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August 2008: Cross-Pollination and Collaboration

We Will Not All Die, But We Will All Be Changed

By Joe Gatlin

"We are the Christ on the cross of free trade." José Salomé Asencio

Salomé is a small, unassuming, soft-spoken man. He is not the poet of Valle Nuevo; that would be Margarita. And he is not the community's greatest orator; that would be Tomasa. I have learned, though, when Salomé speaks to lean forward and concentrate so I can compensate for my impaired left ear and my Spanish-deficient brain. I don't want to miss anything he says.

I have several favorite Salomé memories. In 2007 we admired his new gardening project on top of the hill behind his house. As a *campesino*, Salomé has always worked in the fields tending corn, but this idea of growing tomatoes, chiles, and *huistil*, in a backyard garden was totally new. He laughed and squeezed his *bomba*, an old, scratched two-liter soft drink bottle converted to a water pump, and joked about it as his \$1,000 high-tech device. This year, with joy he showed us the arbor he had built of strings and cane poles, allowing his cultivation to climb up the hill.

My favorite Salomé memory-touchstone is a written missive. One afternoon when he was in Waco for the 2004 Shalom Missions camp meeting, I asked him to sign our guest book. Salomé reached out and took the book, but not the pen I offered. Then he sat silently and still in our rocking chair, examining its navy blue cover, his brow furrowed in concentration.

After an eternal moment, he looked up at me, cocked his



Salomé and his family, June 2008.

head, smiled, and then accepted the pen. He very deliberately took his reading glasses out of his pocket, put them on, opened the book, turned the pages 'til he found the next blank line, and then leaned forward and studiously wrote and wrote some more.

Four years later I still like to pull out the guest book and read these words that take up almost half a page:

Visitamos esta iglesia el 2 de Octubre del 2004. Somos Salvadoreños de Cavanás Suidad Victoria Canton Santa Marta Comunidad Vaya Nuevo José Salomé Asencio [We are visiting this church October 2, 2004. We are Salvadorans from Cavanás (the name of the department), City of Victoria, Canton of Santa Marta, Valle Nuevo Community, José Salomé Asencio]

Salomé's message makes me feel like I am living in the last chapter of one of Paul's letters to the early Christian churches. "I will visit you after passing through → → →

Macedonia. And if Timothy comes, treat him well for he is very dear to me..." Paul did not have Salomé's gift of succinctness.

I particularly like 1 Corinthians 16. When it is tied together with chapter 15, which it certainly was in Paul's mind, there is the sense of a great collaboration going on among the New Testament churches. It was all about living out the grand drama of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ's body, and it was made visible through the commerce and communication between all of these tiny Christian communities.

This year as we loaded our bags into the van and prepared to leave Valle Nuevo, we found ourselves in the middle of 1 Corinthians 16.

Greetings, gifts, and commissions flowed back and forth.

- To Pastor and Rosita, "Here are pictures from Ruth and others from Waco Habitat of their visit with you last summer."
- From Angelina and Pedro, "Please make sure Mary Jude in Chicago gets this letter!"
- To Felipa, "Here is a card from David and Joanne."
- From multitudes in Valle Nuevo, "Please give our greetings to Jaime (Jim Fitz) and David, and please tell Yvonne to come see us!"

And on and on.

It is very easy to see collaboration when we focus on projects. A large project at its best will engage a number of stakeholders in achieving a visible and verifiable result. Funding, developing, building, and dedicating new houses with Valle Nuevo is a perfect example.



SMC delegation to El Salvador, June 2008. Pictured L to R: Ellie Lewis, Annie Spiro, Tyler Chen, Adaia Bernal, Gabriela Gatlin, Anali Gatlin, Nancy Gatlin, Joe Gatlin.

This extensive project had a very small beginning. In a meeting in Waco only a couple of days after Salomé left his message in our guest book, David Janzen addressed our Valle Nuevo guests, "We have been in a relationship with your community for many years. When there are needs, friends help friends. Is there any specific way we can help with your needs in Valle Nuevo?"

In the 1 Corinthians 15-16 story, this was our moment for, "Now concerning the collection for the saints..." All of us in the room from the U.S. were nervous. With a couple of notable exceptions, over the years SMC had avoided significant financial assistance, aware that money or material aid flowing only in one direction can redefine a relationship, squeezing out the joy and love found in mutuality.

There was silence. Tomasa, Margarita, and Salomé looked at each other and without words communicated both emotions and specifics. With slight nods they reached agreement. Salomé cocked his head, smiled, and then responded to David's question, "We still have ten families who live in houses made with the lumber they brought back in 1989 from the Honduran refugee camp. These families cannot afford to build a decent home. We can use your help."

Knowing something about housing development, I quickly calculated the costs and thought of a legion of difficulties and demons we would face in taking on such a project. At that moment I felt faint-hearted.

As the story unfolded, Jesus multiplied the fives loaves and two fish that our communities brought forward. Providential connections were made, and El Salvador Habitat for Humanity stepped forward ready to adapt its standard model to our particular challenges. Our 2007 SMC delegation participated in the joy of the ten home dedications in March 2007. Now SMC and Valle Nuevo have signed papers for a new partnership of another 20 houses. The middle of this project has revealed God to be the grand orchestrator of collaborations. The

(Continued, bottom of p13)

After some introductions Tomasa, very short, thin, weathered and wrinkled, yet deeply rooted and prepared to survive any prolonged season of hardship, stood and closed her eyes. Tomasa has no runway; she went from zero to 90 miles per hour in a split-second and immediately swept everyone up in a breathtaking flight of oratory. The timbre of her voice was haunting, her cadence mesmerizing, her timing even with a translator captivating, and her eloquence inspiring. We could see the epic struggle of a people oppressed by the wealthy few who owned the land and chased by government death squads. We could feel in some measure their pain as they held their children who had been gunned down or watched as the weak and infirmed drowned in the Lempa.

Then it was Margarita's turn. In her small, high-pitched voice she spoke as a 72 year-old child, "We suffered so much." Margarita's eyes are liquid and multi-dimensional. They swim in the wisdom of experience; they tear up with the innocence of youth. That night as she read her poems she focused on a point of faith somewhere beyond the audience, and yet engaged us with a look of love born from suffering.

After Margarita finished, Salomé stood to speak. He told us how gov-

ernment-subsidized imports had driven down the local price of corn. As a result of the North American Free Trade Agreement, his outlay to grow a bushel of corn had become greater than his intake after transporting that bushel to Victoria and selling it. Salomé carefully walked through all of the costs ending again with the market price of corn. The conclusion was clear. It was impossible to make a living as a *campesino*. When there was no more to be said, the impossibility of the situation hung in silence before us in the middle of the room. Salomé cocked his head, smiled, extended his arms straight out to either side, and without bitterness or rancor, said, simply and plainly, "Somos el cristo en la cruz del tratado de libre comercio."

"We are the Christ on the cross of free trade," Nancy translated.

Suffering and death. Through Jesus we know they are required for a messiah. The people of Valle Nuevo talk about suffering and death as easily and naturally as we talk about the weather or the agendas for our upcoming meetings. Suffering and death are not just past tense; they are part of their daily life.

If to know the power of the resurrection I have to experience suffering



Margarita, June 2008.

and death as my brothers and sisters in Valle Nuevo have experienced them, I have little hope. I don't think I will have that opportunity, and I am doubtful I could bear the burden. In this collaboration, though, I am hoping that is not necessary. "Listen," Paul wrote, "I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed." (1 Corinthians 15:51) ❖

authority to speak into our lives.

How does a visitation work? A community will typically invite three to five persons who are in solidarity with the community's vision for a visit of several days to do what we call, in medical terms, a "spiritual checkup." During this time the visitors will listen to anyone who wants to talk with them. Sometimes they hear issues the community has been neglecting. The visitors will also meet with the leaders or other groups who wish to be heard.

The visitation is also a time of fellowship, eating at different tables, getting "the tour," learning to know the community in its own setting. The visitors usually conclude their time with a report—affirming the things they see

God doing and making some suggestions as they feel led. What to do with this report, then, is in the hands of the community and the Holy Spirit.

Who is our community of communities? We keep discovering new partners every day. But the movement we are part of goes back to the original community of collaboration and communion, the Trinity. This God, whose nature is community, dwells with those who have given up family, lands, houses, and possessions in order to follow Jesus more closely. Without possessing anything we are gifted "a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers, sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life." Mark 10:30 ❖

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Politically, a border gives testimony to the very base human instinct to partition and exclude, to domineer and subjugate, to draw lines and falsely appropriate ownership of what rightfully belongs to God. I'm convinced a border is a metaphor for sin. Or maybe it is the other way around, sin is a metaphor for borders.

Border crossing, therefore, is gospel collaboration. When Salomé, Margarita, and Tomasa come our way, or some of us go their way, we are choosing with Jesus to go through Samaria, rather than around it. This collaboration to follow Jesus costs us far more than time and money. It requires our lives.

For the closing *despedida* (farewell celebration) of the 2008 SMC delegation we sat on the veranda of Pablo and Angelina's house. The testimonies around the circle warmed our hearts while the rain

showers kept the evening pleasant and cool. When it came Pastor's turn, he talked about the meaningfulness of the relationship, the community's gratitude for our visit, and how he hoped we would not forget them. Pastor went on to say, "I know how much you suffer when you come. I know it is difficult for you to be here." He explained in some detail the discomfort he could tell we experienced in visiting Valle Nuevo.

We had received incredible hospitality in our four days there. They killed their chickens for us. They slept nine and ten people to a bedroom so we could have some privacy. They bought rolls of toilet paper for us! I wanted to communicate solely my gratitude for these, yet they had correctly picked up at times that we were out of our comfort zones. And Pastor called that suffering!

Suffering. I know it is part of the gospel. The beatitudes start with being

poor in spirit and end with persecution. Jesus told his disciples that any who would follow him had to deny themselves and take up their cross. In 1 Corinthians 15:31, Paul claimed, "I die every day!" In our relationship with Valle Nuevo, I am learning much about suffering, but it is not from my own direct experience with it.

In 2004, a couple of days before the SMC camp meeting began, Hope Fellowship held an open house so others in Waco could hear the stories of the Salvadoreños, about their flight across the Lempa River, their sojourn for years in Honduran refugee camps, and their current life in Valle Nuevo. The meeting house was filled with people that night—a few early SMC arrivals for the camp meeting, a number of Baylor students interested in Central American affairs, and a handful who were tagging along just as friends of friends. → → →

Shalom Connections

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Cross-Pollination and Collaboration

An Editorial by David Janzen

Why Communities Need Each Other:

I recently asked Reba members why we need other communities. Why are we in a covenant with Shalom Mission Communities and in intentional connection with many other groups?

David Lukens began, "Just as we personally need each other in community to be real, to not hide from God, so it is between communities." We observed that, over time, the dominant society tends to wear down prophetic communities unless they find renewal from new movements of the Spirit in a wider community of communities.

Penny recalled such a turning point in Reba's history. "The visitation from the Church of the Redeemer in Houston in the early 1970's was very influential. Graham Pulkingham and others introduced us to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, to freer worship and to dancing before the Lord. Their example caused us to form many ministering households."

"When we were starting community in Newton, Kansas, in the early 70's," Joanne remembered, "Fellowship of Hope, Reba, Plow Creek, and many other groups came to our aid with visits, practical help, and counsel. As a new community we drew on a wider circle of wisdom and experience."

"There is also another side to the

story," Joanne added. "Other communities help minimize the damage we can do to one another. We remember the tragedy at Jonestown and other groups that isolated themselves from the wider church. Groups that go it alone can get off track."

"When Koinonia came under great persecution in the 1960's for practicing inter-racial fellowship," Julius recalled, "their high school children were sent here for a time. We made many trips back and forth to give support. Clarence Jordan came to tell us his Cotton Patch parables, and he made recordings here that were widely circulated. Clarence inspired us to 'be strong in the Lord.'"

"Communities can carry out resistance together," Tatiana reminded us, "sustaining subversive actions like the Overground Railroad, where Jubilee Partners and Reba moved hundreds of Central American refugees to asylum. Now many Christian communities support Christian Peacemaker Teams, praying for them and providing a home base for members who spend part of the year in areas of world conflict."

Communities can come to each other's aid. When Church of the Sojourners' two senior leaders died within a year of one another, other Shalom Communities sent delegations to offer deep counsel and support because we already knew each other well. Likewise, we can join each other in times of joy, especially when there is a reconciliation or a wedding to → → →



Peek at PAPA Festival #1: This handmade (and precariously-hung) creation of sticks and art welcomed folks into the parking area at the beginning of the festival.

Poema

yo quisiera hacer un cuadro para poderles contar
un poema con unas letras doradas
para escribir unas lindas palabras que sean muy
sagradas

quisiera ser un pintor para pintarles un arbol muy
frondoso y que no fuera tan alto para formar un arco
ires de bellisimos colores; i en medio del arco ires
formar muchos corazones; i en cada corazonsito le pon
dria una rosa i en los petalos de esta flor un mensaje
de amor

un mensaje muy bonito con cariño y con amor
para que siempre los recuerden a esta umilde comunidad
que se encuentra ubicada en el pais del salvador

quisiera ser un cantante para cantarles una
cancion como no puedo cantar solo les daria el
corazon

ya con este poema me despido
por que ya no tengo palabras para poderme
expresar quise que ustedes comprendan que en estas
umildes palabras llevan los agradecimientos
de toda la comunidad

The poem to the left is written by Margarita, an elder in the Valle Nuevo community. Below is Nancy Gatlin's translation to English.

*I would like to be a picture so that I could tell you
A poem with golden letters
To write you some beautiful words that would be sacred*

*I would like to be a painter to paint you a very luxuriant tree
One that wasn't too tall so that a rainbow of most beautiful colors could be formed
In the middle of this rainbow would be many hearts
And in each heart I would place a rose and in the petals of this flower,
A message of love*

*A very beautiful message with kindness and love so that you would always remember
This humble community that is found placed in the country of El Salvador*

*I would like to be a singer to be able to sing you a song, but since I can't sing,
I would just give you my heart*

*So with this poem I bid farewell
Since I have no more words with which to express myself
I just want you to understand that all the gratitude of the whole
Community is carried in these humble words.*

celebrate.

Visits, sabbaticals, and retreats at each others' communities renew us in our vocation to radical discipleship. Tatiana added, "Chico and I have visited Jubilee Partners several times to review our life. We get rest and retreat time—and clarity to discern our life questions with people who share the same calling. They know us and can be honest with us in whatever we are going through."

Others recalled the courtships and marriages between communities. "If you are part of a group that renounces personal possessions and careers, where will you find such a mate?" Young people who grow up in community are shaped by radical commitments, but also need to "fly the coop" to test their own faith and calling. They are encouraged to visit other communities, which sometimes—thank you Lord—has romantic consequences.

Cross-fertilization, cross-pollination, intermarriage: It seems impossible to talk about exchanges between communities without sexual metaphors. The language of cross-fertilization comes from animal husbandry—intentionally breeding livestock so that the offspring will have the benefits of both ancestral lines. The result is often more vigor and survival power.

The mule has a horse mother and donkey father—resulting in an offspring that is almost as fast as a horse, yet able to survive hard times and hard use like a donkey. But not all hybrids are improvements. The offspring of a horse father and donkey mother is a "hinny," which combines the worst qualities of both parents—an experiment seldom repeated.

Cross-pollination is the same principle seeking more useful, hardy or beautiful offspring among plants.

Last year I visited friends in India. On the plane I read that there are 20,000 castes in Indian society—a caste being defined as the group within which your daughter is permitted to marry. Cross-fertilization is not a strong point of the caste system—loyalty to your group, accepting your status within the larger hierarchy of society, is the point.

The question of who your daughter (or you intern) marries does really matter, but it is just a part of the larger question of intimacy. What influences and which movements we will welcome into our communities and which ones we will resist?

Discerning Collaboration or Resistance: The Revelation of John warns in explicit language about the "Whore of Babylon" and calls the church "to come out of her." "The Whore of Babylon" is a not-so-subtle code name for the seductive power of the Roman

Empire's military system, its political ascendancy, its far-reaching trade, violent games and glorious architecture. Who does not want to cheer for the winning side, the Power that Providence seems to favor.

"The Whore of Babylon" remains a valid image for the seductive attraction of the dominant political and cultural powers of any age, especially our own. John knows what he is doing when he calls her a whore—reminding us that she only loves herself, her own glory, and the money she gets for her services. Lies and violence go with her, and her destruction is inevitable.

Discernment is always needed. What business model do we use to survive and prosper? Whose media will we enjoy? Whose heroes do we cheer? Where do we go to relax and tell our stories? Whom do we aspire to be like? Where do we turn to assuage our loneliness? Where will we find friends for the journey? Whose music will sing in minds? Where do we invest our hopes, our time and our money? What books will we recommend?

Renewal usually comes to the church through historic movements of the Spirit. The Shalom Mission Communities have selectively drawn from the Anabaptist tradition, the civil rights and racial reconciliation movements, the charismatic movement, the peace movement, the intentional community movement, feminism, and New Monasticism—just to give a few examples. Social movements tend to have limited life spans and yet can mark a decade of changes in the consciousness and the conscience of a generation.

Witnesses to the Spirit of our Age: As followers in the line of Elijah, Isaiah, Amos, and Jesus, we are also witnesses to the spirit of our age. Last year Reba's apprentices helped organize a Cynicism and Hope conference, stirring us all to engage prophetically with the issues of war and injustice of our time, in the hope of Jesus and from a community base.

This year we encouraged our young people to participate in the PAPA fest and to visit our sister community,

(Continued, bottom of pg 15)

Hope Fellowship News

By Matt Porter

The long, hot summer is drawing to a close in Waco, Texas. As Hope Fellowship awaits a respite from the heat, we reflect on what has happened to us over the past few months.

This was a summer of traveling for many in our congregation, giving them the opportunity to renew contacts with loved ones near and far. Nancy and Joe led an SMC contingent to Valle Nuevo, where our relationship with the brothers and sisters there was extended and deepened. Norma Torres is taking advantage of the summer to plan a special mother/daughter trip to New York with Aranza. J.B. Smith and Bethany Wilson traveled to the Pacific Northwest to spend time with David and Hannah Heddy. While there, they got engaged. Hope Fel-

lowship is excitedly preparing for the wedding on November 22. Several other members of our fellowship have also enjoyed family trips.

Allan de Laurell returned from Nicaragua and Bolivia. Allan was there assisting in the building of water wells. Since returning to Waco, Allan has also returned to his work at Talitha Koum, a therapeutic nursery center for high-risk children. Allan has moved into the home of Carrie and Fernando Arroyo, where he has made fast friends with their son, Jonas.

Several members of our community practicing medicine recently celebrated important milestones. Kristie Rowe-Miller, a nurse midwife, delivered her 1,000th child. Her cell group planned a large picnic at the park, complete with food and music, for the entire community to celebrate. Kristie's long career has been a product of her gift for compassionate

care and the support of her family. Karina Zamora's practice of medicine is just beginning. She recently received full certification as a nurse's assistant. Karina's husband, Eddy Zamora, is very proud of his wife's accomplishments. Eddy is also learning new skills as he is now a master at changing Joshua's diapers.

Hope Fellowship and the World Hunger Relief Farm recently bid farewell to intern Will Summers. He will remain nearby, however, working in the Valley both with a Mennonite congregation as well as a school district. His internship at the Farm will serve him well, as he is now farming in partnership with a school district, providing the vegetables for the cafeteria salad bar. Jocelyn Philpott will also soon be leaving Hope Fellowship after her internship ends. Hope Fellowship will miss them both. ❖

Continued from p2...

ending has yet to be written, and the journey towards fulfillment continues to bring hope.

A project, however, is not the archetype of collaboration, at least within the Christian family. A shortcoming of projects is they can easily be interpreted by categorizing participants into two classes, donors and beneficiaries and communion is lost.

The fundamental collaboration in the gospel story is a relationship, not a project. It began in creation and took form when God established a people through Abraham and Sarah. The relationship matured in Jesus when he defeated the powers and principalities of selfishness, greed, ethnocentricity, gender bias, and violence through his suffering and death. And the relationship was fulfilled as the Holy Spirit worked through Paul, other apostles, and the believers to

proliferate Jesus-communities in an expanding network across the world.

SMC is part of this network. Our relationship with Valle Nuevo helps substantiate the reality of the collaboration. This historical community of communities is the great collaboration

It is not easy, though. There

are significant challenges in our collaboration with Valle Nuevo. One is simply the distance. It takes a lot of time, not to mention money. Flying to San Salvador and then driving on to Valle Nuevo will generally take SMC delegations two days. An overland trip further reveals the vast expanse of land, the cultural mountain ranges, and the political rifts including at least three borders between here and there.

Border crossings. That is another way to explain the challenge and the importance of what we are doing. In concept, a border seems innocent enough, especially for a gringo with a U.S. passport. In a classroom a border can be presented as positive, creative, human effort to define social identity and build a durable economy. From a distance, on a hilltop, it likely will appear to be a peaceful river. From a plane, a border goes unnoticed. But down close a border is usually a harsh, bureaucratic reality. Crossing a border is bothersome and expensive, even for a gringo, and traumatically magnified for a Salvadoreño.

→ → →



Peek at PAPA #2: Chico Fajardo-Heflin and Jim Fitz in the outdoor bartering tent. The bartering village set up shop inside and in front of the Plow Creek common building. Dozens of attendees shared, sold, and bartered art, crafts, music, literature, and services.



Gabriela Gatlin teaches English to students in Valle Nuevo.

of visitors.”

Anne Gavitt's pet portrait and illustration business is blossoming now as she has a website up and running (www.annegavitt.com) and is engaging in her first local Evanston "pet events". The Reba Works crew (Adam Vaughan, Ronn Frantz, and Rob Larson) have worked hard to get her business off the ground and the rest of us are eager to see her make connections with other animal and art lovers in the area (or across the country).

Finally, Reba Place Fellowship has just embarked on a significant new (and large!) project. After a month of intensive conversations and special meetings, we have come to unity about purchasing a 51-unit building

half a block from the Living Water meetinghouse in Rogers Park. This apartment building will be managed and maintained by Reunion Property management and will be an affordable housing mainstay in the neighborhood, which is now seeing more and more condo conversions. The new building at 1528 W. Pratt is made up of one-bedroom and studio apartments and currently has the lowest rent in the Living Water neighborhood. Members in Rogers Park and Evanston are enthusiastic about bringing community and care into a building that is home to many vulnerable people, including recovering addicts, single mothers, and resettled refugees.

As always, we need and appreciate your prayers. It is only by the Spirit

that we can live faithfully and gracefully in the midst of all of life's trials and transitions—in the hope that our trials will produce the steadfast character of Jesus. ❖



Natalie Nyberg with the L'Hayim group "tree".
The following verse is at the base:
"We're a family, and we're a tree...
Our roots grow deep in community
When sharing sorrow, we're set free
And in loving others... that's the key!"

Til Death Do Us Part

By Sally Schreiner Youngquist

An unexpected death in our Living Water Community Church family on July 17 reminded me of one of our more unusual inter-community connections. Saruon Ath, the 57-year-old brother of our Cambodian member Sophorn Loeung, died in his sleep. He had only come to this country 2 1/2 years ago, worked a marginal job, and leaves a widow with sons aged 15 and 20 to support. There was no life insurance to pay the death expenses, which can be quite expensive in this culture.

As LWCC pastor, I explained to Sophorn that, over the years, we in the Reba community have found alternative ways to handle death procedures that save money and give us more participation in the process of laying our loved ones to rest. Although this was all new to Sophorn and our Cambodian brothers and sisters, the family was glad to learn from and participate in our communally-developed traditions.

Members of our church stepped up to make a hand-crafted wooden coffin and lining in a week's time, involving Saruon's family members in the sanding, staining and varnishing. Thanks go to Fellowship of

Rogers Park members Ronn and Nina Frantz and Orwin Youngquist, as well as LWCC members Doug Jones and George Putnam for the time, love and quality work they put into this. A mortician was willing to do the embalming on the timetable we needed and let us take responsibility for the other steps in the journey. Our church meetinghouse served as the site for the Saturday visitation and Christian funeral, which was conducted in both Khmer and English, with translation going both ways. We were pleased to offer this witness to many Cambodian Buddhist attenders.

We then transported the body by truck 150 miles southwest to Plow Creek to the small cemetery located on the farm. The cemetery was first developed in the 1970's as the occasional death of a baby, a member, or a member's relative came along. Several Reba participants have been buried there as well, including members of the Reba Sonshine Group, Reba Church and Reba Fellowship. I enjoy visiting these graves when I come on trips to Plow Creek and feel peace about my own remains eventually being laid to rest in such a well-loved place.

RPF member Adam Vaughan spent a volunteer workday at Plow Creek

trimming up the graveyard. Cemetery keeper Rick Reha contacted a local workman to bring over his backhoe to dig the grave. The thirty of us who made the pilgrimage to Plow Creek all had opportunity to shovel dirt over the coffin til the hole was filled in. I could see that the mourning sons, brother and cousin, in particular, found this activity a meaningful way to work out their grief. It was a way all of us--including women--could be involved. Saruon had worked many different jobs in his life, and one of them was farming. The family's grief was eased to see their relative's remains deposited on this lovely farm. We sang hymns of faith in English and Khmer as the shoveling went on. Margaret and David Gale served us city folk some wonderful Plow Creek muskmelon before we got into our cars and drove back to Chicago.

I deeply appreciate the hospitality of Plow Creek in making this space available to people related to the Shalom Mission Communities. It is a tangible way that we are intertwined with one another in life and in death. Working together, we are able to say no to the American way of death which makes the disposal of a loved ones remains a prohibitively expensive burden on the survivors and takes personal participation out of the family's hands. ❖

PAPA Fest: A View from the Inside

By Angela Adams

Two months ago tonight I was sitting on the Prairie at Plow Creek looking at the stars, much as I can just about any night here on the Farm. But on this night I was surrounded by about 700 other believers, dreamers, and co-conspirators. And I couldn't hear the bugs and frogs because the Theillalogical Spoon were on stage. And they were good. And loud. (If you don't believe me, just ask our neighbors.)

When Matt and I attended PAPA Festival in 2006 we were in bad shape after a difficult community "break-up." We went to the Festival because we thought it would be a fun weekend of music, philosophical discussions, and skill sharing. We didn't know it was a Festival made possible by intentional communities. And we didn't know that the Festival would begin a deep time of healing as G-d stitched together our wounds and began to restore our friendships. I am so thankful for G-d's beautiful gift of that weekend in June: the gift of knowing deep in our heart of hearts that we were not crazy.

Because we had such a wonderful experience at PAPA Festival in 2006, we wanted to jump into planning and organizing this year's Fest. So, we did! I began working on registration with Annie Spiro on what would prove to be my greatest -- and hopefully last -- cut-and-paste -from-Word-into-Excel marathon ever. Matt began working on the skill-share schedules.

Our responsibilities as "PAPA Organizers" increased near the end of April, dovetailing nicely with our move to Plow Creek. By being on-site we were able to watch the fields and pastures being prepared; hear the steers being moved again, and again, and again; laugh as the large water container was prepared by folks actually climbing INSIDE IT and scrubbing the walls; help Rick Reha keep the

Plow Creek community informed; stay up all night making new signs; smell lots and lots of bread baking; and share in the common life of the community as we all made preparations for our friends and kindred spirits to arrive.

Before we knew it Plow Creek was a-buzz with volunteers putting up tents, building the prayer space, creating Children's Village in the Meadow, building the stage, establishing Poo Town, making still more signs, coming up with an inclement

weather plan, and adjusting the final schedule. Once the Festival attendees started arriving in the wee hours of the morning on June 19th, Plow Creek had been transformed -- but in a beautiful sense it still felt very much like Plow Creek to me.

Many folks have asked me what I thought of PAPA Festival this year. I had a great time, and I feel blessed by the encounters I had with friends old and new. But this year was very different from my experience in 2006. The best way that I can explain is to say that being behind the scenes, both as a resident and as an organizer, took away some of the mystique of the experience. It was so exciting to drive to a somewhat hidden location and be welcomed to a village created just so you could worship and share life and dreams with like-minded believers! But being involved so deeply provided me with the immense joy of being able to watch as others experienced the very same thing I experienced at my first PAPA Festival. That's even better in my opinion.

So, it's been two months. If you came to Plow Creek tonight you probably wouldn't see much evidence that such a short time ago we had 2000 feet walking around on this Farm. The tents are gone, the cows are back to their pasture in the Val-



Peek at PAPA #3: Angela (on right) and her friend Melissa Flick led a session on how to make your own natural cleaning products.

ley, Louise is back to baking normal amounts of bread, the kiddos can go to sleep on time, and I'm spending my free time processing food for storage instead of processing registration forms. I think life here at Plow Creek is back to normal. (Well, I should say *summer* normal.)

Some days I forget what an amazing thing happened here in June and it seems PAPA Festival 2008 is just a memory for others around here, too. But if you were to mention PAPA Fest in conversation, once you got past the expressions of thanks to G-d -- and a healthy dose of astonishment that we actually pulled it off -- you would probably detect an undercurrent of joy at having been able to host a festival of grace, love, peace, healing, dreaming, and vision for the people of G-d.

Plow Creek -- the people and the place itself -- has captured my heart and the heart of many other PAPA Fest folks. It is my prayer that G-d honors the sacrifice of time, energy, resources, and love that this community extended by blessing this land and this body. And it is my prayer that some of those very same ones that visited here in June will come again soon, bringing still more life and wonder to Plow Creek. Let it be so. ❖

Communion beyond Collaboration

By Tatiana Fajardo-Heflin

My need for SMC was recently clarified in the first several hours after my arrival at PAPA Fest in June. I was a bit disoriented, coming on the second day of the festival, and diving right into the buzz and busy-ness of the bartering village. It felt a little bit strange to be amidst a lot of people living in community, yet feel foreign and unfamiliar with them. A short, but fruitful conversation with Katie Piché (of Church of the Sojourners) changed my spirit. I walked away feeling thankful and shared with Chico, "Katie and I have not spent *much* time together, but talking to her feels like family. She is a part of SMC. We have a common life experience and so I don't need to explain our life to her. She already understands so much."

Sharing with Katie and other SMC members is life-giving because we have connection and intimacy that is deeper than just collaboration. We come to one another with a commitment to care for each other's communities and to share hurts and joys.

In our recent Tuesday-evening conversation here at Reba (see David Janzen's editorial), I contributed that Christian community connections are valuable for carrying out larger resistance to the powers that be (i.e. peace demonstrations, conferences, or practical service like the Over-ground Railroad). Such inter-communal projects are expressions of the "collaboration" part of this issue's theme. I see a deep value in the practical way that the Church is incarnated through collaborative projects that serve the poor, confront injustice, and witness to the onlooking world.

However, after my conversation with Katie at PAPA Fest, and some other small happenings here and there, I have been pondering the value of not just collaboration between communities, but also the real communion that goes beyond collaboration. This past spring, as my husband Chico and I went through an intensive discernment process as part of our novitiate here at Reba Place Fellowship, we came to the conclusion that regardless of what our specific membership

in the Fellowship would be in the future, we knew we wanted to be a part of SMC for a long time. We've only been "around" for a few years, but already we feel we want SMC to be "our people."

Chico and I have both come to Reba with previous community connections. We were first introduced to the idea of intentional community by budding "new monastic" communities during our college-age years. We were enthusiastic and quick to get involved in projects and events and gatherings hosted by these young communities. We are still in relationship with many of these folks and in our still-short lives it feels like we've known them a long time. Surely it would have been logical for us to root ourselves not in the Shalom Mission Communities, but in this wider network of communities that we have already felt a part of.

However, we've realized that we need Shalom Mission Communities for the way they share in deep communion with one another – both intra-communally and inter-communally. It is easy for us, who are young and still zealous, to be oriented too much toward the energy of a "movement". Events and conferences and gatherings are exciting and they do have their place. But just as a Christian community is not simply a group of Christians who do projects together – neither is a community of communities. We are strengthened by our love for one another and by speaking encouragement and challenge into one another's lives. These bonds cannot form unless we are intentional about engaging in deep communion that goes beyond just "collaboration."

In my past few years at Reba Place, I have been able to take part in two SMC gatherings, a visitation, and a good amount of visiting with other SMC members when they come to Reba (or when we go to Plow Creek).



Peek at PAPA #4: Rob Larson cleans out the bottom of the water tank.

I was particularly moved after the 2007 gathering to read through some of the prayer requests shared during break-out groups. It is rich to bear the burdens and share the joys of our sisters and brothers in other SMC communities. I know that my community is stronger because we have a commitment to these others who have strengths to share and weaknesses that we can fill.

I see the value of collaboration between communities. Certainly the wider Church is benefitted by many of our efforts, especially those that draw in Christians who are hungry for a deeper Christian life (and do not know where to find it). But just as Christian community must be sustained by deep communion among members, so it is with connections between communities.

Shalom Mission Communities is a great witness to the onlooking world. As Christians, we should always hope for the conversion of those God brings into our midst (and for our own continual conversion). But let us not try to dazzle the world with our grand projects and accomplishments as a "community of communities." Let us be rooted in love, which will create a life worth calling others into. ❖



Reba Place—Evanston News

By Tatiana Fajardo-Heflin

"My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing." (James 1: 2-4)

On a recent Tuesday evening in Evanston, we reflected on what it means for us to "consider it all joy" – including the trials we all experience. Allan Howe asked us to share the various transitions going on in each of our lives individually, as small groups, and in the community as a whole. And many transitions they are! New jobs, new living spaces, and most importantly new (or departing) people. We pray for the grace of God to guide us as we continue the cycle of welcome and release for the people who come and go here at Reba.

A major coming (following their last-summer "going") was the return of the Clark family at the end of July. They spent nearly a year on sabbatical in Tiskilwa with our Plow Creek sisters and brothers. They are slowly settling back in (the mountain of boxes and belongings grows smaller each day) as well as forming new rhythms with two new housemates. Karima Walker and Julia Guyer, both former RPF ap-



A sampling of Anne Gavitt's pet portrait work.

prentices, are living in the third floor of the Clarks' building. And Heather has reported that they recently had their first shared household event – ice skating in August! Happily, their total number of falls was less than one per person.

Both Cana household and the Clearing household have welcomed new housemates as well. Abby Nafziger, who has been a practicing member and Cana small group member for the past ten months or so, has moved into Cana just before she starts graduate studies in the fall. Josh Bailey, a summer intern with us in 2006, has moved back into the Clearing and will share life there until next summer, when he gets married.

Abby is not the only one pursuing graduate studies this. Susan Flecke and Joseph Marshak are both doing further studies in nursing, while Adam Vaughan continues at North Park Seminary and business school.

We all took part in a grand two-day celebration of Andy Ross and Kristin Kerkvliet's marriage in mid-July, complete with congregational dances and a lack-of-talent show. Barb Grimsley reports that her house, The Gathering, has wound down after being "wedding central" – location of pre-marital counseling, wedding-dress alterations, invitation printing, wedding-quilt planning, and even pre-wedding haircuts for the bride and groom!

Joan Vogt reports that the L'Hayim small group has found a useful image in understanding their life together. She had the idea to make a tree with seven branches representing each one in the group with family names and photos. Now it stands on the bulletin board of their small group meeting room, reminding them of their bond as a group where there is freedom to share joy and pain.

The summer internship started with a bang—PAPA Festival (more to be shared in other parts of



Kristin Kerkvliet and Andy Ross share their story at their pre-wedding Lack-of-Talent show. Their wedding quilt hangs behind them.

this newsletter), and finished with a weekend retreat. The program has been fruitful (if only too quick) for our seven interns. All of them have offered wonderful service, helping folks move, sharing meals, community gardening, and taking part in a large neighborhood block party in July (complete with an inflatable "moon jump"!). Three of our interns will be staying on – Rob and Julie Larson as practicing members and Dumont Darsey as a nine-month apprentice.

The Patch has blessed and sent off several housemates in the past couple of months, the most recent was Annie Spiro, who was a "Patch-mate" since nearly the beginning of the household. She took her rowdy cat Neeps down to Rogers Park, where she is sharing an apartment with two other Reba/Living Water-connected friends. Even while looking for new housemates, the Patch is continuing their rhythms of welcoming lots of guests, growing and preserving food, and hosting one of several meeting places for Monday night potlucks. Roselyn also reports that, "In the interest of improving our physical fitness, we have started the spiritual discipline of nightly push-ups & sit-ups, much to the amusement and bewilderment →→→

Sojourners News

By Katie Piché

Greetings from cold and partly cloudy San Francisco! We are in a season of newness and change. Since all four apprentices will stay with us and four more are coming, we shuffled our households around and acquired an extra apartment. In addition to that, we finally made a decision that Teri Creeger's mother, Lynette, should move in with us. In the upcoming weeks we will be working on the top of the Florida House (where our worship space is located and where Lynette will be living) to make the area accessible. Putting a chair lift in the stairwell of 27 steps means that you no longer need to have functional legs to come and worship with us!

It has been a full but rich summer. The first week of June, Tim Otto led a group of Sojourners on a week of service to Isom, KY, with SWAP (Serving with Appalachian People). Jaime and Marvin Trapnell, former Sojourners, are running the program and doing an excellent job of encouraging people to love one another well in the short space of a week. We assisted local people with home repairs and building relationships. We were also delighted to have Analí Gatlin of Reba Place come along with us.

Shortly after SWAP the covenanted members went on the annual Cove-



JenLou demonstrates how to ride a unicycle to Mateo Langston.



Sojourners annual Covenant Retreat.

nant Retreat. It was a time to relax by the ocean and remember the good things that God has been doing among us.

On July fourth we celebrated Yahweh's Kingship, a Sojourner celebration of citizenship in the Kingdom of Heaven. This year we collaborated with InnerCHANGE's Outercircle Team, a fellow community in the city that befriends and lives alongside people who are hanging out in the Haight/Ashbury neighborhood and in Golden Gate Park. Claire Howard, an Outercircle Team member who worships with us regularly, performed a provocative cameo of a conversion to Christ set in the Roman Empire. We invited people from Claire's neighborhood to worship with us and to enjoy a feast of a Bar-B-Q. Yahweh's Kingship always concludes with a Lack-Of-Talent Show.

Later in July we celebrated our third annual Kid's Week, a tradition that came to us from Church of the Servant King (COSK). The kids, accompanied by parents, went up to the Mullery Family cabin in Grassvalley, CA, for four days. Then Zoe Mullery, Claire Howard, and JenLou Cooney, who is our newest guest member, led the kids in a day of circus arts; arts such as juggling, unicycling, and slack-lining. Kid's Week ended on Sunday; each kid got taken out to a special lunch, and then we concluded with a special kid oriented worship service; this even included a mac and cheese and chicken nugget dinner.

Jacky and Jeremy Alder and their

three boys joined us for six weeks to continue a journey of learning about community. The Alders have been living alongside Rutba House in Durham, North Carolina. Jeremy has been asked to pastor a church community in San Antonio, TX, once he finishes seminary at Duke in December; for the last three years they have spent the summers at other communities, including COSK in Eugene. We were blessed by Jackie and Jeremy's participation with us. Both Jackie and Jeremy cared a lot for our kids while they were here, and Jeremy put his theological training to work with a couple of sermons. Jeremy left us with a call to be friends to one another in the way that Christ demonstrated deep friendship.

Judy Alexander is on break from her teaching work at Christ's College in Taiwan, and she'll be staying with us for six months. Please pray for her that she will be able to rest in the midst of a busy schedule.

Michael Kuany, a Sudanese Lost Boy who has been living with us for a year, will be participating in Eastern Mennonite University's conflict resolution graduate program. Please pray for him as he moves to a new place.

Jadie, Ian, and Cadence Creeger will be leaving us and moving up to Eugene, OR, to be involved with Church of the Servant King. Jadie moved down from COSK over two years ago and will now be returning. Please pray for their transition and especially for employment. ❖

Pat Murray from Nehemiah Ministries in Springfield MA

As told to David Janzen

I'm married thirty-five years to Debbie, a wonderful woman. We have four children and three grandchildren. Debbie and I grew up and met in Buffalo NY. I was twenty and she was eighteen-and-a-half when we got married. I went into the Air Force to Southeast Asia with training as a Vietnamese translator.

After the war I soon left the Air Force, went into refugee services and became a job developer for Vietnamese immigrants with the Catholic diocese of Richmond, VA. That is where I learned about social justice. As a social worker, I found I had no power concerning the injustice of how people were treated. So I went to law school.

My in-laws persuaded us to move to Springfield, MA. There my life began to degenerate into alcoholism. It got so bad my wife left me in 1988 to live with her mother. She left the children with me. That is when I discovered I had two addictions—alcohol and relationships. I had depended on my wife for almost everything. In that crisis Debbie turned to Christ. I went to AA meetings and eventually got to know Jesus too. ALANON helped me stop counting on other people for my happiness. By the grace of God, our family was restored, and we returned to church.

I gave a workshop here at PAPA Fest on "Informed Consent," spelling out what is asked of you, what it will cost to follow Jesus. "If you love me," he says, "they will hate you," etc. Coming to Christ I looked into every corner of my life, where I found a lot of idolatry. I used to believe that it all depended on me and that I needed money first to take care of things.

In 1991 we went to a concert, and a voice from behind me—my former pastor—spoke to us very prophetically. "God gave me a dream," he said, "that you guys are selling your home and moving into downtown Springfield."

"Yeah, yeah," I thought. Debbie and I were ready to get a big house in the country. Our kids were grown and we

were getting comfortable. Then some friends in Intervarsity called us and told about their call to community. They asked us to pray with them. Soon we knew we were in trouble! We prayed with them about a move to the inner city hoping it wouldn't work out. But a large house came on the market just around the corner from my workplace with a law firm.

We bought the building and converted it from six apartment units to one big community house. As we tore into the walls, we found a border all around the kitchen saying "Trust in the Lord. Trust in the Lord." Was that ever a sign!

Two couples and three single women began together with an outreach to the neighborhood—much like the Simple Way. We called it Nehemiah House. We hosted lots of Intervarsity meetings. We did urban projects with their students. Some stayed on.

As a lawyer I've helped many people with mental disabilities get the services to which they are entitled. I'm often appointed by courts to monitor court-ordered treatment. For one-and-a-half years I worked for banks defending their legal issues, and I was miserable till God told me I'll be OK without that job. Within weeks I got new work, and I had my own practice. This work has given me a tremendous amount of freedom to earn a living with lots of time for ministry.

At this point we are seventeen people in community. Of them, thirteen are permanent members. We spend lots of time with our poor neighbors. One of us is an artist who invites other artists to come and teach neighborhood folk, making them aware of their personhood and their creative gifts. I'm sort of a street pastor. I eat at the homeless shelter, lead Bible studies and help folks with their legal problems.

We have art projects, offer refugee hospitality in connection with Jewish Refugee Services. We've gotten to know Muslims and people of many other faiths. Right now we have a doctor in our house from Baghdad. I'm able to speak frankly about my faith and he about Islam. It's all about how he sees Christ in us and we see Jesus in him. Jesus is winning. I'm convinced that if more Christians just practiced hospitality like this, the world would be transformed. Christians in Asia, Puerto Rico, all over the world, have opened their



Peek at PAPA #5: Pat Murray from Nehemiah House.

homes to us. There is power in sharing your home and your heart.

Nehemiah Community now is at three sites in four residences, all within half a mile of each other. We think of ourselves as an order. A permanent member commits to at least two years, but can stay for life. With discernment of God's call, we can release folks to go elsewhere, and they can come back when they want.

We have a covenant of morning prayer and weekly Bible study. We have meetings every Tuesday evening, either at each site or all together. We commit to daily personal prayer as well. We have common work in gardening and building care. Each house is financially managed on its own as a room and board arrangement.

We have started a relational tithe from which we care for debts and needs of our members as well as help for others whom we encounter.

We worship at various different churches in the city. We feel called to infect the church with a radical commitment. We also do this for accountability beyond our group. Our pastors are sympathetic to us and offer resources to the work we are doing.

Our covenant is a way of life that involves prayer, study, fellowship, sharing and permanence.

The biggest frustration for me is getting Christians to believe that Acts 2 and 4 are meant for us now. They call us "communists." But I want people to know what joy and blessing there is in letting go of our stuff and joining in ministry for Jesus' sake. ❖

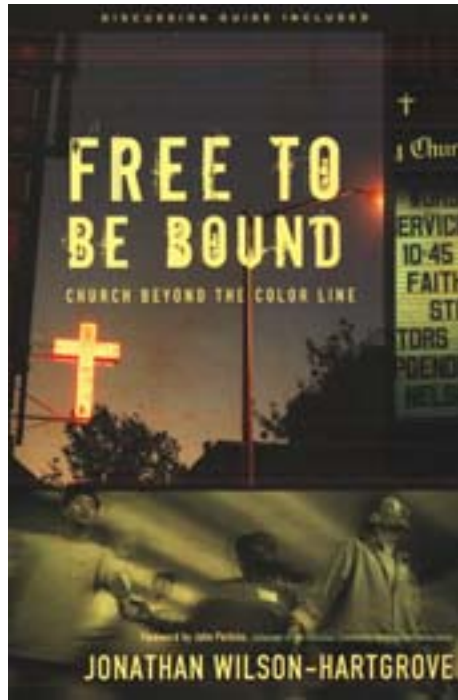
*Free to Be Bound:
Church Beyond the
Color Line* by
Jonathan Wilson-
Hartgrove

Reviewed by Zoe Mullery

“The miracle of the black church in America is that somehow, in a story told by oppressors, the oppressed heard good news—and believed it. ... [S]laves were able to distinguish between the liberating truth of Christ’s message and the white man’s abuse of Holy Scripture for his own purposes.” The miracle of the black church in America, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove wants us to know, is not a miracle that is only for the black church in America, but a miracle that is for the capital C Church, a miracle that witnesses to the Kingdom on earth. Jonathan, a white boy from North Carolina now worshiping in a historically black church in Durham, has entered into that miracle himself, and has written a book to witness to the powerful signs of Christ’s kingdom he has encountered.

Towards the beginning of his book, Jonathan says that “If this story has any single point to make, it is the quiet gospel hope that says we are *free to be bound together in Jesus Christ*.” What does that really mean? The paradox of that blessed tie that binds and liberates is at the core of this book on the journey of finding identity in Christ beyond racial and cultural barriers and deep wounds of the past and present.

Jonathan starts out by saying this is not a how-to book on racial reconciliation, but rather a “how-it’s-been” book, a collection of stories “written along the way by a white boy who followed Jesus from Klan country to the black church, listening for the music that could teach his soul to sing.” Jonathan is not coming to the problem of racial division in the church with a fixed notion of what the outcome will look like, exactly, or Google-maps-style directions on how to get there. He pieces together some incidents, milestones, difficulties, hopes and longings and looks for how God makes a story of redemption and



hope out of our broken and bumbling attempts to be faithful.

The topic of racial reconciliation and the “new humanity” we are called to in Christ has been a burning issue for me for a number of years now. One of my struggles has been in trying to frame the questions in Kingdom language, and in ways that *genuinely* challenge us in the places we need to be challenged, rather than framing the issues to only affirm the distance we’ve already traveled, or elicit a punishing sense of guilt. Jonathan is not looking for how to nail white folks on racial sins—though he does name some deep and abiding sins of the “white church.” He is also not out to romanticize the “black church”—he knows that becoming one people will mean change and challenge for everyone.

“Forsaking one’s people to become part of God’s people is an experience so radical that it tests the limits of human language. Maybe Jesus said it best: You must be born a second time.” However, the challenges are different for those with an inheritance of power, whether we have sought it or not, than for those with an inheritance of suffering at the hands of those with power.

Jonathan gracefully seeks to describe a history of Jesus’ church in America that illuminates the issues we face in the light of truth. “Caught up in the story of America, we forget that the Bible reverses the story of Babel not

with a melting pot, but with Pentecost.” He argues a bigger vision than the popular American view that racism needs to be addressed on a person-by-person basis only and the inherent individualism from which that view arises, and instead reaches for a kingdom vision which binds our destinies together, our sins and our triumphs, as one people.

He writes, “We had tried to ask the questions, ‘What does it mean to be one in Christ Jesus?’ But we had asked the question in the language of the Enlightenment: ‘What does it mean for us to appreciate another cultural expression of Christianity?’ That way of asking the question not only kept us from facing racial division in the body of Christ as a fundamental problem with our Christianity; it also allowed us white folk to feel good about our efforts to appreciate gospel music and black preaching. Nothing about my church’s white theology and practice of Christianity had to change for us to appreciate Greenleaf [the black church they’d been relating to]. We simply assumed that we could move forward from a history of white supremacy to be rounded out by a friendly relationship with people whose lives had been marked by suffering at the hands of white Christians. ... We knew we needed each other, but we didn’t know how to be a people together.”

Jonathan lives in the hope that American Christianity can learn to “draw deeply from the wisdom of the black church,” a church that has suffered and persevered. “[T]he second miracle is even more profound: that after centuries of oppression and disenfranchisement at the hands of white folks, black Christians would pray for us, love us, and invite us to come and learn what it means to plead the blood of Jesus. There are some things that nobody but God can do. ... To plead the blood of Jesus in our racialized society is to confess that white Christians like me need to learn from the black church’s prophetic tradition of apocalyptic hope and racial love what it means to be the church.” Jonathan does not claim this miracle for himself or his small church alone, but for all of us on the Way.

For other reflections about this book, read an excellent review at EnglewoodReview.org, issue #20. ❖

Plow Creek news

By Rich Foss

Thirty-seven years ago this summer Plow Creek was born out of a collaboration of the founders and Reba Place Fellowship. Reba Place sent out the original three families that founded Plow Creek.

Plow Creek and Reba Place have been collaborating ever since. Last spring the Reba intern program was full, and Reba Place referred Amy Jonason from Grand Rapids, Michigan, to Plow Creek. Amy was one of four delightful Plow Creek Fellowship interns who shared our life together this summer. The others were Kimberly Briley, Edward Hamilton, and Justin Rose. Both Edward and Justin had previous Reba connections.

Three years ago or so, Doug Selph of Living Water Community Church in Rogers Park, began lobbying Reba and Rogers Park folks to participate in Community Supported Agriculture with Plow Creek. We are in the middle of our third summer of sending weekly boxes of fruits and vegetables to Reba and Rogers Park. The CSA has provided steady income for Plow Creek Farm and a steady source of wholesome food for our city brothers and sisters. Amanda Wilkin, Tyler Chen, Christ Watson, and Matt Adams, all with Reba connections, worked for varying amounts of time on the farm. Matt and his wife Angela, who had



Peek at PAPA #6: Allan Howe and Rick Reha eat lunch with a crowd of PAPA Fest volunteers.

most recently been part of the Clearing at Reba, moved to Plow Creek in May.

Plow Creek’s most recent and biggest collaboration was hosting 750 people for PAPA Fest in June. The event was a fine collaboration between the long hairs of the New Monastic communities and gray hairs of Plow Creek. The PAPA Festival (short for People Against Poverty and Apathy) was organized by a group of twenty-somethings from New Monastic communities that are located in cities.

The festival featured camping, evenings of music ranging from a harp concert to heavy metal, and lots of workshops during the day. It was organized entirely by voluntary effort, no paid staff, and was funded by donations.

The Saturday before the festival started, a dozen people showed up to begin preparing for the festival. By the night before the festival, sixty people were onsite and working hard on building everything from the music stage to a bridge across the creek. Allan Howe of Reba Place reported to me, “I pretended like I knew what I was doing” as he helped build the stage.

During the weekend of the Fest I regularly rolled past several tents in our front yard where families with infants were camping. Every time the burly, bearded, father of four from North Dakota who was camping closest to our house, spotted me, he’d thank me profusely for hosting PAPA Fest. On Sunday another guest camping in our front yard gave Sarah and me coffee that they had roasted in their Louisville coffee shop.

PAPA Fest at Plow Creek was a marvelous act of God, one we hope God repeats.



Women of Reba and Plow Creek at work in the Valley/CSA Garden.

One of our most recent collaborations with Reba happened when Plow Creek hosted the Greg and Heather Clark family for a year long sabbatical that ended June 26. Three times during the year of the Clark sabbatical I became ill. Heather showed up to pray for me. She would sit quietly on the floor and pray for me quietly. Each time I promptly fell into a much-needed sleep. When I woke up Heather was still sitting on the floor praying. What a gift!

This summer, members of Plow Creek Mennonite Church have been engaged in conversations about selecting another elder or two to serve with Louise Stahnke. The discussions have been wide-ranging with some suggesting perhaps we don’t need elders. Stay tuned.

In July, Paul and Heather Munn were thrilled to host their first (real) retreat here at Plow Creek farm, with guests from Emmaus Ministries in Chicago. They have launched a spiritual retreat ministry at Plow Creek for people who cannot afford to pay for retreats. Earlier they had hosted a “come and see” retreat for staff from two ministries in Chicago. Emmaus Ministries reaches out to male prostitutes, helping them to get off the street.

And that’s the news from Plow Creek where all the women are strong, all the men are good looking, and all the children are above average. ❖