



Volume XII

A Quarterly Newsletter of Shalom Mission communities

Number 2

www.shalomconnections.org

Summer 2008: Redeeming Work

"My occupation: Love. It's all I do." -- John of the Cross

Redeeming Work

An Editorial by David Janzen

When strangers meet the question soon comes up—"What do you do?" This is a polite way of asking "What is your niche, your status in the capitalist economy," and from that answer one can infer a person's value (salary, wealth) in the system. The American career culture encourages us to develop false selves that are nourished by job success and our consumption of material goods. This is a system of "haves" and "have not's," of competition as if there were not enough dignity for all. When I'm getting to know someone, I've found a more interesting and revealing question to be, "Tell me about your work." I learn much more than just what happens nine-to-five.

Work: The blessing, the curse and the new creation. In the second story of creation (Genesis 2-3) God gives Adam two tasks--tending the Garden that provides him food, and naming all the living species on earth. This latter is a serious research project still ongoing, because naming something, in the Hebrew understanding, both reveals and carries the meaning of what that something actually is. Work is



CHRIST
THE WORKMAN

meant to be a joyful collaboration between God, humankind and the awesomely bountiful creation.

But with disobedience and the Fall, this harmony is broken. "Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it . . . thorns and thistles it shall bring forth . . . By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return

Redeeming Work

(Continued from Page 1)

to the ground. . . You are dust and to dust you shall return.” In our post-industrial capital-driven economy work still is under a curse, producing wealth for some—poor wages and unemployment for many, pollution and exhaustion of the land, misuse of creative gifts to produce what humans do not need, competition for survival, joyless striving. Nevertheless, the blessing of work also remains. Work conveys some dignity to the worker, a way to develop gifts and disciplines, an opportunity to produce the things that sustain life, family and community. Thus work carries both a blessing and a curse, but no work is even worse.

“When people lack work, they also lack hope. The resulting despair eats into a community like an evil spirit, and the violent results can be seen everywhere: in self-hatred, increased crime, the drug trade (often the only jobs available), a bloating of the prison population, racism, resentment, fear, alcoholism, break-up of families, domestic violence, children born without stable and secure homes, lack of commitments, and abuse of God-given talents of mind, heart and imagination.” (Matthew Fox, The Reinvention of Work, p. 10.)

Redeeming Work. For people of faith, no matter what our job, the curse does not finally determine who we are--we are invited to participate in the new creation that is already present for those with eyes to see, and will be all in all when Jesus returns. We are called to

demonstrate this new creation by the way our work is structured and motivated in the creativity and collaborative harmony of the original garden. William Cavanaugh writes, “Christians . . . are called to create concrete alternative practices that open up a different kind of economic space--the space marked by the body of Christ.” (Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire, viii.) This new creation is actually larger than the world’s mammon economy. It appears in homes, communities, volunteer efforts—whenever work is done for love rather than money.

Speaking of my own experience, the hardest job I ever had was to quickly cut and assemble cheap doors in a recreational vehicle factory. I never had a tour of the whole plant, never got to see where the doors I made were installed. The equipment I used was inappropriate but my suggestions for changes were not welcome. The work was utterly repetitive with nothing new to learn after the first week. I never knew who my supervisor was, but various people who did not know me came through and gave orders. Marx’s analysis of how laborers are turned into objects in a system resulting in alienation of the working class fit us employees well. I needed the job to make ends meet and I suffered the monotony for four months to feed our family. Bad as it was, I’ve been grateful for the experience—it taught me many things about bad work and good work, and how to become manage work so that both relationships and fruitfulness are valued.



David Lottich puts in some “common work” at Camp Lake on Memorial Day

So what makes for good work? I encourage you to ask others this same question. Here is my short list: Good work will sustain a modest living standard, is interesting enough to develop the worker’s gifts, produces goods that meet real human needs, is cooperative, and at peace with the earth. And there is a special joy in carrying a task through with others from beginning to end, from garden seed to Sunday dinner--producing what we consume in community. Not every job can be structured to meet all these expectations. Every morning I wash yesterday’s dishes and cook oatmeal with raisins—boring some might call it. But I have learned to be content doing my share of the necessary work that sustains life for those God has given me to love.

My occupation: love. Now-a-days my main earning work is to develop affordable housing, a job that has become increasingly difficult, sometimes impossible, in the current political and economic climate. Often my motivation runs into a dead-end my self says, “This work is really oppressing. How can I quit?” Which drives me to desperate prayer, and in that moment of anguish I keep hearing the Spirit say, “David, stop and be still in my presence. You are loved and will never run out of love if you wait on the Lord. Think of the people whom

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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.

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Ade Bethune, courtesy of the Catholic Worker and other various Catholic Worker artists
Photos by various SMC members

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you are serving and remember your love for them. Do the work out of love and you will find joy in it." Hey, contemplation, it turns out, is not just for monks. Concentration alternating with contemplation is, I believe, the way we were designed to work. So I have written on my to-do list—"Pray for love between each task." I'm coming to understand John of the Cross who said, "My occupation: love. It's the only thing I do."

What makes for good work? How does one judge that rightly? I might think work is good when I really enjoy it, choose it. This makes the enjoying and choosing the arbiter, the judge. I may like my work because it is easy, makes lots of money, and gives me status. Does that make it good? Our desires can be corrupted, and often are.

Another way of judging good work would depend on knowing the goal of being human, or more personally, for what purpose was I created? In that case good work might enable me to grow in communion with God, as a disciple of Jesus, a servant of whatever my community needs. If becoming like Christ is the goal of my life, then good work will facilitate that for me and for others. "Humans need a community of virtue in order to learn how to desire rightly," says Cavanaugh. (*Being Consumed*, p. 9.) In our Shalom communities individuals sometimes seek God's guidance about vocational directions in discernment groups—gathering three or four persons to test our visions by listening, prayer and counsel—until we find the work that fits our gifts and serves the community best.

We are the work of Christ in the world. When we consume something, what we consume becomes a part of us. However, according to Augustine, when we consume the bread and the wine, the body and blood of Christ, we become it—we are consumed by Christ and become his body in the world. Our human tendency is always to come

to Jesus hoping he can fix what is broken in us so we can go on being our old selves. And Jesus does graciously heal us--giving our lives meaning and freedom. But he also calls us to become his disciples, that is, to be changed into his likeness, to become his work in the world together with other disciples rather than settle for our own personal pursuits.

For Hebrews thought is primarily in terms of activity, of doing; Greeks in terms of being ('ontology'). 'God' and 'man' as nouns are like East and West, never the twain shall meet. God's being is utterly beyond ours. But God is a doer, a maker, a lover, and we can be his learners, his apprentices. As Jesus described himself, "The Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. . . . The Father loves the Son, and shows him all that he himself is doing" (John 5:19-20) – the craftsman-father shows his apprentice-son all the art and mystery of his craft; the son watches and listens; he learns obedience through what he suffers (Hebrews 5.8). In the upper room Jesus tells his apprentices that they in turn will do greater works, because he goes to the Father (John 14.12) – and his spirit will be with them and with us to the end of the age. This is our work. (John Sweet in *Heresies and How to Avoid Them*, pp. 29-30.) □



Tyler Chen labors making sweet potato fries for his fellow apprentices on retreat (including Elizabeth Stone, left).

Community and Common Work: Over the Years and at Reba Place

By Allan Howe

Work and Common Work

Most of us work or have worked. We've been employed by others. Maybe we've supervised others. So what is the difference between work and common work? Let's start with some images, naming some names of Reba folks many of us know.

Work is Char Oda serving as receptionist and chief typist at the Evanston Legal Aid office. Common work is Char and Jeanne Howe and David Janzen and Annie Spiro and others working together in the Reba Services office on bookkeeping, relating to government agencies, event planning, affordable housing and more.

Work is Ronn Frantz as facilities director for Thresholds Human Services. Common work is Ronn and Nina Frantz and Gus Roddy and Andy Ross and many others doing the mix of janitorial, renovation, maintenance and development work that is Reba's Reunion Property Management in Rogers Park.

Work is Camille Hobbs opening the Starbucks on near Northwestern U. at 5:00 a.m. Common work is Camille and Eric Dahlaw and Jesse Miller and Adam Weber and others meeting and working together day after day as they create The Recyclery collective and within a year or two get it to the place where they can all be paid for their work repairing, selling, and distributing bikes.

Work is Allan Howe with the Illinois Mennonite Conference helping start the ASSETS micro-enterprise training program in Chicago. Common work is Allan and Jesse and Nina and Ronn and others launching—with many difficulties—the Amish furniture store Plain and Simple on Main St. in Evanston.

As Reba Place Fellowship has explored ways to develop more common work we have found a mix of adven-

ture, risk, learnings from successes and failures, and encouragement to one another to develop gifts and capabilities. Here are a few learnings from our experience with work and common work over the years:

Work is necessary. Work can be enjoyable if we're teamed with others who have values and dreams in common with us.

Work environments can be lonely, demeaning, purposeless and depressing. They can also be places of great learning, growth, service and joy. For Christians the chances of the second outcome are much greater if we're part of an organized group of believers sharing our labors for common purposes.

Among the reasons that many Christian groups past and present have developed businesses, trades and other forms of common work are the fellowship, discipleship training and income generation—call it corporate self-support—that they provide.

New Testament perspectives

As Alan Richardson makes clear in *The Biblical Doctrine of Work*, for Christians our secular occupations (daily toil or earning a livelihood) are secondary. They have meaning insofar as they help us become "fellow workers with God" (I Cor.3:9; II Cor. 6:1) in our primary vocation or calling, to be bearers of God's good news, ambassadors of reconciliation in a fallen world.

In the New Testament we often see disciples leaving their boats or other work and joining the disciple community. Less frequently we see a passage like this from Acts 18:

"Paul went to see them [Aquila and Priscilla], and, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them, and they worked together—by

trade they were tentmakers. Every Sabbath he would argue in the synagogue and would try to convince Jews and Greeks."

Jesus the carpenter, Peter and others as fishermen, Paul the tentmaker, Lydia the dealer in purple fabrics or dyes, and countless other New Testament figures knew the human condition in part because they were participants in the universal world of work.

Glimpses from Christian history

Around 500 A.D. St. Benedict and his Rule launched a countercultural movement that continues to this day. Benedictine monasteries expected six hours a day of physical work from their members, however low or high their social origins. The famous slogan *ora et labora* (prayer and work) took form in hundreds of Christian communities. Some have argued that these models of hard-working classless communities were decisive in undermining the medieval caste system.

Later in the Cistercian renewal movement of the 11th and 12th centuries, St. Bernard and others established hundreds of monasteries in the isolated forests and swamps of Europe. They brought a fresh commitment to the Benedictine discipline of manual labor, especially in the fields, and became successful breeders of horses and cattle, exporters of wool, and tenders of vineyards. Often short-handed, they generated a stream of



labor-saving devices and financial monitoring systems. Their impact was so widespread that in 1976, historian Jean Gimpel wrote a book titled "The Industrial Revolution of the Middle Ages."

My own favorite model of community and common work is the 18th century Moravians. Fifty years before the American Revolution, they were creating a Christ-centered, mission-minded community in Saxony (part of modern "East Germany"). They believed that the whole Christian community is called by God into mission, not just a few heroic "missionaries." Some of their number—on average one in every 60 persons, in contrast to the one in 5000 among Protestants and Catholics—were sent out on assignment to bring the gospel to other peoples around the world. But for the Moravians, all who were not "sent out" were fully part of the mission in their work of family support, community building, income-generating, or whatever. This theology of the church as a people in mission bore remarkable fruit on several continents and in fact was a decisive stimulus to the modern missionary movement that began in the early 19th century.

Communities beyond SMC

In the 1950s the Bruderhof (now called Church Communities International) developed their Community Playthings line of classroom furniture and toys. It has developed a large market over the years and still provides the primary support for the CCI communities. In recent years they have developed products to help persons with physical disabilities. Other common work includes Spring Valley Signs (hand carved wooden signs) and Clean Sheen Services (cleaning and property management).

The Jesus Army began in northern England in 1969. By now they have about 700 persons in 60 common purse households around the United Kingdom. Over the years their households have developed a wide range of small businesses so about 250 residents can both work together and support their common life and outreach. The wider Jesus Army Church totals about 2300 persons and carries out an extensive evangelistic program in the cities of England.



Allan Howe looks through paperwork for a customer at Plain and Simple.

Jesus People USA in Chicago began with a few Christian hippies in 1972. Today JPUSA has about 275 members living in their large Friendly Towers building in Chicago's Uptown neighborhood. Most members of JPUSA work in their sizeable building supply business, which generates about 80% of the income for their life and many ministries. With a strong ministry to street people they are very deliberate about using their common work for discipleship and formation.

Church of the Servant King (COSK) in Eugene and Portland, Oregon has well-known bookselling and printing businesses that employ almost twenty people from the community. Jon Stock and Brian Logan lead these operations and can usually be found at Ekklesia Project gatherings and other events where they display their offerings.

Reba Place Fellowship businesses today

For years our Reba Services office has received payment from Reba Place and Living Water churches for the bookkeeping services. Another major client has been Reba Place Development Corporation with its affordable housing efforts.

For years Hilda Carper has turned her colored paper collages into attractive cards and sold them through our local Ten Thousand Villages store under the name of Community Creations. She has used the proceeds to support her favorite charities. Now Tatiana and artists like Chico are exploring ways to expand this little business into other outlets and perhaps other products beside cards.

Plain and Simple Amish Furniture and Reunion Property Management have found financial stability and now help both RPF and some of RPF's start-up ventures.

Anne Gavitt—Reba's all-time top children's book illustrator and painter of animals, especially cats and horses—is now pulling samples of her artwork together so she can launch a pet portrait business, probably on the internet.

Stephanie Vaughan and others are exploring the possibilities of a Reba-based tutoring business. This spring Stephanie has been working for an existing tutoring business to understand how it works.

Ronn Frantz and Barbara Stern are now staffing Reba Works LLC, an RPF limited liability company that will structure investments of RPF and friends of RPF in new business and preserve-rental-property ventures in the city. This summer Adam Vaughan will be working with Reba Works to help persons with microenterprise ideas develop plans to test the feasibility of their products or services (his MBA program at North Park U. is giving him intern work credits for doing this!) Adam recently wrote a fine paper on the Moravians' approach to community, mission and business. Like the Moravians, many at Reba are asking how they can serve the community by participating in its common work. We hope more common work possibilities will emerge naturally as the gifts and hopes of individual members find encouragement and support. □

Our Calling—Our Work

Reflections from Tim Otto

John Alexander, pastor at Sojourners until his death in 2002, often made the point that without being literalists, we should let the Bible inform our thought life in the Church. He surveyed the Bible on the concept of “calling” and found that no one is ever called to paid work. In the Old Testament, occasionally kings and artisans were called to serve God and God’s people. In the New Testament “calling” (among other things) is related to being holy and being God’s holy people. As a biblical people, our primary call is to join in the adventure of being God’s people.

In the time of the Reformation, Luther said that Christians have two callings—a spiritual calling and a temporal calling. Without denying the spiritual calling, he wanted to dignify all kinds of work—tailor, shoemaker, preacher, soldier—that society deemed useful. With industrialization the spiritual calling has been lost. Calling now means our place in the larger economic machine. The sense of God’s call to holiness and community was eclipsed by our participation in the economy. The first question we often ask people is, “What do you do?” Now we are encouraged to think of our job, status, education, our earning power as who we are. This is a tragic narrowing of our identity to what we produce for the mammon economy.

So often at Church of the Sojourners we run into this dual allegiance. We’ve become so socialized in the American Way. We learn how to break off relationships and go where the economy needs us. Even in a serious church like Sojourners our instinct is often loyalty to our job first. Sometimes our jobs include doing good work, kingdom related work, but even this must be kept in perspective.

Our vocation, John Alexander taught us, is church, church, church. Our calling is to be God’s holy people. With your earning work it is nice if you can do something worthwhile and something you like, but that is not the purpose of your life. He challenged us, “Do we think half as much about who we are in the church as we think about our jobs? Sometimes this issue seems to come down to a matter of trust—will God provide for us if our primary commitment is to building God’s family?”

The secular work place rewards gifted people and also demands a ton of them. People’s energy then is expended on their job and little is left over. The rewards of the workplace are very concrete. It is hard for us to see kingdom of God rewards when they are not in numerical terms. At Sojourners, our challenge has been to find jobs that do not consume us. If 40 hours a week is consuming you, then we can say to a sister or brother, we can’t afford to have you miss the life of the church. We can say to each other, we’ll help you cover the costs so you can live a humane life. Together we can seek out how to care for our kids well with parents at home. We live simply, share houses and cars, share tasks, meals and celebrations. These are the dividends of sharing.

When I first came to Church of the Sojourners my thought was to get a Ph.D. in sociology or political science, send out a hundred resumes and go teach wherever I could land a job. But at Sojourners, talking with John Alexander, I came to see being part of God’s people as my primary vocation. I found myself loved while learning to love in return and came to

see that as my most important calling. I volunteered at a hospital AIDS ward and from that experience made the decision to become a nurse. I found that it pays well, has flexible hours and was a deeply meaningful contact with people in need. Nursing has also been incredibly freeing for work in community (I do nursing work just two days a week, leaving the rest of my time for community work). By God’s grace I now do home care and love it. I’m so glad I did not become a sociologist teaching wherever the pay is best.

In retrospect I can see that the church helped me find my true vocation. “To be love in the heart of the church” is the way St. Therese of Lisieux expressed her vocation and mine.

Recently I went back to school, not to increase my earning capacity, but to be a better teacher in the context of the church.

Jack Bernard, another teacher at Sojourners who died in 2003, used to talk about our calling to be saints. Taking a cue from him, I started answering the question “what do you do?” by saying, “I’m trying to become a saint.” I’ve found this leads to interesting conversations. Others now call me to live up to it.

Church of the Sojourners hasn’t yet found a great way to do common work that brings in an income. Some of the guys are scheming to do general contracting work together. They desire a chance to be together and I’d love to see it work. Our moms often hang out together enjoying fellowship while caring for

children. Katie, since returning from Plow Creek, has inspired us with her vision of loving the earth in partnership with Edith in one of our little backyards. Much of our common work has to do with community leadership, worship, and celebration. These opportunities not only give us a chance to do kingdom related work but also to enjoy the good partners that God has given us along the way. □



Meinrad Craighead

Life and Work

By Camille Hobbs

As told to Tatiana Fajardo-Heflin

My story of Work

I came to Reba in the fall of 2006 so that I could be an apprentice and work at The Recyclery (used bicycle shop started by RPF interns). My reasons for being here were to do these things I believed in, but they didn't pay me. I had to figure out how I could make being an apprentice and working at the Recyclery possible – so I worked at Starbucks in order to pay the bills.

I didn't like Starbucks.

I didn't agree with Starbucks, I didn't stand behind it. They wanted me to "sell," and I wanted to tell people to question their consumption. Working at Starbucks was just the way that I could make money during my off-time so that I could do what I really cared about in every one of my extra hours.

Over the summer of 2007, we (the collective leadership) at The Recyclery realized that we were earning enough money to start paying people (ourselves) for part-time staff and mechanical work. That freed up some of my time, and not long after, I was asked to become a youth leader at Reba Place Church. If I had these jobs, it meant I wouldn't have to work at Starbucks anymore.



Paying Job #2—being a skating ballerina with Reba Place Church youth group girls.

My small group and I discerned quickly that it would be best for me to take this work for the church and for the Recyclery and no longer work for Starbucks.

I used to have to earn money in order to be able to do what I really wanted to do in my free time. Now I am able to make money doing what I want to do. And, in addition to my paid work, I also started and organized the compost club, work at the community free-store, live in household, and take part in RPF life as a practicing member.

Blessings and Curses

As with all work, my work comes with both blessings and curses.

The blessing is that I really believe in what I'm doing. My work is in line with my ethics. It's not just a means to an end, but it's a life-giving thing. It's what I would be doing even if I wasn't getting paid.

But that doesn't mean that it's not overwhelming. The curse is that there is so... much... to do. There are so many *good* things to do! Living and working in community means interwoven job responsibilities. I live with people that I work with, and so I'm always thinking about work. I have to learn to hold myself to boundaries – when is "work" and when is "household"? Both are work, but different. As Barb Grimsley says, "You wear many hats."

So it's hard to remember that rest is an equally important part of work, and that it needs to be scheduled and respected. It's just as important as fixing bikes or handing out free food. It all goes together and without rest, it's not going to work.

I also realize that it's a privilege to live this kind of lifestyle – not everyone can do this. It's only because I'm living with the Fellowship that my cost of living can be so low, and that I can get paid for fixing bikes and talking to youth which frees me



Paying Job #1—Camille at a Recyclery bike sale.

up to do compost and work at a free-store.

A "new definition of work"...

When I go home for Christmas, and I talk to my grandma, she will always ask me, "What are you doing? Where do you work now?" I have a hard time answering that question because I consider everything work. Household, composting, resting, meetings, making dinner, fixing bikes, growing tomatoes, mentor meetings, making applesauce. In the past, I viewed work as what you do so that when you're not working you can do what you want to do. But now my work is what I want to do – regardless of whether I'm being paid for it. Work is an overarching term for "what fills up my time." Whether or not I'm being paid for it, it's equally important and equally a priority. Household, bikes, youth group, or applesauce. I see them as glorifying to God, and that is what matters.

So now when someone asks me about the work I do, or why I do what I do, I'm afraid I'll talk too much – because I care so much about it!

I think this is what God intended work to do – for it to be something we can stand behind, not something we do just to make money. I feel thankful to do work now that is purposeful and seems to be more in line with God's intentions. □

Redeeming Work

Everywhere They Put Their Eyes, They See Food: Abundance in the Eyes of Karen Refugees

Stories collectively told by Jubilee Partners to Gabriela Gatlin

"I think God has blessed the Karen by giving them very little. With little, they have time for each other. If they had a lot they would be distracted," Eh Kaw Htoo said to Russ.

Eh Kaw Htoo is a Karen refugee from Burma, the most recent group of refugees to pass through Jubilee Partners. He and many other Karen



have experienced years of scarcity and hardship in Burma and Thailand. Their refugee story is long and too complicated for me to understand in a short time. From what I piece together, years ago (and still to this day) Karen fled Burma to Thailand. For some years, the Thai allowed Burmese soldiers to enter the Karen camp and terrorize the refu-

gees. After some time, the UNHCR provided protection and rations (rice, salt, oil, flour) to the Karen who lived in the camps, and they supplemented their rations from the "nothingness" around them. There had been a rat infestation in the area before the camp was settled, but five years later, not a single rat remained.

The Karen families at Jubilee tell the story of how their Baptist church in the refugee camp was able to purchase a guitar to lead the songs in worship. Each of the fifty families tithed one cup of rice per month from their rations. Each month a member of the church then went to the neighboring village and sold the tithes of rice to the Thai villagers. After two years of faithful tithing, the church was able to purchase a guitar.

For the Karen, part of the value of food and possessions comes from the struggle and the creativity that provides it. The staff at Jubilee marvel at the abundance of food that the Karen find at Jubilee. As Chou commented to me, "Everywhere they put their eyes, they see food." The tips of green briars in the woods, green onions growing in a ditch, squirrels, voles, all insects, snapping turtles from the



The Jubilee pond—location of many a turtle hunt!

pond (alligator snapping turtles are too heavy to catch).

One day Russ stood on the spillway and watched Eh Kaw Htoo hunt turtles at the pond. Turtles, Russ learned, are best caught in the water and not on land or floating log. Eh Kaw Htoo crouched in the tall grass by the shore of the pond and watched a snapping turtle sunning itself on a log. When the snapping turtle slipped into the pond, Eh Kaw Htoo sprung out from the grass, hiked up his skirt and raced into the water. He dove down until he caught the snapping turtle in his hands and then he flung it to shore where his son was waiting to catch the turtle. The next Sunday Eh Kaw Htoo caught five snapping turtles to share at the Jubilee potluck, and there was a miraculous abundance of snapping-turtle leftovers throughout the following week! □

Life and Work: Joan Vogt

By Joan Vogt

When I am asked, "what is your work?", the first thing that comes to mind is telling about The Harvest. Everyone at Reba knows about that – it is our community food co-op. The Harvest story begins many years ago, with a scene of disarray... used kitchen items and clothes for sale along with sacks of grains and food items. Little visitors called mice made their home in The Harvest. It was quite a daunting task to bring order and make it mouse-proof. However, this challenge tapped into my gifts of creativity and hard work. For many years Jane Sprague and I were a team. Then Penny Lukens joined the force. Re-

cently as the Harvest orders have increased three fold, the task became daunting! Then a surprising and unexpected helper came along named Ruth Johnson. She was speedy and gifted! At the present time Tatiana has taken over the cheese order which has been another blessing. Most of the work of The Harvest is hard work... emptying 25-50# sacks of food, ordering, keeping up with the demands and fighting moths in the summer. But despite all of this, it is rewarding work with happy and grateful shoppers.

The next thing I share is the creative work of homemaking which has been a great blessing and joy to me over many years – but again, work! When making a meal for guests, I find myself putting thought and energy into setting a beautiful table with home cooked food. As my mother would say

– "The best for guests!"

Another type of work for me has been making a personalized quilt every year for a 10 year old grandchild along with a book of stories, stories of their ancestors and the child's own story. This work has been very life giving, often restoring my soul. I have come to know that creative work that is God-given brings much joy and blessing.



Joan's pricing work—buckets of nuts and dry goods at The Harvest

“It is such a privilege to live the things that are on my heart and to trust God for daily bread.”

Life and Work: Julius Belser

--as told to David Janzen

[Julius (77 yrs old) has served in many capacities at Reba over the years. He and Peggy have anchored the Clearing household for more than three decades. I asked him recently to talk about his work—which does not look like retirement any time soon. Practical service in community, pastoral care to family, continued learning, community organizing, justice advocacy, and prophetic dreaming somehow flow together with seamless unity in Julius’s vocation. —dhjj]

Our most significant experience in these days is our household, The Clearing. We tend and care for one another in these relationships that have grown up over the years. This work has many practical parts—getting the van fixed up, repairs to Bob’s power chair, getting the ramp to function right. Bob is increasingly unable to steer his chair which needs modifications. We are painting Hilda’s room while she is on vacation. This morning I have to get Bob’s prescriptions. At the same time, I don’t want household life to squeeze out family. Kinship is also a community, a gift, a ministry. I just had a long talk with grand daughter Hilda who is concerned about her fiance’s health just a month before the wedding. I’ve just had talks with Jacob and Betsy too.

On Tuesdays I can catch up with prayer, reading and journal writing by taking a day away. Peggy and I have lunch together that day away from the household.

I’m treasurer for Share Circle which takes quite a block of time. We need some consultation on how to track fund-raising in Guerra Freitas’s vision to start a university in Angola. I’m on the boards of Reba Place



Julius Belser (top row, center) with the Clearing household, taken Fall 2007

Development Corporation, Evanston Community Development Association, and the H.E.Lane Center that offers services to ex-convicts. The challenge is how to approach all these needs with trust in God rather than anxiety.

I’m puzzled how to take care for the poor in Evanston. How do we protect the interests of those who need affordable housing? I feel increasingly overwhelmed by the diminishing options that government structures offer. I question whether we should be assisting the poor to move out of a neighborhood that is getting too expensive. Only a jubilee approach will do. These are some of the concerns that God has laid on my heart for family, community and for the poor.

I heard a lecture last week by Ray Bakke who is concerned that Christian leadership development and the church be geared to what God is doing currently. Fuller Seminary, he points out, is spending 160 million dollars on buildings. The great needs of the church are in the 3rd world. When you train doctors they are sent to the county hospitals. Why not have seminaries where the needs are? So much of the church’s attention is geared to the wealthy and privileged. What is the task of the church? We must be close to the poor, to dream about this and let the Lord use our imaginations.

It is such a privilege to live the things on my heart and to trust God for daily bread. □



Hope Fellowship News

By Matt Porter and Fernando Arroyo

Greetings from Hope Fellowship! We pray that the spring seasons of Lent and Pentecost were well received throughout Shalom Missions communities. Here we spent our Lenten devotions learning about God's gifts to us. The various practices that comprise the life of the church were our theme, and we had several vibrant and useful rounds of conversations on topics such as communion and baptism. Some members of our community have recently begun to inquire about baptism, making these conversations necessary as well.

Our Lenten season culminated in our traditional Easter retreat to a nearby camp. This year, the retreat was remarkably well attended. More than forty members participated. The weekend began with a Good Friday service and ended with a celebration of the Resurrection on Easter Sunday morning at a "sunrise" service that began at 8:30am. A few extra hours of sleep were necessary after a busy Saturday of community recreation. There was an entire day's worth of opportunities for conversation and deepening of relationships. Some favoured casual groups sitting on various front porches of the retreat center while others pursued organized games of soccer and capture-the-flag. After dinner, a "Lack of Talent Show" brought everyone together with an evening of entertainment. Some talented individuals offered songs and the like, but everyone



Lack of Talent#1: Small groups sing-off!

participated in dramas or singing competitions between small groups. It was an evening of wild laughter in anticipation of the joy of Easter Sunday.

Over the weekend, two babies were brought to the congregation to be dedicated to God by their parents. Susana and Justin Clark brought their daughter, Isabel, while Eddie and Karina Martin dedicated their son, Josue. A few weeks later, Fernando and Carrie Arroyo dedicated their newborn son, Jonas, and they also officially became members of our church. Hope Fellowship is enjoying the children, and we look forward to watching the children grow up as disciples and members of the community.

Following the Easter retreat, Hope Fellowship finished preparing for a School for Conversion led by Jonathan Wilson Hartgrove and Angel Gallardo. After everyone learned about the various "marks" of the New Monastic movement, a few families participated in the weekend school.

This particular school was the first time Jonathan had led such a weekend in both English and Spanish, and he was ably assisted by Angel to this end. Hope Fellowship members were joined by a cell group from a local church as well as members of a new Christian community in Austin, Texas. We look forward to seeing the impact this weekend will have on the life of our community.

Spring is usually a busy time for individual members, and this season was no different. Evan Boardman-Alexander, Hannah Bridgewater and Noheli Calvillo have all enjoyed their soccer seasons. Noheli, Carmen and Rigoberto's daughter, recently won an area tournament. Evan proudly shared his trophy with the community. Jesse Rowe-Miller and Emanuel Dominguez have had several musical concerts as well, and all who attended enjoyed their talents. The weather in Waco is as good as it will ever get, and we were able to make good on it with a picnic celebrating Gwendolyn Matias-Ryan's graduation from high school. The family will be traveling to Oaxaca in a few weeks where they will be among family. Paloma will be headed to be beach, Gerson will enjoy his cousins, and Gwendolyn will soon decide between attending a music conservatory in Mexico and enrolling in Baylor University here in Waco next fall. We are praying for her, as we are for all of you. May God guide all we do and bless our communities with satisfying endings as well as hope for new beginnings.



Lack of Talent #2: Interpretive dance!

Plow Creek News

By Heather Munn

The season's gearing up here at Plow Creek with a flood of new arrivals. Mandy Wilkin and Matt and Angela Adams, who came from Reba to help on the farm and relate to folks here, have been gracing us with their presence for three weeks now. Two more new arrivals have come this week: Edward Hamilton, who was at Reba before moving to Grand Rapids last year, and Justin Rose who has done some relating to Reba while studying at North Park. They'll both be PCF interns and also help on the farm. We pray it's a good summer for all these folks, and that they and Plow Creek have a lot to offer each other.

Two other new arrivals are Charles and Susan Lewis, a naturopathic doctor and artist, who've come here seeking community. Their search first led them to another communal



The newest members of the farm team—strawberry-weeding geese!

group, which appeared on the surface to be a Christian community and turned out to be a cult with controlling, abusive patterns and heretical theology. But they still believe enough in community to choose Plow Creek as their landing-place now that they have extricated themselves from the previous community. Charles and Susan are now working on the farm half-time as they take some time to recover from the experience.

Erin and Carlos were married on May 4th in a bilingual ceremony—



Heather and Paul Munn (4th and 5th from right) with their first "come and see" retreat guests.

should say trilingual, because it included a prayer in K'kechi, Carlos' mother tongue. The Common Building was decorated for the occasion with little white flags, Guatemalan cloths, and some pictures of Carlos' family, some of whom weren't able to attend. His brother stood in for his parents, and read a letter from them aloud.

Paul and Heather Munn held their first retreat the weekend of May 11th, a preliminary "come and see" retreat for contacts in Chicago who hope to refer retreat guests later on. Justin Williams, an intern at Emmaus Ministries, attended, as did Ken and Judy Kalina, who used to be at Reba quite a while back and are now active in the recovery ministry at New Life Community Church in Chicago. Rich

Foss, Boo Graham, and Jim Fitz, the Munns' retreat advisors from Plow Creek, attended the retreat as well. The theme for the weekend was the Magnificat.

What else? Our flock of geese is having its first crack at eating weeds in the strawberry field today, and not a moment too soon.

It looks like we will not have Plow Creek chickens after all this year, but since the Zehrs' chickens are still merrily laying those lovely eggs with the orange yolks we can get by without them! Evergreen Leaders, Rich Foss's nonprofit, is (probably, at this point) receiving an unused bank branch in Tiskilwa as a donation and hoping to sell it to a bank. (We'd actually be able to bank without driving all the way to Princeton again!)

Preparations for PAPAfest are underway. The farm, with so many summer workers this year, is getting itself organized with a weekly scheduling meeting and photocopied schedule. The days are warming up, the irises and phlox are coming out, and when you look down the strawberry rows you see hundreds of little white blossoms. The time is near at hand. □



Pepper-planting. Pictured, L to R: Paul Munn, Matt Adams, Meg Foxvog, Mandy Wilkin, and Heather Munn.

Redeeming Work

Sojourners News

By Katie Piché

Sojourners, as you may or may not know, does not have a common business or a common means of earning income. This however doesn't mean that we don't have common work. As in other communities there are meals to be cooked, dishes to be washed, workdays to be worked, worship services to be planned, and other opportunities to live alongside each other. When it is possible, we encourage people to work half-time or three-quarters-time, so there is time for us to work, meet, eat, pray, and play together.

On the topic of play, we recently had



This year's apprentices at Sojourners (L-R: Krista Creeger, Nate Pequette, Dawn Langston, and Matt Creeger) are all staying as practicing members.

a conversation about our culture of socializing. Sojourners have come a long way in learning how to have fun together; we are at least attempting to strike a balance with intense meeting times and the labors of life. Once a month we have either Women's Night Out or Men's Night Out. In the last year or so we decided to have this event fall on the same Saturday as our once a month Workday in order to remind ourselves that in addition to working together, there is the need for having fun together. Our church conversation brought to light that most of us would like to be hanging out with

each other more than we are, and it also came with an encouragement to be initiating with each other. Part of this means that planners should try out some spontaneity, and the spontaneous should try on plans. One difficulty we run into is that we feel too busy, and our emotional energy runs low.

We have decided to work our way through the Gospel of John for the rest of the year, more or less. Tim Otto has been heading this up, and Jeff Hare has been doing the contextual research to pull us into the setting. Over the past two weeks we have been looking at the woman at the well in chapter 4. On Sunday, Tim Otto reminded us that Jesus has the living water to sus-

tain us, and that we do not, despite our efforts, preserve ourselves. This living water even includes us tapping into God's energy for our emotional energy.

We have Discernment Meetings as a church three times a month, but there is a lot of extra discernment going these days. Each year the apprentices and practicing members check in with the church on what it means to be here and whether or not they should stay. All four of this year's apprentices have decided to remain as practicing members. It also looks like some of



The new Creeger Family: Ian, Jadie, and Cadence

the practicing members are going to become novice members; although which ones exactly are yet to be determined. We are getting tight on housing and would appreciate prayers as we think about next year's apprentices moving in.

We are also doing extra discernment about our leadership structure. We have jumped into a full-on evaluation of our current structure. In March everyone in the congregation participated in an evaluation of our leaders. In April the leaders took a two-day retreat to discuss the many layers of this process, and also to evaluate themselves (and each other) as leaders. One of these layers is leadership development and using the gifts of newer people. Matt Toney has been participating with the pastoral care team and explor- →→→



Louise enjoying her birthday jam.

ing serving the church in this way.

Laura Hare, who had been on sabbatical, has come back to leadership as an overseer with Dale Gish and Zoe Mullery.

On April 17, 2008 Cadence Lynn Creeger was born to Jadie and Ian Creeger, discovering for the first time what it is like to breathe air.

We give thanks that Josefina Bran's (Lizbeth Bran's mother) eye surgery went well.

Out of the conversation on culture and socializing, we learned that Louise Harris' ultimate hang-out is a jam session or a modern-day hymn sing. For her birthday we surprised her with just that.

We would appreciate prayer for us and Mike and Teri Creeger as we talk about the possibilities of Teri's elderly mother moving in with us or close by. This brings up issues of our non-accessible housing and how to care for those who can't climb ten to thirty stairs at a time. □



Antonia Guatemala plays the flute in concert

JFK and the Unspeakable: Why He Died & Why It Matters, by James Douglass

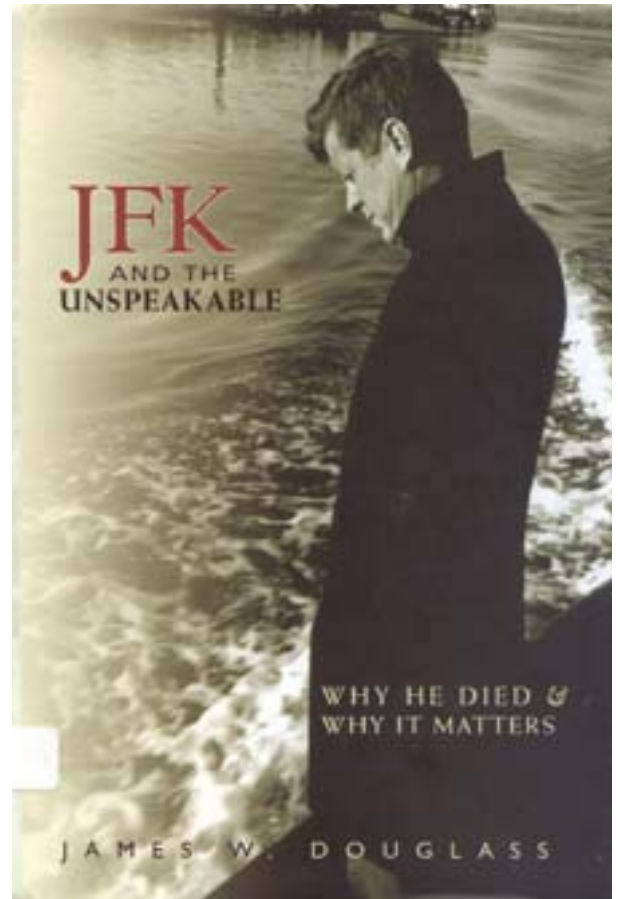
Reviewed by David Janzen

In recent days Don Mosley from Jubilee Partners sent me a copy of a new book from one of my favorite peace activists and theologians, James Douglass: *JFK and the Unspeakable: Why He Died and Why It Matters*. Douglass masterfully weaves together the many strands of the story showing that John F. Kennedy was in the process of conversion from anti-communist Cold-warrior to an increasingly embattled peace president on a mission to collaborate with Soviet Premier, Nikita Krushchev, to end the nuclear arms race and its threat of global annihilation.

Douglass marshals the compelling evidence that forces within the military-industrial complex and the national security establishment had come to see Kennedy as a traitor who had to be eliminated, and the CIA made it happen. The book includes interviews with insiders of this assassination and its cover-up, who found the courage to clear their consciences before they died. The book-title reference to "the unspeakable" comes from a series of letters and articles by Thomas Merton in the time of Kennedy's presidency. Merton discerned most accurately the shadowy actors and forces willing to destroy the world in order to save their own power.

The more you know about the murderous anti-democratic powers at the heart of American history, the more you may be driven to prophetic action and to trust in God for protection in this calling. The real actor in this drama, according to Jim Douglass, is God. God has worked through Spirit-moved actors to prevent human antagonists from destroying the world--for now.

Douglass is planning similar volumes on the prophetic callings and violent deaths of Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King, and Malcolm X—persons grasped by the Spirit who came to see the supreme urgency of making a place for all humans to become sharers in a common destiny.



Reba Place News

by Annie Spiro and Tatiana Fajardo-Heflin

Greetings to all of you SMC members and friends from here in the Reba Place Fellowship office. One of the most exciting developments since the last newsletter is the final arrival of spring. Out our windows we can finally see green grass, leaves on trees, and some lovely tulips and lilac. Winter held its grip longer than usual this year, so these signs of new life and symbolic redemption were slow to come, and all the more sweet for their tardiness.

We have also been seeing some good growth and redemption around the community, not least with the announcement of four covenant members. Stephanie and Adam Vaughan, and Chico and Tatiana Fajardo-Heflin, all became full members of the community within the past few months. The Vaughans are also sharing in the common purse while Chico and Tatiana have established a "covenant partner" relationship outside of the common purse as they observe tax resistance. Adam and Stephanie are also embarking on another communal adventure as they expect their first child later this year!

Albert Steiner, a long-time RPF member, was recently honored for forty years of work at Northwestern University. He has been a leader in developing computer systems for the University – starting before per-



Sally Youngquist enjoying rest and relaxation at the May Fellowship retreat.



RPF Apprentices (and leader) at their recent retreat—from L to R: Kate Bierma, Gavin Betzelberger, Tyler Chen, Andrew Freeman, Elizabeth Stone, Chris Watson, David Hovde, and Anali Gatlin.

sonal computers even existed. We are proud of him and thankful to have a small insight into his work which we don't get to be part of on a day-to-day basis.

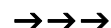
Community gardening efforts continue, and many little pieces of land (rented garden plots, containers, and backyard raised beds) are planted full with radishes, carrots, lettuce, and an array of other tasty things. It seems like just about every household has been nurturing small seedlings reaching for the sun in their windowsills. Char Oda is continuing her own small "Sonshine garden" which is not for vegetables, but flowers – intended to be centerpieces for the bi-monthly Sonshine meals she coordinates for mentally and physically disabled adults in our church and community.

Along with the surge of interest in gardening and growing our own food, a number of "Rebites" have relocated to Plow Creek for the growing season. Practicing members Matt and Angela Adams, Mandy Wilkin, and for half-time, Brandon Lane, all departed in late April for our sister community to the west. Mandy is interning with Erin Kindy in the CSA garden, while Matt and Brandon have joined the farm team. Just-graduated-apprentice Chris Watson is also joining them for the month of June. We look forward to reuniting with

these friends periodically as they bring CSA goodies to the Rogers Park and Evanston communities.

In other Plow-Creek-related news, PAPAfest organizing is in full swing, with the festival just under a month away. Melissa DeLong, of the Camden Community Houses, came out recently, and along with Annie Spiro spent a few days with Rick Reha and other PAPAfest planners on site. The summer interns and several others will be heading out a few days before the festival to help Plow Creek and the PAPA organizers with making signs, building a stage, maybe digging out a pond... physical details that will help the event run smoothly, and hopefully benefit the host community as well. We're looking forward to this weekend of music, connectivity and greater insight into the kingdom of God with great anticipation...and maybe a touch of trepidation. Prayer would be greatly appreciated as we enter some of the final planning stages.

Our apprentice group is coming to the close of their nine-month term, and we have recently heard reflections from them about their experiences in the program. They spent a Monday night seminar sharing with everyone the covenant they had created to live by during



their time at Reba. They then shared ways in which they had succeeded at upholding the covenant and ways that they struggled with it. They also shared how the covenant and the apprentice program have affected them individually, and how they were feeling about the whole experience as the program came to an end. The group especially reflected on how the apprentice group interacted with the rest of the community, specifically the covenant members of the Fellowship. All who attended the evening's sharing were thankful for the honesty of the apprentices. We all continue to seek ways that we can better attend to the needs of the young people who are coming to us.

Some of us have recently been meeting regularly with Bud Ogle and

others from Good News Partners, a diverse group of ministries in a low-income neighborhood between Reba (Evanston) and Living Water (Rogers Park/Chicago). Bud hopes to retire from his position, and so we are beginning a process of exploration and discernment about whether some folks from Reba Place might assist in the work and ministry he has carried for decades. Allan Howe may join the Good News board of directors as a way to get better acquainted with the ministry and North of Howard neighborhood.

We recently spent a weekend away for our annual Fellowship retreat, exploring what it means for all of us to take part in the mission of God and of this community. It was a special treat to have the Clark family



Micah Clark, rockstar-in-the-making?

with us for the weekend (as they have been on Sabbatical at Plow Creek since mid-August). This whet our appetite for when they return to us (yay!) in a couple of months. □

Fellowship of Rogers Park News

By Sally Youngquist

Common work and common life are increasing in Rogers Park these days. Nieta Jones and her adult son C.J. moved in with the Frantz family in January, forming a new two-family household among us. Ronn Frantz is giving leadership to the formation of a Limited Liability Corporation (LLC) arising out of Reba Place Fellowship called Reba Works. He has hired Barbara Stern, a practicing member of FRP, as his bookkeeper/assistant. Through Reunion Property Management, he also provides employment for Andy Ross, a practicing member, and Eric Dahlaw, former practicing member. We are preparing to say farewell to the Dahlaws as they move to Bloomington/Normal, IL this summer for Eric to finish his bachelor's degree.

We are all heavily immersed in Living Water Community Church with its accompanying currents of life. Neighborhood kids have invited themselves to our Wednesday night potlucks and are challenging us to new levels of hospitality, cross-generational fellowship and peace-making.

We stood on holy ground as Ted Eatmon was called home by the Lord early on the morning of April 22 amidst the love, songs and prayers of his church family after a long battle with lung cancer. We enjoyed increasingly multicultural fellowship at our all-church retreat to Camp Friedenswald in Cassopolis, MI April 25-27, especially in hearing from new Cambodian, Burmese and Burundi participants among us. On May 10, many of us celebrated the marriage of Jeremy Carlsen, who grew up at Reba, to Julie Garrett, a refugee resettlement worker who has drawn a lot of our new friends to LWCC. We look forward to celebrating the marriage of

our own Hilda Ginny Frantz to Kevin Casey on June 8.

We are in a season of listening for how God wants us to be in mission together, participating in Christ's work of reconciliation in our church, neighborhood, and world. We continue to seek how to provide low-income housing to the most economically vulnerable among us. Ronn Frantz and others have been exploring mutual interests in the North of Howard neighborhood of Rogers Park with Bud Ogle of Good News Partners. They are also checking out other properties closer to LWCC. Stay tuned for further developments! □



Nieta seems pretty serious about beating Doug in this game during the recent RPF retreat!



June 19-22, 2008

at a familiar farm outside Chicago...

music—workshops—food—friends
camping—skill sharing—art—bartering village

Angela Adams and Annie Spiro have been up to their ears in registration forms, and have noticed that some of you SMC folks haven't yet sent those in! If you are interested in coming, which you definitely should, please go to **www.papafestival.org** and register. You **must register** in order to attend the festival!

Valle Nuevo Housing Pact Signed

Shalom Mission Communities has just concluded an agreement with Habitat for Humanity, El Salvador; with the Habitat affiliate in Waco, Texas; and with the Directiva of our Salvadoran sister community to build 20 houses for the neediest families in Valle Nuevo. We have sent funds to buy materials for ten soon-to-be-built houses and now we need to raise about \$22,000 more to make affordable the last ten houses, which are slated for construction in early 2009.

A delegation of ten persons from Hope Fellowship, Church of the Servant King, and Reba is going to visit Valle Nuevo (June 27 to July 6), to work alongside ten families who are building permanent homes, and to participate in a series of workshops on non-violence. SMC is sponsoring Adaia Bernal, a Colombian veteran of non-violent struggles in defense of human rights, to lead these sessions. Please pray for this delegation, but even more, for the campesino communities on the edge of poverty, who know the tragedy of war first-hand, and who struggle with how to respond when their leaders are threatened with death and their lands with confiscation.

Shalom Connections
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