and then are refused pay with the employer’s threat—“go tell the police.” Some employers expect sexual favors if you are woman. Months and years up north turn out to be forever when the man takes up with another woman, and the family back home is broken. Some get caught by the “migra” and sent back with the result that an uncle has to sell all his cows and plunge another family into poverty to repay the debt. These are scenarios I have heard from friends in Valle Nuevo.

Personal acquaintance with the humiliation and trauma of immigrants is why hundreds of thousands have been marching in the streets in America. We enjoy cheap goods, but the low wages paid do not begin to heal the wounds to body, soul and family systems.

These illegal migrants may be campesinos, but they are usually quite articulate about the macro-economic causes of their distress. The Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) floods cheap agricultural products into their countries while U.S. farmers profit from \$20 billion a year in Federal subsidies. This means the production of Salvadoran campesinos has no monetary value. In a good year they can only hope to grow enough corn and beans for family subsistence with no cash for necessities. The most powerful families in the Salvadoran oligarchy have made a priority of keeping the countryside underdeveloped because that is the power base of their opposition and the source of cheap labor in urban factory sweatshops.

Free trade in everything but labor: Open borders for goods, money and communications are slammed shut for those whose only economic power is their willing bodies. U.S. politicians posture righteously about the evil of illegal immigration that should never be rewarded with amnesty. At the same

time they are all for free trade in everything but labor. From south of the border this looks like bitter injustice and hypocrisy. Immigrants are consoled by the thought that God sees and remembers.

Most Valle Nuevo “alumni” up north gravitate to communities with thick Salvadoran networks, soccer leagues, and Catholic services in Spanish. They help each other survive through hard work and an informal economy of lawn services, teams of maids and nannies. In Buena Vista, an upscale San Diego suburb, I heard it said that “It takes a village to raise a child—a Salvadoran village.”

Those in Valle Nuevo who’ve been North are also quick to acknowledge



that Americans generally are “buena gente”—good, sympathetic people. With pride they show me pictures of their Anglo friends and employers. We are all humanized by such encounters. God sees and remembers.

What shall we do with such terrible and wonderful knowledge? In the midst of these struggles that divide our nation between sympathy for struggling human beings, not unlike our ancestors, and the in-

Shalom Connections

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stinct to lock our doors, what is God doing?

I've been reading William Cavanaugh's, ground breaking book, Torture and Eucharist. It is an analysis of the use of torture in Pinochet's regime in Chile (1973-1990) to terrorize and disintegrate any social groups with the capacity to resist the totalitarian state. He asks the question, why was the church not such a movement of resistance? Well, toward the end of the regime, this did begin to happen, but first it needed to shed a theology of separate spheres (church=soul of society, state=body of society) to think more holistically.

Cavanaugh contends that the basic resource the church has to form Christians in a stronger loyalty to Jesus and his followers than to the state, is the eucharist (the Lord's supper). It is a commemoration of Christ tortured, killed and resurrected by God so that we might be the body of Christ despite the powers of this age.

The church has often accommodated itself to the state by the distinction that the church deals with spiritual realities while the state deals with political realities. They are separate and complimentary spheres—what many people mean



by the separation of church and state. This is totally at odds with the Biblical view point, especially the prophetic vision of the Old Testament and all of the New Testament. In Jesus and the witness of the early church we see a distinction between two ages or times that are both alive and active now. The kingdoms of this world, however, have been defeated by Jesus on the cross, and his non-violent self-giving regime has already begun on earth. The church community's role is to be a prophetic demonstration of the kingdom of God soon to come in its fullness, in this time when the kingdoms of this world still pretend to ultimate power.

We know as followers of Jesus, that the Kingdom of God has no national boundaries. How do we know this? Here's how the Apostle Paul lays it out:

“From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view.”

“For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them. From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view. . . So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation. . . All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.” 2 Corinthians 5:14-18.

So how do we live this good news of one new humanity in an age of national boundaries, guarded fences, and enmity--in this time between the times?

Our unity around the communion table informs everything else. In our fellowship, the different languages and cultures each offer their gifts to bless one another to the praise of God who has reconciled us

Immigration Between the Times cont. pg. 15

A Cry for Fairness

An interview with Hailu Cherenet

Hailu Cherenet is an educational leader and college president in the rapidly growing Meserete Kristos (Mennonite) church in Ethiopia. The missionary-led MK church numbered about 5,000 in 1975 when a communist regime took over the country and drove the church leaders into exile or prison. In 1991 when the Marxist government was toppled, the church emerged into the light 50,000 strong, based in resilient and fervent house church fellowships. The MK church has continued to grow until today it numbers about a quarter million, the largest national group of Mennonites in the world.

Hailu and his wife Yeshe moved into the "Reba village" in January along with their three boys, leaving a college-age daughter in Ethiopia. Hailu has begun studying for his Doctor of Theology degree at Trinity Evangelical Seminar in Deerfield, IL. Here is a selection of what he shared in an interview with Eric Lawrence and David Janzen, May 3, 2006.

An interesting approach—let your life do the talking: I was familiar with Mennonite missionaries from an early age. They had an interesting approach—let your life do the talking. They didn't speak much or loud but they lived a practical life modeled on the gospels that spoke volumes. They trusted young indigenous leadership that, in 1975, had to take over when the communist regime actively pursued the elimination of Christianity in Ethiopia.

My first taste of the hostilities was during high school at a Bible academy, one of the most prestigious schools in the country at the time. Midway through my sixth year the regime shut down the school and the persecutions began. I had to



*The Cherenet family at Reba Place Church: Yeshe, Hailu, Natnael, Salem, and Daniel:
Photo by Rosalind Vaughn*

study elsewhere. I was subject to "random sampling." My course of study was assigned to me and I had to study philosophy. "The philosophy they taught was incompatible with my faith. It wasn't a survey of different thinkers throughout history; it was just Marxist propaganda. So, I went to my church, we prayed, and the leaders decided that I should drop out and pursue work. That is what I did."

"This kind of decision was like suicide."

For a time I served with World Vision and there I met my wife, Yeshe, a nurse. We know more than twenty Christian couples who found each other at World Vision.

This kind of decision was like suicide: During this time I heard God tell me to commit my entire life to him, to engage in full-time evangelism. I knew, like I know my name, that I was to be committed full-time to the Lord. At that time this kind of decision was like suicide. The Church had gone underground. God led me to organize small groups, lead Bible studies, and plant a church, all the while being hunted by the government.

During the communist regime I spent two-and-a-half years under

house arrest and in prison. These were hard times. They drew me to the conclusion that if we were going to be successful at making disciples in Ethiopia, the leaders needed proper training. I and my partners in evangelism acted out of a deep sense of calling, not out of deep training. It was just the Bible and us. But we needed more. Therefore we decided to start a training school to prepare Ethiopian Christians for the battle just to survive.

Urged on by the Lord, we responded with fervency and took the necessary steps to start a Bible school, and I was named coordinator in its early stages. The church also appointed me education secretary for thirteen churches in the Addis Ababa region. There was much work to be done if the church was to be a potent force in Ethiopia.

In 1991 the communist regime was toppled, and the church was figuring out how to respond to the new political landscape. I knew the need for disciplined intellectual and spiritual leadership was greater than what we could handle, and the Bible school wasn't providing for the need we saw. Therefore I attended a Presbyterian seminary and got my

Bachelor of Theology in 1994 with the intent of starting a Meserete Kristos seminary.

The school began with meager means, one paid staff, and a class of thirteen students. The books were borrowed or donated, a hundred of them, mainly from individuals. But we knew that God was moving us towards bigger things. So, my associate went to Nairobi to study more, and I left my family and came to America where I studied at Eastern Mennonite University under Tom Finger and other professors. There I earned a Masters of Divinity degree, focusing on developing the skills and spirit needed to oversee a functional seminary.

This proved to be a time of trials and tremendous pain. Never before did I have to leave my family for so long. During this three-year stay two brothers died, and my family had to move because our landlord increased the rent 100% thinking I had gone to America to make more money. My wife lost her job. I wanted desperately to go home, but my wife is a very strong woman and told me to continue doing what God had for me and that the Lord would see them through the pain. She quoted Jesus, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom God." After that experience I said that I would never leave my family again. It is too painful to come back and have your son act as if he does not know you.

In 2005 I visited the United States to raise funds to complete construction for a new MK College and Seminary. Friends in American arranged a scholarship for me at Trinity Evangelical Seminary to complete my theological studies. But my family's

suffering last time was fresh on my mind, and I vowed that I would not come unless my whole family could be with me.

With all the necessary papers showing support for our family while in the United States, I applied to the U.S. embassy for visas. An application cost more than \$600, and we were turned down in just a few minutes with no serious attention to our case. The officer said I was an intending immigrant. How could she know that? "I'm a college president," I said, "What could I covet in America?" She threatened to have me removed from the room.

In America there is the ideal under the law that one is innocent until proven guilty. But the embassy

uses a double standard, and those hoping to emigrate to the United States are guilty until proven innocent. This was my experience.

I place blame first on those who lie and deceive U.S. immigration officers to get into the country, and secondly on the poverty of my country which creates the conditions of desperation where deception may not seem like a real problem. But serious responsibility lays upon the United States for its treatment of immigrants. The sad part of my story starts here, with the

officers at the U.S. Embassy. They treat us like commodities, not people.

A second time we paid our fee and applied hoping to talk to a different officer. We spent countless hours procuring further documents showing that never had any staff or students from Meserete Kristos stayed in the U.S. in order to make money, rather they dedicated themselves to

come back and serve the church in Ethiopia, as I had done myself. A second time we were turned down.

I wrote a passionate article, a letter to the Embassy titled "A Cry for Fairness." After reading the article, the Embassy invited me back to apply a third time. I had two very bad experiences, and one good one. Sometimes the officers will use family members as a sort of hostage. They'll allow the parents to go but won't allow the children so that the parents must come back to care for them. This time we planned to only take the youngest two children with us, but the officer had compassion and gave everyone F-1 visas except for the oldest, our daughter, who must stay behind. This has been difficult for her, but she is in the care of relatives and going to school.

Thanks to God, and many friends in the Reba Place Church, our family is doing well here. I am not a young man like the others students in the Seminary, and learning new languages now is hard for me. But God is faithful and will see us through. □



On the Paralytic and the Faith of Friends

Reflections from Jubilee Partners:

by Gabriella Gatlin

As a child, one of my favorite Bible stories was from the gospel of Mark, chapter 2. Jesus was at home and “so many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door; and he was speaking the word to them. Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’” [Mark 2:2-5 NRSV]

I wonder if my fascination with this story as a young child was one of my first experiences with the living Word because today I realize that the printed verses of the story do not capture the character develop-

ment or the emotional depth of the story that I always knew. I remember being impressed not by the paralysis of the man, but by the strong friendship he shared with the men who carried him to the house and up onto the roof. I remember noticing not so much the man’s need for healing, but his need to be in a place where he was not immediately welcomed, and the lengths to which his friends went to give him access to that place.

I think of this story as I, along with my community, Jubilee Partners, wonder how to respond to the current national debate on undocumented immigration and how to respond to our friends and neighbors who live without documents on this side of the border. This Bible story comes to mind not because the United States is the only “house” where Jesus is performing miracles, but because the United States is a country to which many people are immigrating. However, the United States does not allow easy entry to those who come, whether legally or illegally, and once here, immigrants do not receive a warm welcome. I wonder to what lengths we who follow Jesus will go to make a way for those who come as immigrants.

At Jubilee Partners, the refugee program pulls us together in a common

“We know that our calling to offer hospitality and proclaim “the year of Jubilee” should not be constrained by whether or not one can show documents.”

work of hosting immigrants from many countries--most recently from Afghanistan, Burundi, Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia. After a lengthy interview process that sometimes lasts years, the U.S. State Department grants these refugees asylum and the International Organization of Migration loans them money for the flight to the U.S. Once in the United States the refugees benefit from a caseworker and a few months of government financial assistance. But then they are on their own to make a living and a home in a foreign land, usually on no more than minimum wage. For us at Jubilee, we count it a privilege to accompany some of these refugees during their first months in the country.

However, we realize that there are other immigrants, undocumented immigrants, who receive no such welcome or support from our government. We know that our calling to offer hospitality and proclaim “the year of Jubilee” should not be constrained by whether or not one can show documents. In the early 1980’s and 90’s, Jubilee Partners extended refuge and hospitality to many undocumented Central Americans fleeing civil wars in their home countries. In those days, Jubilee would take a bus to Texas to pick up Central Americans sitting in detention centers, pay their bonds and bring them to Jubilee where they would make requests for asylum to the Canadian government. Then Jubilee would drive them to Canada.

Today, when we at Jubilee ask ourselves how we can be engaged with the current population of immigrants from Latin America, we cannot recycle the response of the 1980s be-



Refugee children find love at Jubilee Partners—photo taken by Deborah Schaffer

cause this time the United States is their destination. These immigrants don't need a couple months of refuge at Jubilee and then a bus ride to Canada. They come here to work for two years or five years or until "only God knows." Most often they are fleeing poverty in their home countries, a poverty compounded by U.S. foreign and economic policies protecting the comfortable and inexpensive lifestyle we wish to maintain.

In our efforts to know our neighbors and understand the current context of immigration, we have visited nearby trailer parks, chicken factories and parking lots where men wait for a job that day. Some of us participated in a recent march of over one thousand Latinos in downtown Athens who were asking for more just immigration legislation. We see that our undocumented neighbors are doing their best to keep quiet and out of sight (except for in the recent march) because they know all too well that the United States, though it needs their labor, does not welcome them or their families into our cities and neighborhoods.

And so at Jubilee we are asking, as are many of you, how we can be the friends of the paralyzed man, like those in the gospel of Mark, who insist on making a way for our neighbors when they are unwelcome and even hiding. How do we live out the second great commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves [Matthew 22:39] when so many see our undocumented neighbors as strangers, aliens, illegals, exploited labor, or only clients of soft-hearted social programs?

I don't claim any great answers to these questions, but I believe we can remember with profound gratitude the times when we have been surprised and even saved by the hospitality of others. Let us keep looking into the shadows for our friends who need a welcome. □

“I Was a Stranger and You Welcomed Me”: Grandpa, Granddaughters and Friends March for Immigrant’s Rights

*Reba Place Fellowship
Julius Belser*

Over the years Peggy and I have been a part of many demonstrations, but recently we were excited because our granddaughters beat us to the draw and invited us to accompany them on the May 1st Chicago March for Immigration Rights. Hilda Ginny Frantz and Betsy Belser both have become fluent in Spanish and have gained important cross-cultural relationships. Their commitment to action for their friends was authentic, so of course I would go.

I made a couple of plywood signs to express our Biblical convictions: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me—Jesus,” and “You shall also love the stranger for you were

strangers in the land of Egypt—God.” Direct and clear. The signs, held high, helped us to stay together in the crowd of over 400,000.

The girls worked out the transportation strategy neatly in advance so we could easily meet up with others: Nevin Belser, John Cook, Elizabeth Kelly, Mariella Gonzales, Fernando and Ismael, coworkers with Betsy at Steak and Shake, and Dave Lonergan, a new participant at Living Water Church. As soon as we got off the train we were part of a huge mass moving toward the rally.

I found the people and their signs interesting: One man with a bright and lively little son on his shoulders had a sign, “No child is illegal”. A tall sign proclaimed, “We are indigenous people. We are not criminals. We are not immigrants. We did not arrive on boats 514 years ago. Our ancestors have been here for 1000s of years. We did not cross the borders, the borders crossed us. We are nurses, policemen, cooks”...etc. The voices were diverse with one group passing out a newspaper proclaiming, “Another world—A communist world is possible”—Voice of the revolutionary communist party-USA.

“Stranger” continued on next page



Dave, Hilda, Betsy, Nevin, Fernanda, John, Ismael, and Julius Belser at the Immigrants Rights March in Chicago

“Stranger” continued from page 7

The crowd was mostly Hispanic, but there were Poles and other national groups participating. One salient aspect of the march was the number of families involved. I enjoyed seeing one family with a little 5 year old in a stroller who was so content with clasped hands and a great smile. Her three-year-old brother was walking proudly behind with his father. Everywhere we saw demonstrations of the importance of family to Central and South American folks.



At the march with signs and the whole get-up

In our visit to El Salvador a few years ago we were able to interact with many families in their homes and hear their stories. I now have an idea how desperate fathers feel working with a meager corn crop and perhaps a few months on a coffee plantation. Survival is at stake. If you love your wife and kids, breaking out for the United States, in spite of the dangers, must seem to be the only real alternative. Is survival illegal?

Exclusion is not the only way to deal with the neediness of others. The Marshall Plan implemented after

WW II dealt with survival issues in a more positive way. Could we imagine a policy that directed the resources consumed for “protecting” our borders towards community development? How different the results would be!

I don’t know how much the march impacted our legislators in Washington; but I’m sure that the sense of worth and hope of these people who were marching grew tremendously.

As the march slowly plodded forward with lively chants one could always spot five or more helicopters

overhead, and whenever they came close enough, there would be shouts and raising of signs. After 4-5 hours of marching we met members of St. Patrick’s Church on the curb passing out small cups of water—a gracious gesture.

As we marched through the LaSalle Street canyon past the Board of Trade I had to think of how subsidies to American farmers put farmers in the developing countries at a disadvantage. Then we talk about Fair Trade.

We’ve been sharing with many friends accumulated along the march, acquaintances from work and school. Many of them are “illegal.” Does that make us felons?

As we crossed Michigan Avenue, another granddaughter, Tikva Frantz, joined us. She just got back from Washington, DC, where she was at a rally with a busload from North Park University concerned about the killing in Sudan. It’s getting so a 75-year-old grandpa has to run to catch up, and I’m happily out of breath. □



Waco News

*Hope Fellowship
Joe Gatlin*

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view, even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is done by God, who through Christ changed us from enemies into his friends and gave us the task of making others his friends also.

2 Corinthians
5:16-18

More than a third of us who form Hope Fellowship were born outside of the USA. We come with differing cultures, backgrounds, languages and life experiences.

Yet, as I remember how we played, talked, cooked, prayed and just hung out together during our annual Easter retreat at Three Mountain Retreat, I'm aware that God is teaching us how not to judge each other from a human point of view. We are learning and experiencing how Christ changes us from enemies, or at least strangers, into friends

From Strangers to Friends: was our Lenten theme this year. During the teaching times several of our brothers and sisters shared their experiences as immigrants, both in the USA and in other countries. These stories have helped us reflect on how we should be responding to the immigrants in our midst. Many of us participated in a Palm Sunday march and demonstration in Waco

when 3,500 people convened to call for humane immigration policies. Then several of us gathered on May 1, outside our Meeting House for a public time of prayer, reflection and solidarity with our immigrant neighbors.

In the last week of March we had the opportunity to bond with the youth of Jubilee Partners who traveled to Waco for a week of service and friendship. Picnics, painting house banks with our children for the Valle Nuevo housing project, a scavenger hunt in Waco, and a music night were some of the ways we got to know each other.



At the end of April the Hannah family who are feeling called to start an intentional community in Denver, stopped in Waco to see us after first making a visit to Reba Place. Many of us had the joy of hosting them in our homes, visiting and reflecting together about Christian community.

We were sad to send Robyn Mosley off, back to Georgia in search of a job that will help her attain her LPC license. Several others of us are also in transition. J.B. Smith will be moving across the alley after almost five years of living with the Gatlins. The Gatlins, meanwhile, are remodeling part of their house in preparation to receive Joe's mother who will be living with them. David and Hanna Heddy have just bought a house in the neighborhood and are

busily at work getting it ready for an early July move-in.

At the World Hunger Relief Farm we have made and renewed friendships with folks from near and far. Many of us participated in Farm Day on April 8th, an annual spring gathering; as well as the Mid-Texas Mennonite Association retreat which was held on April 22nd at the Farm. We are all thankful for the rains that have helped everything come alive and grow!

We are also grateful for opportunities such as Luz Rueda's quinceañera, a fun 15th birthday party that was the result of a communal effort, and for our recent work day on the Meeting House when children, youth and adults worked together to clean up the grounds and garage. These experiences help solidify our familyhood across our different nationalities, cultures and languages.

We ask for prayers for Emily Miller who

will be traveling to Bogotá, Colombia, to participate in Youth Venture for three weeks in late June. Likewise, we covet your prayers on behalf of Alan Caruthers as he continues to struggle with the insurance and doctor protocols concerning his diagnosis and treatment of myelofibrosis. Ramona Ryan has also just recently discovered that she most likely has breast cancer. We would like your prayers to be added to ours for the whole Matías-Ryan family as Ramona embarks on treatment.

Thanks be to God that we are no longer strangers and that we can offer Kingdom friendship to all--without borders, without restrictions! □

Winnipeg News

*Grain of Wheat
Marcus Rempel*

The Housing Ministry has rented out its first house to a refugee family from Gambia and a Zimbabwean refugee on ground floor. They are good tenants, very interested in gardening and taking care of the yard.

We are in the process of selecting a new Servant Leader. Craig Terlson has stepped forward, and has received a lot of support.

Many of our young people are giving leadership in camp ministries, especially at Manitoba Pioneer Camp.

We are still renters at St. Matthew's Church, but this space is more our own than any other we have previously worshipped in. We have had significant planning and financial input into the renovation of this space.

Ploughshares Community Farm is planting, weeding, watering a garden and trying to figure out what to do with several acres of very weedy, but still productive asparagus, as well as digging a well and discerning where on the land to situate "the Hof" (Hutterite word for the central communal compound).

Fatmata Amara is graduating with her Health Care Aide Certificate and already has an interview lined up for a job. Haroona Amara has some part-time work as a support worker in a social service for mentally challenged adults and is looking to expand his employment in the social work area.

Leah Marie MacKinnon was born to Melanie and Ken MacKinnon on April 7th.

We are planning our 25th anniversary celebration for August 4-6, 2006. We give thanks for many gifts

and ministries our body has been given. God is good, life is full.

Blessings and fond greetings to all of you in the Shalom Mission Circle, on behalf of Grain of Wheat Church-Community. □

Refugees All, Seeking Our True Homeland

*Grain of Wheat
Marcus Rempel*

I remember the director of a Winnipeg refugee advocacy organization reflecting on the fact that all his full-time staff were either Mennonites or Jews: "I guess we're only a generation away from having been refugees ourselves." It's a sentiment that is profoundly biblical: "A wandering Aramean was my father..." (Deut. 26:5) "You shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God." (Lev. 19:34)

In my suicide intervention work, I recently dealt with a very depressed, very lonely West African university professor. After sharing his immediate crisis of abandonment and isolation, he got on to discussing his PhD thesis: that all of human culture is formed out of exile, from the descent of our ancestors out of the trees, to the flight of Israel out of Egypt, to all the groups who have forged a kinship and an identity in the process of displacement, usually violent, which, if you look back far enough, includes all of our cultures. The exiled, lonely African's pain had brought him a lesson in insight and compassion: We are all refugees, really.

Remember that you were refugees. It's an Old Testament reminder that the people of God needed to hear again and again. In the New Testament, we are reminded that Jesus

himself was a refugee. It's a tradition that should lead to great consideration being given the refugees in our midst: How can we welcome them? What can they teach us?

In the summer of 2004, Grain of Wheat welcomed the Amaras, a refugee family from Sierra Leone. We have learned a lot from them, about perseverance in the face of tragedy, about the power of hope, dreams and faith.

The other day, while visiting over tea, Haroona Amara, the father of the family, shared a challenge that seemed especially noteworthy for intentional communities to reflect upon. Haroona's children won't eat Sierra Leonian food anymore. Haroona is confounded by this. "Back home, the head of the household would say, 'This is what we are eating today,' and that's what the children would eat. Now, everyday, I have to get them candy bars, chips, or I don't hear the end of it." How quickly family power dynamics and food tastes, such elemental cultural markers, have been washed away in the mainstream cultural tides of their new country. There are different problems, different pressures here. It's not about getting enough food for the day, it's about resisting the glut of sugary, greasy, salty treats.

For either challenge, whether in securing food in a land of scarcity, or in limiting gluttony in a land of plenty, we need to share one another's burdens in community. Whether in Egyptland, or the wilderness, or Sierra Leone or Canada or the USA, we're all refugees here really, and we need to band together to make it through the day and to keep alive the memory and the culture of our true home, a place of abundance, justice, peace and grace. □



Evanston News

Reba Place Fellowship
Eric Lawrence

So, in a couple of months I'm getting married, and you're invited to the wedding! I can think of no bigger news, mainly because it's our wedding, but also that I view marriage as a union representing God's faithfulness to his people through tumult, disobedience, and even idolatry. In fact, the more I ponder the symbolism, the more significant marriage seems to the life of the Church, and indirectly, to the concern focused in this newsletter.

Marriage speaks to the issue of immigration because of the hospitality at the heart of Christian marriage. Each family is part of the "new creation" called into being within a community of discipleship with the character to pass on virtues like faithfulness, service, fidelity, and patience.

The way my fiancée, Katie Jean Dahlseng, and I view marriage is going to impact the way we celebrate and live out our union, which is, in essence, a celebration of God's fidelity and love for the Church. That is why you are all invited, because we're family in this together, even those who might be

called aliens and strangers to the nation-state. Don't feel bad if you can't make it, though; we know you still love us.

Weddings certainly do seem to come in seasons. This summer we're planning four weddings for Living Water Community Church couples—counting Katie and me. We pray that God would bless all these couples in their new lives together.

This season also marks the end of an era and the beginning of a new one. Ten interns who have been around Reba from four months to two years, will be moving on from the title "intern," meaning different things for different ones of us. Liz Digitale (married on May 6th to Peter Anderson) moved down to Rogers Park where they'll live in the Living Water Community neighborhood. Of course Katie and I will prepare for our wedding while sticking around here. Chico Fajardo is in a special relationship with an intern from last summer—Tatiana Heflin—both of them staying around to discern God's leading for their life. And Stephanie Leep continues living at the Clearing household in close relationship to the Fellowship, planning to teach in the Chicago area. Jesse Miller has chosen the path of Fellowship novice membership—a

step we celebrated at our May Fellowship meeting. Camille Hobbs will stay for the summer, along with Luke Hingtgen. They are both pondering future plans, which may include staying at Reba a bit longer.

A new crop of four summer interns arrives in early June to participate in a re-vamped intern course created by David Janzen and Tatiana Heflin. She's a recent North Park College graduate and tenacious Reba Fellowship participant, who will co-direct the program.

The new interns, along with us intern alumni, will labor in an 800 square foot garden growing vegetables for others and ourselves. Wish us gardening beginners luck! Other collective work for the interns may include The Recyclery, a non-profit used bicycle collective born about one year ago.

Since its inception among Reba interns and friends, the Recyclery has grown and developed a community dynamic of its own. We are about five core members, six consistent volunteers, several kids who get a bike if they help a few hours, and others contacting us everyday to either donate a bike, buy a bike, or hoping to volunteer. We recently surprised ourselves when we sold sixty bikes in four hours at a Wild Oats food store parking lot. We're now looking to move beyond the disparate confines of various basements and garages to a centralized storefront. You can check out the work and latest ideas at www.therecyclery.org. (My goodness, I'm really plugging myself in this news piece... and they say the reporter should be unbiased.)

All this environmental stuff reminds me of the Fellowship's recent retreat where "For the Beauty of the Earth" kept recycling in our worship. The whole weekend at Inspiration Center (near Lake Geneva) in Wisconsin proved to be just what we wanted it to be: a time to focus on shared gifts, a to experience Sabbath, and to reflect on our life rhythms both with the church and within the church. Chico Fajardo and Ronn



Pizza after a work-day at Carol and Albert Steiner's—photo taken by Albert Steiner

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Treating Illegal Aliens to a Thanks- giving Feast

*Plow Creek Fellowship
Rich Foss*

(This piece was written for and published in the *News Tribune* pastors' column on March 30, 2006.)

Several years ago at Thanksgiving my wife, Sarah, and I invited Jim Fitz, a parishioner, and his son, Andy, for dinner. Jim's wife was working that day and we wanted to share our Thanksgiving dinner with them.

Jim speaks Spanish and often befriends neighbors who speak Spanish. A couple days before Thanksgiving Jim called and asked if he could invite a couple of his Hispanic friends. Sure.

Then our daughters who were in college at the time called and asked if they could bring a couple of friends from Central and South America home for Thanksgiving. Sure.

Then on Thanksgiving morning Jim called and asked if he could invite friends of his Hispanic friends. Sure.

By the time we sat down for Thanksgiving dinner we had more Spanish speakers at the table than English speakers. Our entire dinner conversation was translated between the two languages.

During the meal I was startled when one of our guests revealed that he had been brought to Princeton the day before by a coyote. A coyote is someone who makes his living by illegally bringing people across the border from Mexico into the country.



Dusk by Dan Foxvog

I was startled because his comment made me realize how pervasive the use of illegal workers is in the USA. He had a job waiting for him in Princeton when he arrived.

This week the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate are considering bills to stem the flow of illegal immigrants. One of the bills would make it illegal for U.S. citizens to help illegal immigrants in the States. If the law is passed, I wonder if we could be arrested for inviting friends for Thanksgiving?

This morning I received an e-mail from Dan Regier, a young man who worked on our Plow Creek farm as an intern the summer of 2004. Currently he is in a Mennonite volunteer program in Tucson, AZ. Recently the volunteers in his program spent several days in Mexico where they "visited a shelter for deported children, spoke with immigrants just hours before they attempted to cross the border, and even witnessed a man scale a fifteen-foot wall to jump across into the U.S."

Dan was struck by the desperation he witnessed. One of the bills being

considered in Congress will create a 700 mile fence. "The numbers show that so far, undocumented immigrants seem undeterred by every wall, border patrol station, and unmanned aircraft paid for by our tax dollars," Dan said in his e-mail. "Men watching their families starve will sooner die climbing a wall than stay home and do nothing," he added.

Although Dan is a year out of college and doesn't consider himself an expert he does think that the "most beneficial solution is the partial legalization of immigration, such as a guest worker program, like President Bush is promoting."

In the Old Testament God addressed his nation of Israel, in his usual blunt manner, when they faced the same issue: "The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God."

How should Christians treat illegal aliens? Invite them for Thanksgiving. □

Tiskilwa News

*Plow Creek Fellowship
Rich Foss*

A great day for the Tiskilwa Strawberry Festival? Not exactly. On June 10 at 5:40 a.m., Kevin, the Plow Creek Farm's marketing manager, dashed through the rain to borrow my cell phone to coordinate the three markets we run on Festival day. "Well, we're getting much needed rain," I said as I handed him the phone. "I expect we'll have several good stories come out of this day," he said. Not so good for selling strawberry short cakes but good for the earth and good for stories.

Global economics: How can we justly hire temp workers in a global economy that encourages (forces?) Mexican and Central Americans north to work on farms like Plow Creek? No easy answers but Erin Kindy, who spent three years in Colombia with Christian Peacemaker Teams and saw first hand the effects of the global economy in that country, did a great job of initiating this important conversation.

Village politics: As president of the Tiskilwa Public Library trustees, I have been working with trustees, village residents, and political leaders seeking a way to create an accessible library. The current library has nine steps up to the door.

Practicing new found carpentry skills under the tutelage of Rick Reha and Lyn Fitz, the teens are building great additions to the Plow Creek playground.

The church and fellowship at Plow Creek are both undergoing transformations. Sarah and I will be honored June 25 as I retire from 25 years of being a church pastoral elder. I will continue as a Plow Creek Fellowship elder. Plow Creek Mennonite Church has asked the

Illinois Mennonite Conference to license Neil Horning for ministry at Plow Creek as part of our commitment to have IMC license at least one of our PCMC elders. For the time being, Louise Stahnke is continuing as both PCMC and PCF elder but hopes to retire from PCF eldering while continue to serve the PCMC as an elder. PCMC has also formed a visioning group to envision new ways for us to be a faithful congregation. In PCF members meetings Lynn Reha has been helping us to envision new ways to organize the practical side of our life at Plow Creek and to share responsibilities well beyond a few old time leaders (me being one of them--smile).

Peace is a fruit of the Spirit and Rebecca Klitzke and Kyle Urck, who live in south central Illinois, have found peace growing at Plow Creek. After three visits, they are planning to move here in August with their two preschool sons. Rebecca spent several of her early childhood years at New Creation Fellowship in KS, one of the original Shalom Covenant Communities.

Of all the initiatives at Plow Creek, I'm personally most excited about the internship program in communal living that Rick Reha and Erin Kindy are organizing on behalf of PCF. As in any new venture it's been a "roller coaster ride" to use Rick's metaphor. We are hoping to have the first new interns to arrive July 1.

Jesus is a great friend of Plow Creek. It's his love that bonds us to him and to each other, even when we are close enough to get into conflict with each other and distant enough to be in Argentina on mission as Richard and Ruth Anne Friesen are.

Faithful reader, the mission anagram is your reward for reading to the end of the Plow Creek news. The first word of each paragraph, read from top to bottom, tells you our mission. □

San Francisco News

*Church of the Sojourners
Zoe Mullery*

This news is being written longhand on a yellow legal pad from where I sit on a log beneath spires of redwood trees swaying in wind-choreographed majesty. I'm at our annual Covenant Retreat, where "covenanted" members at Sojourners renew our commitment to one another and take some time to spend together in a beautiful place.

Our guest speaker, Virgil Vogt from Reba, is reminding us—amongst other encouragements—that *the things we do for Christ in love are the only permanent things*. Tim Lockie, this year's retreat planner, gave the weekend the Western-style theme "Circle the Wagons," implemented with costumes, character assignments, and an assortment of visual aids. Virgil succeeded in finding many parallels between the wagon train and the life of Christian community. Tim Lockie loves to say "Yee-haw!" as an alternate to Amen.

Life at Church of the Sojourners is never uneventful. (For our retreat, we counted up the number of visitors we'd had in the last year: over 180!) Here are a few highlights since the last newsletter:

Now in their last trimester, this year's Apprenticeship and Practicing Members' groups seem to be living out well the hopes that we had for them at the beginning of the year

Debbie and Dale Gish continue to actively pursue adoption, and have a strong lead with a potential birth mother.

Tim, Jenny, Alexina, and John David Lockie will spend a month in Guatemala this summer. Tim's work calls him there, as well as a desire to study Spanish; they are also pur-

Sojo News continued on page 15

Three Houses Built in Valle Nuevo--Seven to Go

Reba Place Fellowship
David Janzen

In March our SMC delegation visited ten Valle Nuevo families who have been selected by the community as most in need of new homes. But before I report on that project, however, I want you to meet one of these recipients, Margarita Aviles and her family, as they welcomed our group.

Margarita Aviles is known to many North American friends because she was chosen to visit the Shalom Mission Community Camp Meeting in Waco Texas, October 2004. During her visit to Reba she celebrated her 70th birthday with the first birthday party anyone had ever given her. Margarita welcomed our 2006 visiting group with long tearful hugs, cries of joy, and then a campesina feast way beyond anything we could have imagined—tortillas, rice with veggie flecks, a thick chicken noodle soup, beef meat balls in a savory sauce, large chunks of stewed squash, orchata to drink, and the dry season fruit--jocotes to chew and suck on. We were overwhelmed by Margarita's lavish gesture of love in the midst of such obvious poverty.



Margarita welcomes her long-time friend, Jim Fitz



Family members gather with Margarita to anticipate the home that will replace the old adobe and tin construction.

Margarita's legendary love is expressed in the makeup of her household which includes a feeble elderly couple—her sister Leandra (74) and Leandra's husband Martil (74)—who on hearing there were visitors, hobbled away to hide. A few years ago Leandra was starving, no longer able to grind and prepare corn tortillas, so Margarita took her home to help her recuperate. Her husband came to visit, and they ended up staying. Friends helped them build a little lean-to ranchito attached to Margarita's sagging house.

Margarita is raising three teenagers for other struggling extended family members—Lenis (19), Walter (17) and Ana Elizabeth (14). Lenis and Walter have already dug the footing of the new house that will be built a few steps down hill from the current house. Lenis is a shy fellow who did not want to talk with us until we asked if he played soccer and then he lit up. It turns out that he is on the Santa-Marta All Star team that has won the Cabanas championship and now is playing other departmental teams for the national championship.

So this is the way the Salvadoran campesino welfare system works—any relative that can help raise a kid or feed the old folks is called into service as long as they are alive—

because there is no help from any government agency.

Margarita tried to get a house by joining the local housing cooperative, but she could not care for her family and put in the sweat-equity hours required—and still be an active member of the Valle Nuevo Directiva (village council).

A three-way agreement to build ten houses in 2006 and

2007: On our visit the SMC delegation con-

firmed an agreement with Habitat for Humanity that they would oversee this project to build ten houses and purchase the materials. The Valle Nuevo families would each contribute two construction workers for the duration of the project and \$300 to pay for the mason. Shalom Mission Communities are committed to send Habitat \$4,000 for construction materials on each house.

We witnessed the beginnings of construction for the first group of three families. Salome Ascencio's home was dismantled to make room for the new one. Habitat's foremen surveyed the foundation lines and the crew began digging footings.

In the following weeks, we got reports from Morena Ascencio, Salome's daughter and a student at the Jesuit University, about the process of construction on her family's home. "Concerning the construction of houses [in Valle Nuevo] they say that the work will be completed by the 5th of May if there are no problems, although the rains are coming. But everything is under control. The beautiful thing is that very soon [our family] will have a new house."

And in Mid-May she wrote: "Receive many greetings from my family and all the community in general. I can say that the houses now are finished and they came out very beautiful. Now my mama expects everything will be moved in place within the month of May."

Continued on top of next page

Shalom Mission Communities are praying for the resources to finance seven more houses for Valle Nuevo in the next dry season (December, 2006 to May, 2007). Your partnership in this kingdom of God redistribution and hope-giving enterprise is most welcome. □

Sojos News continued from page 13

suings the possibility of Guatemalan adoption.

Louise Harris' daughter got married in Belize in May, and Teri Creeger, Anne-Marie Saxton, and Laura and Naomi Hare (age 7) all joined Louise there. It was a joyful celebration and also good for more of Louise's church family to be connected to her Belize family.

Matt Creeger returned early from Mission Year—long story, good ending—and has been finishing out his year of service at Sojourners doing "Mission Here." He and Krista are engaged to be married September 17!

Rick DiMicco will return to us on July 7 after three months in Southern California, just in time for his birthday.

Judy Alexander has had some unwelcome experience with the Taiwanese health care system. Soon after successful gall bladder surgery, she returned in pain to the emergency room where it took them awhile to determine she was having an appendicitis attack. By the time they operated, it had ruptured. She's ok, but in pain. Fortunately she has a good group of friends there to care for her.

Jon & IvaJo Pedersen have been three weeks on the Pacific Crest Trail from Mexico to Canada. Or perhaps from Mexico to... Southern California? Check out their blog (pederstrians.blogspot.com)—I especially like the picture of Jon as "Captain Chaparral."

Let's conclude with something from a recent Tim Otto email, just finished with his first year of seminary: □

"Life is beautiful now. No more frantic translating, no more getting called on in class, no more fighting with beasts wearing seven horns in Greek. If I'm not smiling beatifically the entire time I'm there, look me straight in the eyes and say 'Greek, Greek, Greek,' three times in a harsh voice. Then I'll remember my happy, free condition and return to a serene bliss." □

Immigration Between the Times from pg 3

in Jesus. The church is a stage for the world to see, a series of prophetic dramas of how it will be in the age to come. Hope Fellowship in Waco, worshipping in English and Spanish is such a dramatic sign. The lavish welcome we receive in Valle Nuevo from families who love us despite everything—is a sign. The SMC communities this year are tithing from their housing investments to build homes for the poorest families in Valle Neuvo—is a sign of the future already here.

Even though the states now on the map are passing away, we can offer our public servants provisional insights and support for good initiatives. We can welcome reforms that take steps toward the Kingdom. Realism would point out that in the past fifteen years, spending for border control has increased five times, while twelve million additional migrants have entered the country to stay illegally. The hope of controlling U.S. borders with barbed wire and high-tech guard towers will prove futile as long as our neighbors have no decent way to survive in the urban slums and campesino villages beyond our borders. U.S. citizens will never be secure until our neighbors are secure. In tragedy and in hope we are already one people—both in the world of economics, and in the real world of the body of Christ, our only secure home.

Reba News continued from page 11

Frantz have volunteered to gather meditations and prayers from Fellowship members and research other resources that might serve as our own book of daily common prayers.

The Fellowship needed an extended Sabbath not only because many of us are over-worked, but we're also expanding, which calls for more time to build relationships together.

There are a lot of interns graduating who just don't want to leave. Lisa Selph brought back from Church of the Sojourners the idea of "practicing members," that Reba has adopted. It is a way for persons to participate in community life and meetings for a season, learning all they can while discerning with others where they are called to spend the rest of their lives. Practicing membership is for an agreed-upon but extendable period of time.

To support this new type of relationship, the Fellowship wants to provide each practicing member and year-long interns with mentors. How shall new people be formed in the values and practices of community? Allan Howe says that, in addition to the osmosis approach, "The mentor will provide orientation, support, serious modeling, and guidance." Heather Clark and Joe Marshak will spearhead the effort to prepare mentors for their task so that practicing members as well as others who need or desire it, will have a spiritual companion.

We have been earnestly praying for Martha Lukens (daughter of David and Penny Lukens) who fell critically ill in Liberia where she is a missionary-English teacher. By God's grace she improved just enough for emergency flights to the U.S. where she was diagnosed with an abscess on her liver. After several surgeries in the Evanston Hospital and two weeks of recovery, she has come home to the love and care of Cana household. If her healing continues, she hopes to return to her students in September. □

Preparing for PAPA

*Chico Fajardo
Reba Place Fellowship*



Scattered across the country, in little communities tucked away in cities, suburbs and rural places, folks are hard at work preparing for the June PAPA Fest in Tennessee. The PAPA Fest is a convergence of communities from different circles and movements within the Church gathered to celebrate the Kingdom amongst us. As a “co-conspirator” Reba Place has been hard at work these past months preparing workshops to teach, artwork to share and coordinating the “Reba Caravan.”

Katie Dahlseng, Chico Fajardo, Tatiana Helfin, David Janzen and Doug Self are all brainstorming and piecing together their presentations for different workshops on Peak Oil, Dance and Movement, and Why we live in Community.

Chico has been roaming the back alleys collecting castaway wood panels to paint for props in the Children’s Village. Tatiana has received a cascade of phone calls and emails from dozens of people looking for a way to travel to the PAPA Festival. Inspired by our nomadic ancestors, she is coordinating the “Reba Caravan”—a group of folks piling in cars and vans with their eyes set on Eastern Tennessee.

Reba is also working on the creation of the PAPA (H)our, an alternative form of currency that will enable festival attendees to “come out” of the Empire’s economic system. No one is quite sure how it will all pan out, but hopefully this little “experiment in truth” will help all of us imagine new ways of practicing Kingdom economics.

This celebration of God’s Kingdom is fast approaching and we are all looking forward to seeing how God will take our months of hard work and transform it into something beautiful, prophetic and life giving. Shalom.

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