

Volume XII

A Quarterly Newsletter of Shalom Mission communities

Number 1

www.shalomconnections.org

March 2008: Food, Faith, and Fellowship

SMC Coordinators Discuss Faith, Food and Fellowship.

Shalom Mission Community Coordinators met at Church of the Sojourners in San Francisco for a January 18-21 retreat. Following is a condensed version of their discussion of food and faith issues in our various communities. Notes of the discussion by Zoe Mullery, editing by David Janzen.

David Janzen: In a recent conference call we agreed to Nancy Gatlin's suggestion to take time in this Coordinator's Retreat to discuss the intersection of our faith, the food we eat, and the importance of table fellowship in our communities.

Joe Gatlin: Culture is important to us at Hope Fellowship since we are Hispanic and Anglo, becoming One New Humanity. We note from the New Testament that every time the early church gathered to eat, they felt they were taking communion. For them, Jews and Gentiles eating together became a landmark issue.

It has almost become a generational issue for our communities. We have a younger generation highly conscious about the injustices of food production, healthy diet, earth care, and how that affects table fellowship. What we eat for us Christians is more than what we eat, it is also a sacrament.

Barb Grimsley: Some of us at Reba had gardens for the first time last year, and some of us were inspired by a conference called Food, Faith and Hope. We'd like to raise more of our own food, but our lots have shade trees and little sun.



A tasty spread at the SMC Coordinators' Gathering in San Francisco.

There is a big emphasis among young people at Reba about eating organic, vegetarian and local. If we could garden more, we don't see it replacing the community supported agriculture (CSA) connection we have with Plow Creek, but just to avoid the expense we pay in buying organic.

The Clearing Household is now eating organic two days a week. The Patch household tries to eat local, vegetarian and as much organic as they can. My household (The

Continued, Next Page...

(Continued from Page 1)

Gathering) is moving towards vegetarian eating too.

At our potlucks nearly all the dishes are vegetarian. We also have some food limitations that are being addressed out of love. I think it's pretty fascinating. There's also a risk of food consciousness consuming us.

David: Some folks at Reba have pretty severe food allergies. Carol Steiner can only eat food prepared in her own kitchen from organic sources. For health reasons, Alan and Jeanne Howe don't eat meat or milk—which means lots of soy products. Others have similar challenges.

Katie Piche: Our Sojourners communion bread is a little different—you may have noticed—to accommodate food allergies in our midst. I'm really glad about that. At our Friday night gathered meal people are very aware of food allergies and provide options. Edith and I are cooks and we try to make a vegetarian option, but also remember that there are people who really love meat. Even though I have strong feelings, I don't want food to be divisive.

Joe: We have to make sure as we work through these food issues that we don't end up segregated over our differences. Compromise, sensitivity on the part of everyone, yielding and giving way is a spiritual gift. Paul told the ones who are stronger that "you can accommodate this."

Gabriela Gatlin: I feel strongly that Valle Nuevo [SMC's Salvadoran sister community] has a lot to say to us about downright gratitude for the food we have to eat, whatever it is, whether it's precious chickens they have slaughtered for us as guests, or a box of macaroni and cheese someone prepares that's

terrible to eat, but we are grateful because they want to honor us with American food.

When I did the CASAS program in Guatemala, the family I was with served a tortilla and a half and some watery coffee. It was all they had. Even though I understand all the issues, it's really hard for me to devote all the time and money for diets of integrity to ourselves when we can't offer that to the rest of the world.

Joanne Janzen: We grow our own greens and beans, get some free food, but that's it—the rest we have to buy. So we shop at Aldi's which is cheap—but who knows what exploitation went into the food. The dollars we save we can send to an orphanage in India where kids get only an egg a week. I just feel confused. We'll eat peanut butter and jelly on free bread while we think about these things.

Gabriela: When Adaia Bernal [Colombian peace activist] was at Jubilee Partners she was critical of the deep freezers we had that stored produce and food from the food bank. She reminded us of our affluence that allows us to store food and enjoy that stability. There are so many folks who really do live day by day.

Katie: We're trying to limit how much of the world's resources go into our food. If we start buying local food, it actually has an impact on other people. We may be able to build a relationship and support the people growing food in our area. Local is more important to me than certified organic.

Barb: One of our summer interns worked as a community organizer to win approval for a Big Box ordinance that requires large food stores in Chicago to pay union scale wages to their workers. She pointed out that Sam's Club is



Barb Grimsley and Anali Gatlin, happy to be in the San Francisco sun.

owned by WalMart, who doesn't treat their workers well. At Reba we had been using Sam's Club a lot, especially to buy for big parties. You can buy really cheap or go to Costco where they pay their workers a more decent wage. How do you sort this out? It really helps to have a few people do the research for the rest of us in community.

Rick Reha: In Tiskilwa we have this Palestinian guy who's running a little store in town. It's more expensive than going to Aldi's, and we don't know where his produce comes from either. Shall we eliminate him as a possibility because of our wonderful righteous financial reasons, and stop our neighbor from making a living. Somehow we've got see that connection too.

David: It matters how we hold our different convictions. If we take them to extremes we cancel out other values. At Reba our food allowance is in line with what people get on food stamps—but you can't buy much organic food on that. Should we live on a budget that's in solidarity with the poor, eat organic, get our CSA produce from Plow Creek, grow and prepare our own food? I think we should do all these things as much as we can, but not get self-righteous about it or compare ourselves to others.

I believe the potluck is a wonderful symbol too because you can accommodate different needs at the same table.

I grew up on a farm that raised cattle as well as → → →

March 2008—Table of Contents

Food, Faith, and Fellowship Conversation.....	1
Eating and the Kingdom of God.....	4
Alcohol and Fellowship.....	6
Gratitude for Food, Faith, and Fellowship.....	7
Family Reunion.....	7
Loaves and Fishes.....	8
Food and Faith Book Review.....	9
Brothers in Pen: A Book Appreciation.....	10
Potato Prayers.....	10
Sojourners News.....	11
Hope Fellowship News and Valle Nuevo.....	12
Reba Place News.....	13
Rogers Park News.....	14
Plow Creek News.....	15

Shalom Connections

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

Postmaster:

Send address changes to the Publishing Office address, below.

Editors

David Janzen
Tatiana Fajardo-Heflin

Editorial Assistants

Joanne Janzen
Annie Spiro

Publisher

David Janzen
Tatiana Fajardo-Heflin

Contributing Artists:

Tatiana Fajardo-Heflin (masthead and SMC logo)
Photographs by various SMC community members
Drawing and stamps by Chico Fajardo-Heflin

Contributions/Permissions/Reprints:

Contact Editorial Office, below.

Subscription/Address Changes:

Contact the Publishing Office, below.

Publishing/Editorial Office:

737 Reba Place, Basement
Evanston, IL 60202
(847) 328-6066 voice
(847) 328-8431 fax
dhjanzen2@juno.com
www.shalomconnections.org

Shalom Mission Communities are:

Reba Place Fellowship

P.O. Box 6575
Evanston, IL, 60202 r_p_f@juno.com
www.rebaplacefellowship.org
(847) 328-6066 voice (847) 328-8431 fax

Plow Creek Fellowship

19183 Plow Creek, Unit 2
Tiskilwa, IL 61638 pcmcl@plowcreek.org
www.plowcreek.org
(815) 646-6600 voice (815) 646-4672 fax

Hope Fellowship

1700 Morrow Ave
Waco, TX 76707
(254) 754-5942 voice
http://www.mennowdc.org/texaschurches.htm

Church of the Sojourners

866 Potrero Ave
San Francisco, CA 94110
(415) 824-8931 voice & fax
http://churchofthesojourners.org
info@churchofthesojourners.org



Church of the Sojourners leads worship during the San Francisco SMC Coordinators Weekend.

the food they ate. Now-a-days farms in the US are only profitable to the extent that the Federal Government subsidizes them—almost \$50 billion a year. That keeps some farms from dying out, but also forces the ones who survive to get bigger and bigger. U.S. subsidies make beans and corn so cheap that the farmers in Mexico can't survive. The US preaches globalization except for our farm products. Farm subsidies in the U.S. are causing farmers to starve in the 3rd World, who end up crossing our borders looking for work.

Joe: I've often thought about my parents and the story of white bread. They grew up on dark bread, rich folks had white bread, and we lusted for white bread. Dark bread now goes to an expensive niche market. With the movement to eat organic, if the economy starts to shift, it may get less expensive as it becomes the standard economy. We are also trying to pay more attention to grass fed, free range meat and maybe the markets will change on that too.

Lynn Reha: I want to add a layer for our consideration--the time and energy it takes to be as responsible for your own food as you can be. What path through this maze am I called to? How do my choices influence the community? I don't think I'm called to figure it out for everybody else but we can help each other do so.

Overarching all the politics, we must count it all joy, because we have the privilege of being provided sustenance by our Father. We must find that path to gratitude and live it out with a whole heart.

If anyone is having trouble figuring that path of integrity and joy, one way that

has helped me is to get out of the brain and dig in the dirt. It helps you to be properly grateful.

Rick: In doing this analysis and consciousness raising, it seems we are trying to lay a guilt trip on the establishment in general, and sometimes that guilt trip spills over to our own people. That's part of the mine field we are walking. We want to be sensitive, giving, and caring about the people living around us

Dale Gish: Here at Sojourners we've taken a fairly clear line saying the Fellowship is the center. We've asked folks who come as vegetarians or vegans to not have that be a higher value than table fellowship. We've asked them to be flexible, so that people who have convictions will be okay with meals that don't always cater to them. Our primary witness to Christ is that we are together.

As we address these food issues, it's not really about individual purity or trying to justify ourselves in the way we eat. We do want to act more justly with our resources in how we eat together. We're open to those questions and are probably heading into more discussions. But food justice is not the primary thing motivating us. People who have food issues as first priority would probably struggle at Sojourners.

Barb: I think The Patch household is misrepresented. They do dumpster dive, they eat non-organic from the Free Food Garage. They have decided that food will be on the simple side. I will go back and raise that question with them: is food more important than fellowship?

Continued on Page 15...

Eating and the Kingdom of God

An editorial by Tatiana Fajardo-Heflin

What do I want to say to the members of Shalom Mission Communities (and others) about food, faith, and fellowship? I will challenge myself, and start with “fellowship”. But first, a bit of background.

For three or four years now, there has been a small group of people at Reba Place Fellowship who hold strong convictions about food. It started out with mostly “young people” (interns at the time) who were vegetarians. Then, in the fall of 2005, one group of intern men put a substantial effort into canning, freezing, and storing organic vegetables purchased from the local farmer’s market. The following summer, a few of us started a garden and attempted to grow some of our own vegetables. Soon after, we launched a new household (The Patch) where we put a lot of energy into trying to eat in the most ethical and just way possible. We canned tomatoes and applesauce, froze lots of garden vegetables, boiled beans and lentils, purchased fair-trade, and ate lots of soup with crusty day-old bread.

Flash forward a year and a half and what was at first a small minority of young people has now grown to be a rather large pool of people, mostly in their twenties, who have a growing conviction about making economic decisions that show care for and honor all of Creation (and that includes the poor). Because this “food thing” is no longer on the margins of our community, we’ve had more and more conversations about it. Some people are vegans and hope for more of the community to reject the consumption of all animal products. Some people think we need to spend even less money on food and eat more off the waste of others. Some people really like meat and don’t mind saying it. Some people want to grow as much of their own food as possible. And still others want to eat organic and “health” foods.

Amidst quite a wide range of convictions and opinions about food, it is no wonder some raise the concern “Will this discussion consume and divide us?” As good Anabaptists, many of the long-term members of Reba believe we should evaluate our food choices based primarily on how they will affect our life together and the strength of our community’s fellowship.

This is not a natural place for me to start. I did not come to community (or Anabaptism) out of a desire for community, but rather out of particular convictions about economics, non-violence, and what it means to love God and neighbor. However, I do believe that if the issue of food is approached with a full commitment to seeking the way of God, then beginning with either community or economic faithfulness can lead to the same end. That is, the Kingdom of God – which encompasses both community and economy (and more).

I would like to offer some thoughts on food and agriculture in relation to common life, specifically in Christian community. I believe one of the best ways to “build community” is through working together. I have known this since I was young, when I came away from spring break “serve trips” feeling especially bonded to my fellow youth-group mates. Something about sweating in the sun while painting Habitat for Humanity houses brought about real feelings of warmth and intimacy. But it was always a bit awkward to return home after the trip and realize that the people who felt like “close friends” no longer had much in common with me. Without common work, we lost much of what brought us into fellowship.

I believe that the agrarian life is inherently more communal than the current industrial/urbanized life. This is because agrarian people, out of necessity, spend a lot of time working together. Communal bonds evolve naturally when one spends their days side by side with others churning butter, weeding vegetable rows, or repairing rooftops. Community life is more cohesive when “community” and “work” are not separate sectors of one’s life, but rather integrated into one whole.

However, I live in the city. And our life at Reba Place Fellowship is far from an agrarian one. Many of us work “regular” jobs, that is, with people who are removed from the rest of our lives and community. Because many of us do not work together, our common life comes mostly in the non-work hours of the week such as evenings and weekends. The global industrial economy urges us to use that time for entertainment and consumption – which can be difficult, at times for even communitarian Christians to resist.

This economy is viciously anti-community, as it has built a society in which we transmit our most intimate communication by machine (email, cell

phone, text message, internet “social networking” sites), we can publicly travel long distances without ever speaking to the travelers around us, and we eat meals alone or on the go without knowing a single person who was involved in the growing or preparation of the food. Grocery stores are increasingly corporatized and super-sized, and we risk losing any human-to-human (as well as human-to-earth) connection that used to be natural in the eating of food.

This new surge of interest in food, agriculture, and agrarian practices poses new opportunities for the bonds of our community to be strengthened. Agrarian practices of food preparation and preservation, gardening, building furniture or shelter, or raising animals draw us nearer to our creator God as well as nearer to one another as we do the work together and depend on each other.

So now I will come back around to the question posed to me at Reba: “Will all of this talk of food be divisive?” My answer: *It doesn’t have to be.*

My husband and I continue to look at the global industrial economy with tears in our eyes, saying, “This is not the will of God.” So we’ve made a lot of choices (and some sacrifices) in order to put adequate time and energy into our food practices.

Practices like growing our own food, shopping at the farmer’s market, preserving vegetables, and cooking meals from whole foods is harmonious with the rest of our life, because we have *both* made a commitment to prioritize this way of eating. The “food thing” is something we share, and it works for us. It has also been incredibly life-giving! Our marriage is stronger because we spend many months of the year working together on our garden. We have formed relationships with neighbors we otherwise would probably not know through taking part in our community free-food distribution (leftovers being saved from grocery stores and given away for free). I have been especially blessed to connect with more church and community members by running the Evanston CSA pickup and sharing recipes



and nutrition information through our CSA newsletter.

However, I *have* experienced the sort of division that many people fear will come if we pursue more radical food practices. I understand why it happens – because gardening, canning, and food storage are not extra-curricular activities that we community folk can simply insert into the rest of our already-very-scheduled lives. Agrarianism isn't a "hobby", it is a complete reordering of our way of life. To live an agrarian life means to live by the rhythms of nature. Tomatoes are ready to be harvested and processed even if we'd rather take off for a week's vacation in August. Potatoes will wither and sprout if we neglect to regularly check their storage space for temperature and humidity. Food does not wait on us, it does not co-operate with our available "spare time." And because of this, attempting to revolutionize our eating can be very difficult. It can feel like more of a burden than a joy; it can bring more conflict than unity.

Typically, I imagine that if the Kingdom had come in its fullness, we would all be agrarians living in small, close-knit communities. Genetically modified corn syrup, oil wars, and fast food joints wouldn't exist. We'd remember how to pray and the Lamb would be our light (Rev. 21:23). A large part of me holds out for that, praying "Kingdom come, kingdom come."

Realistically, I probably have to settle for some version of "already, but not yet." And everyone *won't* be farmers. Instead, we, in our Christian communities, should be intentional about knowing our vocation(s), what we are capable of, what we are called to do and be.

I believe that this issue of food does not have to be divisive as long as communities and individuals can be honest and self-reflective about whether they are ready to arrange their life schedules around food. Some communities will, and this is a very good thing. We at Reba Place, who regularly partake in the eating of food, have a responsibility to encourage and support our sister community Plow Creek in their growing of food and tending the earth. We are part of the same body, and it is right for us to give as much of ourselves to the support of their work and calling as we do to our own.

I would also suggest that Christian communities would do well to bless the agrarian vocation within their own



Fruit of the harvest from the 2007 garden season—courtesy of the Grimsley/Scott garden.

group. I have seen this at Jubilee Partners, who have integrated agriculture deeply into their communal life – but also with the contented understanding that not everyone is a farmer. A few people manage most of the work of growing food, milking cows, and preserving vegetables in service to the rest of the community. Their work does not bring division from the community because all of Jubilee has agreed on the importance of agrarian practices and has ordered its common life in a way that supports the agrarian vocation. Perhaps there are others in our communities who are called to an agrarian vocation and might be supported in carrying out more radical food practices on behalf of the Body.

When I started writing for this editorial, I assumed that my natural conclusion would be a loud call for agrarianism and some harsh chastisement for the complicity of the Church in the global industrial economy. I *could* say those things (with plenty of theological and economic evidence) but I would rather close with some more practical (and less fiery) thoughts.

First, as followers of Jesus who are seeking to be salt and light in the world, the economic choices we make *matter*. Every person and every community will not come to the same decisions or convictions, but let us not convince ourselves that the food we eat has no spiritual consequence. It is not right to plead ignorance or to justify sinful economic choices in the name of community. We need to ask the questions, we need to have the conversations, and we probably

do need to make some or many changes in the food we purchase, eat, and/or work for.

Second, I encourage all of us in SMC (especially those, like me, who are overflowing with youth and/or idealism) to be honest and realistic about who we are and what we are ready to take on. Spending lots of time talking about theory and ideology is okay for a little bit, but it rarely brings forth the Resurrection we hope in. There are plenty of young urban people these days talking about agrarianism, but those conversations happen more often in the booth of the coffee shop than over a steaming water-bath canner. If we are not yet ready to embrace the canner over the coffee shop, we should be honest about it. Starting lots of new projects without the commitment or diligence to carry them out is not going to build community; it will threaten it.

Third, all of us, young and old and vegan and meat-and-potatoes alike, need to continue to remind ourselves that the Kingdom of God is not just ecological sustainability or a buzzing social life. We are Christians, and our first commitment is not to our own callings or convictions, but to God and the incarnation of God's love.

The Kingdom of God is a new social order *and* a new economy. It is a new family *and* a new heavens and a new earth. As we seek to be faithful to God, both with our fellowship and our food, let us continue to pray, "Kingdom come, Come." □

Alcohol and Fellowship: A Brief Discussion

Following is an excerpt from the larger discussion of Food, Faith and Fellowship between SMC Coordinators in their January retreat at Church of the Sojourners in San Francisco.

Joe Gatlin: I'd like to bring up another item for discussion--the use of alcohol in our communities. I see three issues.

My teetotaler's stance originates with both of my grandfathers being alcoholics, and both my parents being absolutely opposed to alcohol. It took me into my 20's to realize it wasn't just puritanical legalism. Then I became thankful to them as I probably have a genetic propensity towards alcoholism.

Then in the context of our church fellowship, how we socialize with each other? It's hard to bring up because it smacks so much of legalism, and often in our communities people are still working on delayed adolescent rebellion—

Barb Grimsley: Don't talk about me Joe!

Joe: In Hope Fellowship we have recovering alcoholics. So how are we going to socialize? Because of the delayed adolescent rebellion, it is not just that some enjoy alcohol, but it's important for them.

Then there's our wider society where alcohol is a demonic power, much like money. I've had many conversations with people trying to recover from alcohol's devastation in their families. I wonder if you deal with this in your communities.

Anali Gatlin: From a simple-living perspective, alcohol costs a lot of money. I know a lot of time we bring alcohol into social settings to make us feel more comfortable with one another. But we live in community! Do we really need that? I'm not saying we should make a law about it,

but I think we should look at the issue together.

Rick Reha: There's a lot we could say about sodas that's destructive.

Joe: but we're talking about something that is chemically addictive...

Rick: I'm not sure you couldn't say that about sodas. What our society says you have to do to be accepted.

Gabriela Gatlin: I see what you're saying, Rick, and you could maybe throw coffee in there too. But there is something uniquely destructive about alcohol.

Rick: We tried to have the discussion at Plow Creek, and we had to agree to disagree, but it did make people more sensitive in the way they used alcohol.

Anali: Alcohol is an issue not just among the young people. It's an image thing, it's in jokes, and it seems to span all ages.

Rick: In my family and background culture, alcohol is a part of high celebration. Drunkenness is not. We always have a bottle of wine at Christmas. It has been an important part of our heritage. It's not like we guzzle it down—it usually lasts us two weeks.

It's not at all like drinking to enhance my image, or to enhance what you look like to me if I get far enough gone!

Gabriela: I feel more comfortable eating red meat than drinking a beer... that's where my convictions are. It's good to have this topic on the table. □

A Call for Continued Conversation...

By Lisa Selph

I was supposed to attend the recent SMC Coordinators meeting in San Francisco, but ended up in Rochester accompanying my mom through surgery. Once back, I dutifully tackled the entire nineteen-page e-mail attachment of minutes from the meetings. It was all interesting. But one thing that really got my attention was that, near the end, the issue of alcohol use was raised. I commend those brave enough to venture forth on this topic, and sense it may be time for a broad and open conversation on the topic.

Growing up, our kitchen sink delivered two liquids: water and Genesee Cream Ale on tap (piped up from the quarter-keg down in the basement refrigerator). No drinking taboos in my family! But in my late twenties I lived and worked at the Olive Branch Mission on the old skid row of Chicago's West Side. There I saw life after miserable life under the control of alcohol. It started to feel very wrong to support an industry that seduced and destroyed so many people. For many, many years I did not drink at all. Now I find myself enjoying an inch or two of wine when eating dinner in the homes of my wine-drinking friends, and (confession) preferring the chalice with wine over the one with grape juice during communion.

The tension isn't just within me. I admit I have struggled with how some of the communities we relate to handle the issue, which has eroded my respect for them. I think there are some new tensions within our own community as it grows. I want to hear my thoughtful, committed, principled brothers and sisters tell how God has led them. Let's talk about freedom and responsibility, accommodation to culture, our stress levels, self-indulgence and self-denial, reaction against legalism, blind spots, coping strategies, how we love those with addictions, how we love those with convictions, our health, our witness, what industries we support, what we're teaching our kids, what Scripture teaches us. Let's not stop with what coffee we drink (or don't) conversations. Let's have another round on some other drinks. I'm glad the discussion started at the SMC meeting has begun popping up in corners of our community — let's continue.

Gratitude for Food, Faith and Fellowship

By Gabriela Gatlin

My food choices have global, local and personal consequences. In considering the health and justice implications of my food choices, I have learned how to garden, milk cows and goats, buy fair trade, cook foods in season, and eat less meat. I appreciate that my household buys



Anali Gatlin and Hannah Zazvorka are "midwives" for a mural in San Francisco.

many organic items. But at the beginning, middle and end of the day, whether I am served mac and cheese from the box with wieners or an exceptional vegetarian meal from somewhere nearby, I want to lift up a sincere thanksgiving to God for the food set before me and for the brothers and sisters who sit around the table.

There are moments in all of our lives that fill our hearts with gratitude for food and fellowship. These are a few of those moments in my life:

- *Huddled up close on a cold night with my host family in Guatemala, we each ate one tortilla and drank watery coffee by the light of a lantern.*

- *Helping to prepare and serve "Mennonite BBQ" with the men and youth of my host church in Honduras to honor the mothers of the church on Mother's Day.*

- *Eating home-cooked meals with my*

family on Sunday afternoons when I was at college.

- *Sharing a meal of grilled chicken for twelve at Doña Margarita's house in Valle Nuevo.*

- *Singing grace at Jubilee Partners on Sunday evenings before sharing meals provided by volunteers, partners, and refugees.*

In the spirit of thanksgiving, I'd like to share a song that we often sing at Hope Fellowship before eating together.

*Gracias Señor por el pan.
Da pan a los que tienen hambre
Y hambre de justicia a los que tienen pan.
Gracias Señor por el pan.*

*Thank you, Lord, for the bread.
Give bread to those who are hungry,
And a hunger for justice to those who have bread.
Thank you, Lord, for the bread. □*

The Family Reunion plans PAPA Fest and more

By Chris Watson

Matt and Angela Adams, Annie Spiro, and I from Reba, along with Boo Graham, from Plow Creek, shared a 13-hour van ride to Philadelphia and back for the February 15-17 Simple Way/Camden House Family Reunion. I've only been at Reba since September, so I wasn't sure what to expect.

At Atonement Lutheran Church a potluck had already begun. We were 70-90 people huddled together in a cold sanctuary that couldn't afford to pay for heat. We heard updates from all the communities present--Potter Street Community (Simple Way), Camden House, Relational Tithe, New Jerusalem, Nehemiah House along with Reba Place, Plow Creek, and a few others. Between times of sharing, we worshipped in songs of praise and adoration, dancing with joy and lots

of laughter.

Chris Haw led in blessings for recent marriages, engagements, births and moves. Catherine and Pete from Northumbria Community in England led us in communion. It was beautiful to see the family of Christ meet and share at the communion table. After a long and exhausting day, we drove to Camden, where we were warmly welcomed with late night tea and still more conversation.

Saturday, at a Camden community center, Shane Claiborne shared what the Simple Way was going through after the June fire that destroyed half a block of buildings, including their second house. They have distinguished the intentional community, Potter Street Community, from the non-profit organization, the Simple Way. They'll celebrate ten years together this year, and are still learning how to "dream big and live small".

We were especially eager to begin planning the 2008 PAPA Fest, which will be hosted by [Oops, can't say that here! You have to register to find out.] a fellow community this sum-

mer. We discussed what all is needed to successfully host this festival. Some of us from Reba are a part of the planning, and helping the host community prepare for this large project.

In other break-out groups we discussed sensitive subjects such as power and leadership in community, gender and God-image. The gentleness and sincerity of these conversations conveyed the struggles these groups are experiencing. However, I'm convinced that by the Spirit of God, these conversations are teaching us how to love one another and strengthening our communities.

Sunday we met Quaker-style with reflections on the weekend interspersed with silence. After attending a beautiful mass at Sacred Heart in Camden, we had lunch and conversations that encouraged us to join together and share the journey of our communities. Belonging to one another, presenting our brokenness, and loving each other regardless, we are a true family.



Loaves and Fishes

By Chico Fajardo-Heflin

When folks ask me “what I do” at Reba, I tell them I paint, grow food and study the Bible. If I’m really trying to impress somebody, I also tell them I help run Reba’s “food pantry.” I need to be careful, however, when I talk about our dear House of Manna, because calling it a food pantry is probably pushing it. A few wobbly tables arranged inside a cold, crumbly garage won’t earn any grant money, that’s for sure. But House of Manna is still dear to our hearts.

Every Tuesday and Friday morning, a little glimmer of the Kingdom of Heaven does its dance in an alley somewhere in the middle of the Reba Village. Friends from the neighborhood, low-income neighbors and community members turn out for a time of chatting, laughing and “shopping” at House of Manna. Cans of baked beans, semi-wilted lettuce and day-old bagels make their way into reused grocery bags as food that would have clogged a landfill is lovingly salvaged and made new again. Resurrection is practiced and tummies are fed. Thanks be to God.

But something new happened a couple of years ago. The Manna Garage raised its hulking green metal door for a third day of the week—Wednesday. But instead of old beans, bagels and bread filling the makeshift tables, there sat boxes and boxes of fresh, colorful produce—red tomatoes, purple eggplants, green peppers, orange carrots and large, striped watermelon among many others. This was something new. And many of us were excited about it.

And it didn’t take long for some of our neighbors to notice. Soon, familiar faces began peeping into the garage and asking with wide eyes whether we were open for “the free food” that day. When we explained that this wasn’t the usual “House of Manna” delivery, but rather, a paid-for subscription of produce from our sister farming community Plow

Creek, there was, at first, some puzzled interest. But once we mentioned the price of the CSA (community supported agriculture) program, there usually came a disappointed nod and pursed-smiled parting. This was, for many of our neighbors, nothing new; just a story they’ve heard before.

For those of us working the Manna Garage on both the “free food” days and the CSA days, the clash of social classes was unavoidable—there were times when the garage was open for everybody and there were times when it was not. Our consciences began to tingle.

There is currently a lot of energy here at Reba Place, especially among the younger and newer generation (not to mention the lively energy of Covenant member Doug Selph), surrounding food and justice issues. Wendell Berry, local economy and farming are big topics of discussion, and the Fellowship seems on the brink of a new era of projects, ministries and initiatives surrounding food and the global economy. This is a very good thing. However, voices from the older (wiser) generation keep raising the question, “Yes, but what about our poor neighbors? They can’t afford this food.” Much of the time, when this question is raised, conversations seem to come to a halt. “But what about our poor neighbors” is an important question. And a difficult one. In fact, it might be one of the questions of our times.

The Church in America finds itself in a new and complicated position. Due to the emergence of an omni-

present, imperial economy, we discover that our “neighbors” are not only those who live down the street from us, but also those who live down the chain-of-production of almost all of our household goods. How can we live in such a way that we are caring not only for the struggling single mother with two jobs in our neighborhood, but also for the oppressed Honduran worker on a banana plantation? How can we live and eat justly in such a way that honors *all* of God’s children, instead of feeling paralyzed by the seemingly either/or choices?

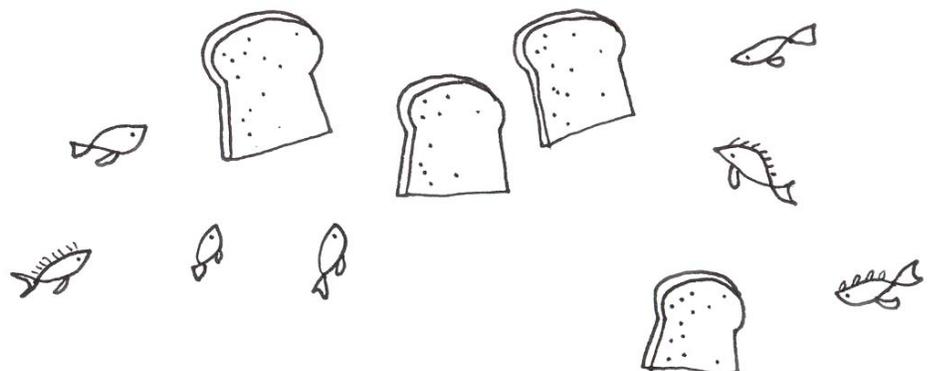
There are no easy answers. But in God’s Kingdom, there is always a Way.

Meditating on that difficult question, “Yes, but what about our poor neighbors?” a familiar story came to mind. It’s somewhere in the Gospels and the question is almost identical: “But Jesus, what about all these hungry people?” Jesus’ reply is challenging: “You feed them.” The disciples assess the situation and tell Jesus with some frustration, “Yes, but Jesus, it would cost a lot of money to feed all these people. We don’t have all that money.” No, in Rome’s economy, we don’t.

But Jesus figured out how to feed all those hungry people, didn’t he? He asked for what was there, blessed it and distributed it. And the people were fed.

This story gives me hope. And when I hear that pressing question in the midst of this complicated world, “Yes, but what about our poor neighbors?”

I feel Jesus’ answer cut through →



the confusion and to the point: "You feed them." Jesus believes we can feed them. He is aware of the complexity and limits of the situation and yet still gives the command: "You feed them."

And so we tried. And what was born was the Loaves and Fishes Fund.

The Loaves and Fishes Fund isn't anything big or complicated. It is simply a fund that collects money for the purpose of purchasing CSA shares specifically for those who cannot pay the full price. Folks come to the Manna Garage, pick up their white, waxy box of farm-fresh fruits and vegetables and pay whatever they can afford that week. Some pay ten dollars a week, others don't pay anything all. And we get to announce to some of our Tuesdays and Fridays neighbors that now, if they want, they can come on Wednesdays. And there are smiles all around.

I love telling this story because it's so hopeful. Instead of being paralyzed by all the complicated questions of how much should we pay for food or whom we should help or what we should or shouldn't buy, we can be empowered by Jesus' words—you feed them—and go do it. I get excited about the idea of the Church connecting with local farms and farmers and setting up their own little Loaves and Fishes Funds to be able take that adventure with their neighbors instead of without them. And I shiver when imagine what "You feed them" could look like if we took it a little further.

Perhaps one day our communities will commission members to relocate to the poorest and most neglected places in our regions to plant gardens and share the work and fruits of them with hurting neighbors. And since most of the poorest places in the United States are what sociologists call "food deserts"—areas lacking grocery stores or food vendors of

any kind—it would be more than a symbolic gesture. It would simultaneously fulfill the words of Jesus in Matthew 25 when he spoke of feeding the hungry (our close neighbors) as well as those words in Luke 4 of setting the oppressed free (our distant neighbors). Two birds with one stone, one could say. Or maybe, two birds in one garden is more like it.

Things don't have to be complicated, as Jesus reminded his disciples when they were floundering in a sticky situation. Despite Rome, despite the global economy, despite the seemingly limited choices, when we trust God and seek God's will, God will always make a Way.

You feed them.

Yes, Lord Jesus. With your help, we shall try.



Food and Faith: Justice, Joy and Daily Bread

Edited and compiled by Michael Schut

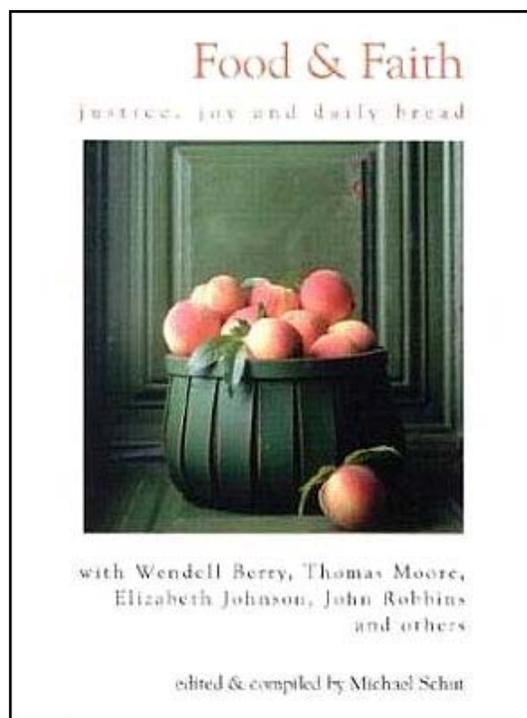
Reviewed by Kate Bierma

Developing holistic food ethics might not sound exciting to many traditionally-minded folks but the beginning piece of this book describing the glory of a Southeastern Minnesota tomato season is enough to get many food lovers interested. Memories of grandparents and traditions remind us to appreciate the table time stories we have along with our lament for the current state of food.

This book is not, however, just a collection of stories. It is full of essays, research, poems, and interviews discussing food and its meaning in our lives. The authors from different countries, faiths, and areas of expertise make space for conflicting opinions. These different perspectives allow the reader room to think for herself more so than much fact-heavy food literature allows.

I ended my reading thankful for newly learned truth and compelled to think more about the numerous questions I was left with: Should developing countries really owe the U.S. for food aid after the uncountable costs of imperialism? What does the Bible say about our relationship with food and Creation? Should we be eating chemically and genetically modified foods when the verdict is still out on how healthy they are for us and the planet? Why does our country consider increased spending as the only indicator of progress (even if the spending is on fast food, diet pills, etc.)? Should so few companies have control of so much of the world's food?

The writers of the book seem to recognize that the secret of the movement towards better food lies in a commitment to meaningful connection with each other and with God's provisions; that the scientific and economic views of our larger culture are not enough, but can be worthwhile when approached with discernment and creativity.



Brothers in Pen: A Means of Escape

Edited by Zoe Mullery.
(A book appreciation, by David Janzen)

I had a new book from Zoe Mullery to read on the flight home from our SMC Coordinator's gathering at Church of the Sojourners in San Francisco. Zoe talks with pride about the guys at San Quentin in her Wednesday Night Creative Writing Class. Brothers in Pen: A Means of Escape is their second anthology—a collection of fiction and personal memoirs along with one chapter from a novel that Zoe has just completed.

These men have worked hard and developed some writing muscles. "The Rattlesnake Story" by Ernie Laszlo is a fine Western yarn. Watani Stiner's "A Question of Authority" takes us back to an era of American history when the black power movement was finding its way and unraveling at the same time. Watani writes with a lot of insight and surprising humility. I also enjoyed Tharon Hill's "Hard Times"—a fictionalized and endearing rendition of his ancestors' struggles to survive off the land in depression times.

I appreciated the nine biographical sketches and felt a lot spiritual connection with each one's journey. Zoe has a mission with these guys and their love for her shines through. You can order a copy by writing zoe@churchofthesojourners.org.



The 2007 Wednesday Night Creative Writing Class

Top (L to R): Luke Padgett, Ronin Holmes

Middle: Ernie Laszlo, Troy Williams, Richard Gilliam, Watani Stiner, Tharon Hill

Front: Kenny Brydon, Zoe Mullery, Michael Willis

This is an anthology of short stories written in an ongoing writing workshop at San Quentin State Prison, San Quentin, California. Some stories are fiction, some memoir/creative non-fiction, and some a combination.

If you're looking for stories about rattlesnakes, Black Power, Santa's demise, post-apocalyptic communities, prison boxing matches, one-day courtships, painful childhoods, transformation in the 'hood, or the Lost Boys of Sudan, among other things, you've got the right book. The range of subject matter here is as wide as the imagination. This project is a culmination of over a year's worth of labor by these men, many of them Lifers, all serious writers.

All proceeds from the sale of this book go through the William James Association to support this creative writing class through the Arts-in-Corrections program.

ID: 1663453
www.iutl.com

North Block Press

Potato Prayers

By Marcus Rempel

I remember planting potatoes with Madeleine, an Elder at Doig River Reserve, in Northern British Columbia. Every potato she planted, Madeleine blessed in the name of Jesus.

My grandmother prayed over her potatoes, too, once they were peeled, boiled and steaming on a well-laid table. Somehow, for my people, who are a deeply pious, prayerful lot, our instincts to pray run indoors. Once we're in our good clothes, around the white, square tablecloth, once the potato has been safely removed from the living womb of earth and sanctified into pure white starch, then we solemnly bow our heads.

I wonder, if my people had prayers and spiritual teachings for planting and hilling potatoes, for picking potato bugs and digging potatoes up, as Aboriginal people seem to have for every contact they make with the living things of earth, could we have

ever turned our family farming heritage over to "agribusiness"? Winkler, Manitoba, is home to the official "potato lands" of this province, and also the heart of the Mennonite bible belt. It is a land of such loamy fertility that even in these days of "farm crisis" (how far back do do these days go? when will we see their end?) farmers there can still get rich, none more so than the large-scale potato farmers. I have a colleague who grew up working on one of these farms. The high-tech methodologies, the incredible production statistics he describes – 30,000 lbs/acre this year – stagger me. The pesticide regime required by McCain's, their singular customer and lord, terrifies me. Toxic dowsings are almost weekly.

But the potatoes on the plates of my people still look much the same, and so we bow our heads and thank the Lord. But who is now our Lord of the harvest? It is surely not a grandmother's laying the name of Jesus on each potato that accounts for the 30,000 lbs of potatoes reaped per acre on Winkler's 2,000-3,000 acre megafarms this fall. Surely we should bless the wisdom of McCains

and laud the wizardry of Monsanto.

Does that sound idolatrous? How could it? That is business and work, which belong outside, and our Jesus has nothing to do with them. Inside the four walls of the church and around the ordered square of the dining room table, we still pray in Jesus' name, Amen. So all is well in our house. And safe. And sterile. And nearly dead.

I'd like to go outside and see if I can find Madeleine's Jesus. He is in the earth, with each potato, with each worm, in every living member of the living soil. He is there, receiving Monsanto's biocides, chemically burnt, lashed, exhausted. And he is there holding Madeleine's blessings and bringing forth life.

Broken and blessed. His body. Our bread.

Madeleine the Potato Blessor holds out a communion to us. Might we receive it, and make of our farming yet a Eucharist?



Church of the Sojourners News

By Katie Piché

We've got a new life in our midst. Annalise Joy joined Dale, Debbie, and Rebecca Gish on December 28, 2007. Just a few days before Christmas, news that Debbie's mother passed away extended the Gish Christmas trip that was already planned to visit her family in southern California. Barely a day after returning from this trip they received word that Annalise had been born – almost four weeks early! They immediately threw themselves onto a plane up to the Portland area to adopt their newborn daughter. They stayed for almost two weeks as they waited for Annalise's eating habits to stabilize.

They are home now and adjusting their lives to being a family of four instead of three. Dale and Debbie are beaming parents and Rebecca is a proud big sister. We rejoice with the Gishes as Annalise has been long-awaited and prayed for. There are long lines of Sojourners at any given meeting waiting to get a chance to hold Annalise. We would appreciate prayer as we are now trying to figure out a way to lighten Debbie's load of church responsibilities for a maternity leave and family time.



The smiling (and sleeping) Gish family—L to R: Rebecca, Dale, Annalise, and Debbie.

Prayer would also be appreciated for Zoe Mullery as she embarks on a journey to adopt a child.

We began our church calendar year with an Epiphany celebration. The kids, dressed as kings and carrying a star, led us in a procession and a song across the neighborhood and up into our worship space. The celebration consisted of singing Christmas songs, a tamale dinner, a time where we shared gifts that we would like to offer to Jesus this year (quite a few people offered the discipline of reading scripture), a King's Cake dessert time, and a drama focusing on Jesus' escape from Egypt.

We hosted the SMC coordinators meeting in January. It was good to connect and reconnect with delegates from other communities, and to be reminded of the ways we partner with and learn from each other. We even managed to squeeze everyone into our worship space on Sunday evening.

Then three weeks later we hosted a School for Conversion and really filled every crevice of our large living-room worship space with a warm body. Maria Kenney from Communality in Lexington, KY came to partner with us in leading our discussions and talks about conversion and being the church together.

As a church we recently reworDED



Alexina Lockie celebrates her sixth birthday.

our practice of "Study" to "Listening to Scripture." We are just now delving into a study of the book of John with this new viewpoint in mind.

Good things are happening with the apprentices this year. Through their shared finances, they were able to pay off one person's credit card debt. They have also been thinking about ways that they and Sojourners can serve the needs of the neighborhood. So far they are just a few weeks into a homework club one afternoon a week.

Please be praying for Josefina, Lizbeth Bran's mother, who has been here for the past six months from Guatemala. She is seeking to have cataract surgery done in the U.S. and has received an extension on her visa.

Michael Kuany, a Lost Boy of Sudan who has been living at Sojourners since June, started an organization awhile ago to build a school in the area of Sudan where he is from. Sojourners has supported the project, and other money has been raised as well. Thanks to Steve Novotni, a community friend from Cincinnati, RebuildSudan.org now has a functioning website that actually allows people to make donations online as well as provide updated information on the school project. Check it out! □

Hope Fellowship News

By Fernando Arroyo and Matt Porter

Greetings to you all from two new Hope Fellowship correspondents, Matt Porter and Fernando Arroyo. Matt and his wife Michelle will be officially welcomed into membership at Hope Fellowship very soon, and Fernando and his wife Carrie have recently become parents of a beautiful baby boy, Jonas Fernando.

The theme of our corporate teaching for the coming year is "Being Stewards of God's Gifts." We intend to explore our individual giftedness so that we might best serve the community. We also hope to discuss what gifts we as a congregation of believers might be able to give to our neighbors and to the world. Our previous theme dealing with racial reconciliation, "The New Humanity in Christ," concluded with a session where George Yancey shared his keen insight on the topic. Yancey's book, *Beyond Racial Gridlock*, is an attempt to provide an alternative means of seeking racial reconciliation in America. The event has led to many helpful discussions within our congregation and will continue to encourage us as we seek to put on Christ's New Humanity.

In the wake of the many recent departures at Hope Fellowship, several new families and individuals have joined with us. Eddie and Karina Zamora, along with their children Martin, Genesis and Josue, have hosted the Spanish language Bible study conducted in the neighborhood for some time now.



Carrie and Fernando Arroyo with new baby Jonas.

They have recently begun joining us for corporate worship, and they are also joining a new cell group. The World Hunger Relief Farm continues its tradition of providing new members of the community almost as soon as the old members depart. Will Summers, Jocelyne Philpott, and Jessica Stundinka are three interns who have brought vitality and vigor to the congregation. Jessica recently became an aunt, and her distinctive choice of footwear has earned her the title "Aunt Chaco."

This time of transition has provided opportunities for rich reflection within the community. Barbara Bridgewater was able to enjoy a

surprise 50th birthday celebration with many friends and memories of the years. J.B. Smith recently printed an important story about the difficulties immigrants face as they cross the Arizona deserts. J.B. has been working on this article for almost one year, and it can be read at <www.wacotrib.com/mexico>. Various members have recently begun meeting with new cell groups, leading to a deepening of relationship with new members and a broader circle of engagement. The moment lends itself to a re-evaluation of what cell groups have achieved and can be expected to achieve in light of the demands of Christian discipleship.

Our children continue to grow up, with Hannah Bridgewater demonstrating growth not only in basketball and soccer but leadership as well. Gerson Matias-Ryan returned from an extended trip to Mexico with his family displaying a new maturity that extends beyond his appearance.

Cristina Dominguez continues to reflect gratefully on what Gerson's mother, Ramona Matias-Ryan, taught her during her final days. Ramona was an inspiring example of patience and joy in every day life. May we all be such careful stewards of God's many gifts. □

June 28-July 6 Delegation Making Plans to Offer Non-violence Workshops in Cooperation with Valle Nuevo Directiva:

Nancy and Gabriela Gatlin are co-leading this year's June 28--July 6 SMC delegation to our Salvadoran sister community, Valle Nuevo. Adaia Bernal, Colombian Christian peacemaking veteran has committed to join the delegation that is planning to offer a series of non-violence workshops in cooperation with the Valle Nuevo Leadership Council (Directiva). In these days the community is struggling to complete the titling process for their residential plots. The Salvadoran legacy of class conflict and civil war has made this process a mine field. Please pray for Valle Nuevo and surrounding communities with similar issues.

Reba Place News

By Tatiana Fajardo-Heflin

Is it really February, already?

Maybe I should really be asking... is it still... February? Many of us at Reba are eagerly anticipating the coming of spring – both in the coming of ice-free streets and alleys and also in the coming of our garden season! I saw my first little shoots of perennial flowers peeking out of the ground today in front of the Reba Services office building. Praise the Lord, it will be May before we know it.

Despite lots of bitter cold and too much snow, we have not been entirely hibernating this winter. As is typical for Reba life these days, much has been happening – lots of conversations, meals, dreams, creativity, and old fashioned work.

We have a growing pool of people in varying levels of membership at Reba who are under the age of thirty, and a common thread knitting many of them together is an interest in food, agriculture, and sustainability. The theme of this Shalom Connections comes at a perfect time for us, as we have had several community-wide discussions on food at Monday seminars and Tuesday night meetings. Barb Grimsley, along with several others, has been working to co-ordinate a larger com-



A lively sharing time at a recent Monday night potluck.

munal gardening effort, expanding beyond the several plots Reba folk were tending last season. We also hope to have our fingers a little more deeply in the dirt at Plow Creek, with CSA workdays scheduled throughout the upcoming season.

Another hot conversation topic (we may even be able to call it a “buzz word”) has been common work, and the desire for more Reba folk to be able to work together in business or service enterprises. No concrete “new business” plans have been nailed down, but lots of ideas are flowing and a business council has been formed to give more attention and energy to the real process of

cultivating common work. Allan Howe has begun Saturday afternoon seminars to talk about common work as part of community and mission. A lively group has gathered for the past several Saturdays in the basement of Plain and Simple Amish Furniture (one of our RPF-run common work ventures) to ponder the mission and work of historical Catholic orders, common work in present-day Christian communities such as Jesus People USA, and how all this dreaming might be made manifest in the day-to-day life of Reba Place Fellowship.

In addition to lots of conversation on common work, quite a few of our practicing members and apprentices have been engaging in some common work – though without the hope or promise of earning income! The “Compost Club” and “Pick team” have initiated major efforts to expand and improve both community composting efforts and the community free store, respectively. I took a stroll through The Pick recently, and I can report that it feels like a whole new basement!

Some resurgence in creative and domestic arts has also been happening, especially among a group of women who have been gathering once a week to learn and/or practice quilting and other handwork skills. Joan Vogt has convened →



Food, faith, and fellowship were all present at the RPF Single Women's retreat, held at the brand-new Emmanuel Lodge. Sally Youngquist led the group in sharing, prayer, worship, and fun.

Food, Faith, and Fellowship

the group and is making her wealth of quilting knowledge and experience available to those who are just beginning or who want to build on skills they already have. Anali Gatlin and others have also established a weekly knitting time. Our fellowship meetings are growing in their number of attendees (men and women alike!) patiently and meticulously knitting, crocheting, mending, or quilting in the midst of sharing stories or discussing upcoming decisions.

After over a year of workdays, demolition, visits, phone calls to contractors, and even a seven-person (successful!) attempt at moving a shed using levers and wheels... the RPF retreat house at Camp Lake has been completed. After some confusion and a Fellowship-wide vote, we chose to keep its former name, "Emmanuel Lodge." The house was commissioned and blessed on January 12th, with much song and feasting, as well as the mysterious appearance of a Hummer in the driveway. Emmanuel Lodge is already being filled with guests and future guests, including the Reba Place Church high school

group, several RPF women on silent retreat, and an RPF Single Women's retreat at the end of this month.

I am writing this just several hours before our first all-Fellowship Tuesday night meeting in several months. For the past two monthly meetings, we have gathered in separate groups of full and novice members (December) and practicing members and apprentices (January). Both of these meetings were convened with the purpose of having an open forum for the RPF body to share their thoughts, feelings, or concerns about the rapid growth of the community over the past couple of years. We have become aware of the unique challenges of fast growth (as well as the challenges of larger communities in general) and the need for more intentional discipleship processes for all those who are newer arrivals at Reba.



Silliness at the Single Women's Retreat.

Both meetings brought forth some deep concerns as well as some constructive suggestions, and many in the community are working to respond to the needs that are arising. We hope to continue seeking the leading of the Spirit in how best to order our life together and how to respond to being in the midst of a culture-wide interest in Christian community and radical discipleship. We would welcome the prayers of our sisters and brothers in SMC (and beyond) as we go forth. □

The Rogers Park Rant

By Doug Selph

Workin' Workin' Workin'

A couple of things at Living Water a-cookin'
You see some folk prayed to God they did
next thing you know an influx of rowdy neighborhood kids.

This Wed night potluck thing we scheduled for fellowship time?
Well these young kid types swarmed in and my oh my what a time!

Gives us supposedly godly types something different to hug
But if you want more details, well ask Sally— this here is Doug.

And since this Doug, I will mention yet another thing,
Well it's CSA sign-up time, all of us eager for the coming spring.
Got here a lot of interest, so this Doug is rather happy,
but not a lot of farmers, so get out there folk and make it snappy!

Well what else to say, on this 10 degree cold winter day? Oh you know, the usual, new babies being born and stuff. I think they have names, yes that's true, so once they grow and tell me, I will get back to you.

Oh one more little thing, well not so little you see, Our dear brother Ted is dying, and all together we do accompany he. So yes, here, death and life, continues as you may guess, And to all our activities we all do hope and pray that God indeed bless.



Celebrating our sister Nieta's birthday!

Plow Creek News

by Heather Munn

Life is quiet here at Plow Creek, and new beginnings come quietly as well; quietly as the grass grows green again. Paul and Heather Munn have settled in the Common Building apartment and are beginning their ministry of hosting spiritual retreats for the poor—or as they like to call them, the *anawim*, the poor of God for whom he has good news. They will work part-time on the farm and hope to host their first retreats in the spring and summer. They've begun participating in worship leading, including Taize and Celtic prayer services for Thursday night vespers; they plan to declare their membership in the church on Palm Sunday.

The farm team, after long thought about how to replace Kevin Behrens, who marketed the produce, has chosen to divide the necessary work for this year among the people who remain. The CSA will be able to sell fifty shares again this year, and folks at both Plow Creek and Reba are giving some thought to getting Reba folks down here to participate; we're especially excited about the monthly CSA workdays, days for folks from the city to come out and work together in the fields their food grows in—and help out the people who work there every day! A couple of young people are also discussing a plan to commute from Reba, spending several days at Plow Creek every week or two.

Erin Kindy and Carlos Mucú have postponed their wedding, which was to happen in February. One of Erin's plans for the farm this year is to bring a new kind of livestock to Plow Creek: hens, the kind that lay those beautiful orange-yolked eggs some of you know from your CSA boxes. (This year they came from the Zehrs' flock at Coneflower Farm.) Philip Horning is laying plans for a herd of fifty geese, which apparently will be helpful in weeding the strawberries. Hey, any help on that is fine with us! We'll also be building a greenhouse in the Valley this year, so as to be able to start our own tomato and bell pepper seeds rather than having a



Rick Reha and fellow guys with guitars (and one little girl with no guitar) at Sojo's.

commercial greenhouse start them.

We had some tense moments a couple weeks ago when we heard a gunman had opened fire at NIU, the school where Anni Moore teaches; she was at school that day and was late coming home because security had closed the campus temporarily. She did not witness the shootings. Please pray for the victims and their families.

We've had quite a winter out here, with deep snow, quick meltings that flooded the Meadow, and hard frosts that turned it into a skating-rink. We're very excited about PA-PAfest this year, and you'll find out why in good time.

The Foxvogs, thanks to a gift from their family, are in Ireland visiting Jim's brother this week; we look forward to hearing what they saw in that good green place where no one even knows what hard frost means!

But even here the winter is fading, and spring is on its way; we can feel it in the lightening of the air. We take off our coats, stretch, find words for new dreams, we wonder out loud: where shall we dig a swimming hole? What shall we plant in the garden this year? What does God have in store for us, in His inscrutable dreams? □

(Continued from Page 3)

Lynn: I'm impressed by what Tatiana did in cooking for the SMC Gathering last summer. She made food for all of us that met her justice standards—using Plow Creek produce. It was inexpensive and delicious. She and her friends made the effort to share their vision in practical service rather than laying on a guilt trip.

Matt Porter: There is a very mature conversation going on about how we should be eating. There is also a more immature way—that there are good and bad foods, clean and unclean foods. There are folks among us with eating disorders for whom his kind of talk can trigger self-destructive behavior.

Adam: The conversation about food justice and the movement towards organic eating is bigger than our Christian communities. Our culture is thinking about it. What makes our discussion different from the rest of the world? For me it is more about sharing and grace. It would be a shame if disputes about food got in the way.

Rick: Is there a conclusion we should come to? My sense is we've only begun the discussion. It's been good, and I assume we're taking this topic back to our communities and continuing it.

David: Each community will address the issues as seems fit. What we put in the newsletter can only be a reflection of the discussion in progress, not a wrap-up. □

SMC 2008 Calendar

April 25-27 – School for Conversion at Hope Fellowship

May 5 – Shalom Connections submission deadline

June 7 – Hilda and Kevin's wedding in Chicago

June 8-14th – SWAP trip in Kentucky w/ the Trapnells

June 19-22 – PAPA Festival

June 28-July 6 – Valle Nuevo delegation

August 4 – Shalom Connection submission deadline

October 17-19 – School for Conversion at Church of the Sojourners

November 3 – Shalom Connections submission deadline



Gabriela Gatlin and Adam Vaughan say:
"This schedule is serious business!"

Shalom Connections
P.O. Box 6575
Evanston, IL 60202-6575

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED