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June 2009: People of the Resurrection

A People of the Resurrection

By Joe Gatlin

"And you shall be my people, and I will be your God." (Ezekiel 36:28) The statement is so elegant, the formula so simple. Imagine its twelve words as poles, and its two clauses as the complementary sides of a large tent, a wonderful home where God dwells with the people.

That's our imagination. Underneath the tent, well, it's chaos. There are raucous debates about the ownership of the tent, some escalating into fisticuffs. A few people have grabbed poles and begun bludgeoning others with judgment. One group has painted a logo on the outside and trademarked a new slogan, "MY People – Privilege, Power, and Plenty," while off in each corner a few tortured, anxious souls wring their hands, shake their heads, and mumble, "Lifestyle, I just can't get it right."

"And you shall be my people, and I will be your God." A second to memorize, four millennia (and counting) to master. Moreover, in the spirit of 1 Peter 2:10, "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people," we, the people of Shalom Mission Communities, are relative newcomers at this peoplehood-of-God-thing.

Our efforts remind me of our new dog, Quijote. A little over a year ago we walked the aisles at the animal shelter trying to choose a new family pet. Some of the mutts stood right at the front of the cage, wagging their tails, begging to be liberated. One hung



Quijote enjoying some time with his master.

back in the shadows. Shy, we thought; meek, we hoped. In the shelter play yard he was very social, maybe a little too exuberant in his affection, but he will be obedient, we told ourselves.

"And you shall be our dog, and we will be your master," we declared. In context there was an obvious transaction, we the human beings adopted the dog. We chose him; we went and got him; we paid for him; we even named him. In crude terms, we became his owner.

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When we got home we discovered Quijote has an endearing, although annoying, trait; he loves to play. Annoying because his favorite game, actually his only game, is to stand on his back legs and overwhelm nearby humans. He is a one-act wonder. He is very good at it, and he plays it all the time. “No, Quijote,” – all the time – “Sit, Quijote,” – incessantly – “STAY, Quijote,” – without end – “ROLL OVER AND PLAY DEAD, NOW QUIJOTE!” If not in his mind, certainly in his actions, Quijote is the alpha being of the household. He is oblivious to our agenda.

Perhaps Quijote has a bit of dyslexia. ‘D-o-g.’ It is not spelled ‘g-o-o-d.’ Or maybe he just doesn’t catch the *gestalt* of the relationship. “Our dog” is different than “your master.” The first communicates possession: we own you. The second communicates identity: you belong to us. You wear a tag that says you belong to us. You dog; we master.

Actually, Quijote doesn’t think these things through; he’s just not that bright. If he could understand English, I would tell him, “You know, it’s not that hard to



Empty tomb at Plow Creek’s Resurrection Day celebration.

be a good dog. Just relax and pay attention to the human beings. Watch for our cues, O.K.?”

In the universe of human beings, we in the Christian community movement are so Quijote-like. Quijote likes to play; we like to create and make things, namely community. We are not an old, lazy dog, but young, full of energy, and with the mentality of a pup. If we are to be the people of God, then, by golly, we will get busy and build community. We’ll make rules, write covenants, decide on a just lifestyle, and we’ll adhere to all of it. We will

achieve peoplehood-of-God, or we will bust a gut trying.

God probably finds our vigor an endearing trait. After all, God chose us, came and got us, paid for us, and made a home for us. But probably God also gets a bit annoyed with us, and says, “All right, all ready! Relax a bit. Watch for my cues!” Of course we’re too busy jumping up and down to hear. We can be sure God won’t ever tell us, “Roll over and play dead,” but “Let those who have ears, hear!” may be said with the same tone of exasperation.

Hearing is part of our problem. “You shall” sounds like “you should.” “You should be my people. Come on, folks, snap to it! Become a people, namely my people.” Isn’t that what God is saying?

The statement, though, is a declaration not a command. “You shall” means “you are,” or in other words, “I am claiming you.” It is performative language, similar to the “I do” or I will” in a wedding vow; saying it does it.

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But unlike the matrimonial covenant, which takes two, the establishment of the people of God is executed by one party. God declared we are God's people. We can no more make ourselves the people of God than Quijote could make himself our dog.

That peoplehood-of-God status cannot be achieved by our actions is hard to accept. Nevertheless it is scripturally true. Prior to the consummation statement in Ezekiel 36:28, God set the stage in verse 26, "A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."

It appears to be almost one-sided. We're just lying there, unconscious on the operating table while God is doing a heart and spirit transplant. "Relax," God says. I am sure it is a little difficult, even for the Almighty, to get all of those connections right when we are reared up on our hind legs pawing anything that moves.

No, wait; it is even more extreme than that, according to Ezekiel. We are not just under the influence of anesthesia, we are dead. Not mostly dead, but real dead. Not just recently dead, but dry-bone dead. And the remarkable thing is, even when we are just a bunch of scattered dry bones, God does not give up on our hearing ability: "O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord." (Ezekiel 37:4)

God clothes the bones with flesh, knits them together with sinews, and then quickens this new body with the breath of the spirit. Our becoming the people of God is a class one miracle. "And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you

up from your graves, O my people." (Ezekiel 37:13) The people of God are the people created by resurrection.

Yes, it is God's work, but surely our involvement in this miracle of becoming is not limited to lying under a tree and just gnawing on a metaphysical blessing our master threw to us. Well, actually that's close. In his closing words in the gospel of Luke, Jesus had one command for his disciples, "STAY." (I wonder, did Jesus have a dog?) "Stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." (Luke 24:49)

There is more, of course, although it may still not be the role that we would aspire to for ourselves. In this pivotal passage in Luke, the Resurrection shifted from being the validation of Jesus' messiahship to becoming the identity of his disciples.



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People of the Resurrection

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Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city..."
Luke 24: 45-49

The function of the disciples was to be "witnesses of these things:" the suffering and resurrection of Jesus and the proclamation of repentance and forgiveness throughout the world. "You will be witnesses," Luke re-quoted Jesus when he picked up the story in Acts. (Acts 1:8) It is another one of those non-commands. Witnessing is not what you will do, but a witness you will be.

The tent glows brightly, giving a light so all the world may see creation's design: resurrection, repentance, and forgiveness. We do have a lifestyle, a covenant, and a rule.

Resurrection is our lifestyle.

We once were dead, but now we are a people created by the breath of God. We are a people who generate life and wholeness. We are a people, regardless of circumstance, with an undying hope. We know the ending will be good.

Repentance is our covenant.

I once heard Jack Bernard explain repentance as that relation where we abandon our opposi-

tion and turn our face to God. We are a people who find our life in Jesus. We are a people who unrelentingly are in relationship with one another.

Forgiveness is our rule.

We have been accepted and loved. We are communities of Jubilee, proclaiming the cancellation of personal and societal debts. We refute the pessimism and cynicism of determinism. We are zones of grace and healing in the world.

We are a people of the Resurrection. "For we know we have passed from death to life when we love the brothers and sisters." (1 John 3:14) □



12 Years of Shalom
Connections: A rope
that holds us
By David Janzen

Joanne and I have escaped to the Plow Creek cabin for a couple of days of retreat. We've enjoyed the Creekers potluck welcome, gotten plenty of rest, listened to a riot of birdsong, and witnessed a startled deer snort and bound away from us on Daisy Hill. But while here, I'm also paging through a fat binder with twelve years of Shalom Connections newsletters. For 48 issues you've put up with me as the newsletter editor, but now I have passed on the whole caboodle to Analí Gatlin. To mark this "regime change," Analí and I have agreed to write a pair of essays--one looking into a grimy rear-view mirror and the other through a newly washed windshield.

Twelve years ago I visited Reba Fellowship members Richard and Ruth Anne Friesen on mission with the Mennonite Central Committee in the small mountain-locked town of Cotzal, Guatemala. There I was utterly fascinated to witness all stages of the rope-making craft practiced in public view on the verandas and in the streets of this town that calls itself "the Maguey Capital of the World"—in Spanish and Ixil, of course.

Ropes made the old-fashioned way begin as twine that forms as if by magic from a handful of fibers twisted together by a hand-

spun spindle. (Oh, that's why they call it a "spindle," cause it's a stick in a wheel that spins!) These fibers, beaten from leaves of the Maguey cactus, are so fine and strong that if you try to tear one, it will cut your fingers. The fibers are rough and a bit sticky—twisted together they make a strong twine useful for tying bundles and for endless children's play.



But in Cotzal the women patiently make miles and miles of twine, a handful of fibers at a time, in order to produce ropes, and ropes that are hundreds of feet long are fashioned in the street. Three twines are tied to a porch post and stretched several hundred feet down a straight cobblestone lane, uphill and down, past trotting horses, donkey carts, herds of goats, and the occasional diesel truck. On the far end of the three twines, one sister pulls them taut and spins them together with a wooden hand-crank mechanism. Meanwhile, the other sister walks along the snaking fibers, loosely clasping the point where the spinning twines come together, producing an even twist that progressively transforms three twines into one small rope--perhaps for sale as

lariats in the market. But sometimes three or more lariats are spun together to make a thick rope that can pull a truck out of a ravine.

Why am I so fascinated by the making of rope? Well, because a rope is like a newsletter, like a community in time, like the church where people and their stories are spun together into a cord that we hold onto and that hold us. Our fiber may be short or long, but by God's twisting spindle and shaping hand, the rope goes on far beyond our finite life or contribution. It extends to eternity, tied to God and used by God for the purpose of reconciling all of us to one another in peaceful service for the sake of the world. You might even say that God's very nature is rope-

like--Father, Son and Holy Spirit wound together in common love and purpose. And the church is like a rope that preschool kids hold onto as they walk to the park—"we all stay together and no one gets lost."

In reading Shalom Connections I am fascinated anew by the creative efforts of so many people who have poured their talents and fresh experiences of community into the newsletter. I want to mention a few of those fibers, both short and long.

--The first issue includes a letter of encouragement from John Howard Yoder only months before he died. He urged Reba to develop an archive of learnings

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about what works and does not work in intentional community. Reba has not followed his advice, but the Shalom Connections newsletter has accidentally become such an archive, collecting news of countless communities, along with reflections on what to try and not--available at shalomconnections.org.



However, JoHoYo, as he is called by some of our younger theology buffs, has also been a long fiber, a contributor to every issue in that he has been a "mentor" and source of theological support for this radical calling to be a people of the Resurrection, to follow Jesus together now, not waiting for the revolution to come first.

--The first issue reports on a summer-long visit of two Cabrera sisters, grandmothers from Valle Nuevo, El Salvador—doing their part to build up a sister community relationship that continues to the present with annual visits and transforming collaborations South and North. Valle Nuevo is a sibling in the SMC family.

--Twelve years ago we were three intentional communities in association—Plow Creek, Reba, and Hope Fellowship. But by that time a courtship was underway between Dale Gish of Reba and Debbie Mattier at Church of the Sojourners. By God's grace there was not just a wedding, but a coming together of communities that added Sojo to SMC.

--God has provided wonderful editorial assistants who added their fibers, who put together the newsletter—Sara Belser, Zoe Mullery, Conrad Yoder, Eric Lawrence, Annie Spiro, Analí Gatlin, and countless others in mailing, distribution, and actually reading the paper.

--Various speakers at our conferences and camp meetings have come among us for a time and given us their best, including Richard Hays, Chris Rice, John Alexander, Jack Bernard, Johnathan Wilson-Hartgrove, and others.

--In the second issue, Marcus Rempel reported on the Grain of Wheat community's participation in a military air show protest in Winnipeg. The peace witnesses of our communities at a series of vigils and CPT engagements are an ongoing thread, as is the special friendship of Grain of Wheat.

--Shalom Connections is not just the name of a newsletter, but also reminds us of the network of friends in many communities who have come to our gatherings as we have visited theirs. I want to name a few from the newsletter even if we can not name them all--Jubilee Partners, The Open Door, Koinonia, The Simple Way, Camden House, Church of the Servant King, AC-COREMA in Spain, "The Farm" in South Africa, Wooden Bridge in earlier years, and the unforgettable PAPA Fest camp meeting circus at Plow Creek in 2008.

--In reading my own usually too-long editorials, I am humbled in two ways. I see arrogant pronouncements that strain to sound more radical than we really are. I also read

words where Jesus shines through, convicting me for having drifted into spiritual slackness, operating by easy answers rather than suffering in hope and meeting Jesus afresh in the struggles of life.

I see that Analí is taking over most of the work I have been doing, which gives me freedom to take on other tasks that had been beyond my reach. With her help and your prayers, it seems like my calling to "nurture other communities" is now able to grow a bit. The history of our communities over the past years is a rich storehouse of examples and wisdom that may be helpful to others.

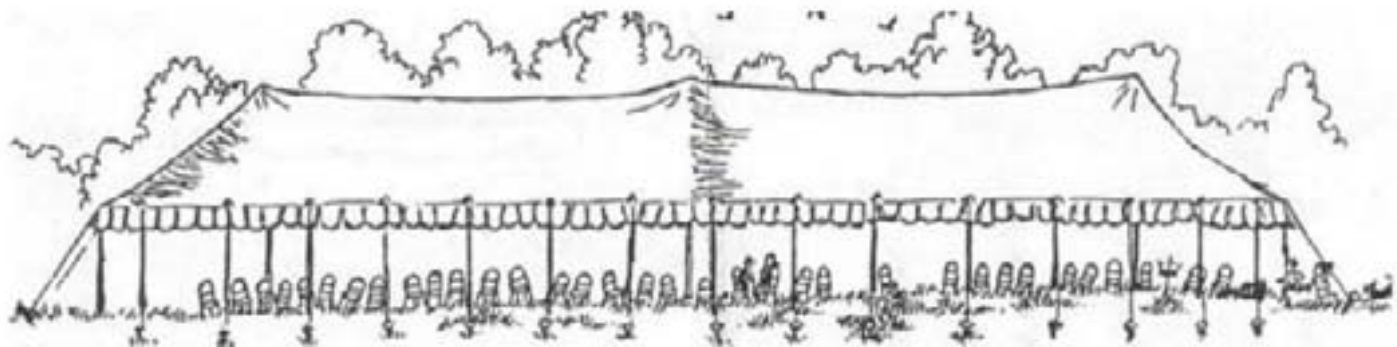


It is a myth, however, that older folks possess wisdom. Wisdom is not a possession that we can dispense like proverbs. Wisdom is knowing when which proverb applies, which earlier communal crisis is applicable to this crisis, which word from Jesus' teaching fits the present moment. Wisdom is something the Holy Spirit gives right now if we have been attentive to Jesus, proverbs, communal experiences over the years, and are not too rushed trying to fix things out of our own anxiety and need for control.

Please pray for me and others as we visit various communities in the months ahead, tending and encouraging what God has planted.

We are a people of the Resurrection. It's not that our bodies die and our spirits live on. No, our bodies and our spirits are already made alive with Jesus' resurrected presence and power. Imagine how you might love if you could not die. Well, that is the power that Jesus gives us now. Oh yes, we get tired, bro-

ken, bleed and wear out. But we are fully alive now and forever. There are days, and there will come a day, when we can no longer hold onto God. But because of Jesus, we are twisted into the rope of a resurrected people. We can dare forgiveness, risk community, and proclaim justice in the assurance that God holds onto us because God's passion for communion empowers us and outlasts all this broken world can put us through. Alleluia! □



*Act of Coordination:
My Memories and
Hopes for SMC*
By Analí Gatlin

One of my first SMC memories was a visit by Hilda Carper and Virgil Vogt to our fledgling community in Waco, Texas. As an eight year old, I was more interested in playing with my dog Good News than sitting through the lengthy meetings. All I really understood about the visit was that Virgil and Hilda had come to offer their support and advice as Hope Community was taking shape. Only a year before, our family had been a part of a church and household that had dissolved. As we were in a state of transition, it was comforting to know that another community cared so much about what was happening in Waco that they sent two people to be with us.

Jump ahead five years. I was now thirteen, had just finished seventh grade, and had only recently convinced my classmates that Hope Community was not like the nearby Branch Daividian cult. Needless to say, outside the Hope Fellowship youth group of three, I did not feel like I had any peers who understood what was important in my life. That summer, Church of the Sojourners sent six teenagers and three adults to Waco for a week of work, play, and Bible study. No one had any idea that week would lead to youth trips between San Francisco, Waco, Chicago, and Tiskilwa over the next four years. No one had any idea it would result in a youth-led retreat at Camp Lake plus a run-in with the Wisconsin police (I promise those canoes tipped themselves over). Certainly, no one had any idea that such an exchange would create friendships that last to this day.

The SMC connection offered me an alternative to the dominant culture I faced as a teenager. Yes, we SMCers may be a little strange—we talked about non-violence before it was cool to bash the war, we live in the same houses or same neighborhoods, we share money in different ways—but as we learn how to become people of the Resurrection, it is comforting to know that we are not doing it alone. For that reason, the SMC camp meetings have become one of my favorite times of the year where we share how God is working among us, receive encouragement, and have some fun.

These SMC relationships have stayed with me, and when I was graduating from college a few years ago and exploring what to do next, I felt God leading me to

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live in another community, to see how they shared life. A few months later, I moved to Reba and have been living in the Clearing household for the last two years. (By the way, now Hilda is my housemate, and Virgil my next-door neighbor). Living in a large intergenerational household, nine months in the Apprenticeship with eight other young adults, learning from patient mentors, and working at a nearby nonprofit—all these have stretched, humbled, inspired, and taught me in ways that I am still trying to unravel.

Last year at Reba, we spent a lot of time talking about work—work that is meaningful to us as individuals, work that challenges, work that serves the community, common work. In December I began wishing that I could support myself by working with SMC. Yet when David Janzen coincidentally approached me a month later to discuss taking over his role as SMC Coordinator, I panicked. A list grew in my mind of the reasons why I could not do the job: I'm young, I don't have much experience, I certainly don't have David's wisdom, there is no way I can be responsible for four communities, I can't tell a joke like David does at every "lack of talent show" (the list was endless). David patiently discussed his role with me, and I realized that the SMC Coordinator initiates and facilitates communications between the communities. The Coordinator is not responsible for the health of each community. I began to feel more comfortable with the job description.



*Sojourner youth travel to Waco summer of 1997.
Standing L-R: Tim Otto, Dan Piché, Doug Selph, Matt Creeger, Ian Creeger, Debbie Gish, Michelle Somers, Jamie Trapnell, Gabriela Gatlin. Sitting L-R: Marvin Trapnell, Anali Gatlin, Hannah Zazvorka, Ruth Boardman-Alexander, Ellie Alexander, John Alexander, Joe Gatlin.*

At the SMC Leader's meeting in January, we realistically assessed what limited experience I could offer and what the SMC needed in a Coordinator—and still the delegates were supportive of the transition. They have continued to offer advice and encouragement these last few months as David and I have overlapped roles.

I will be moving back to Waco at the end of May. Deciding to leave Rebaland has been a hard choice, but I have discerned this with others and feel God calling me back to Hope Fellowship. I am extremely grateful for my time at Reba and for the relationships that God has blessed me with in Chicago. Please pray for me this next month as I leave Reba and transition into life in Waco. Once in Texas, I am looking forward to living with my sister, being near family, and reconnecting with Hope Fellowship. I am thankful that I will be able to continue working as the SMC Coordinator from Waco, which gives me a great excuse to come back and visit!

After my initial hesitation to fill the coordinator position, I have become very energized by this work and am excited to find new ways to serve the communities that have been so important at various stages in my life. At the SMC Leader's meeting in January there was a renewed sense of urgency that SMC should do what it can to foster the growth and sustainability of new communities without neglecting our local communities.

Visiting one another builds up relationships, though it is increasingly expensive to accomplish on a regular basis. However regularly sharing our experiences, celebrations, and prayer concerns in the newsletter is a feasible way to stay connected. I also hope that this coming year we can be faithful to share news and pray for each other during community meetings. And of course, contributing pictures and stories about our lives not only makes the SMC newsletter an entertaining read, but keeps us involved in each other's lives!

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I will be the first to say that I am not a technologically savvy person; however I hope that in the next few months we will have an updated SMC website. Don't panic—we're not going to make the web our primary mode of communicating with one another. Sometimes there are more articles and pictures submitted to the newsletter than there is page space. Also, many of our communities produce helpful papers on everything from common life to financial sharing to discipleship. The website will have space for these additional writings and will hopefully assist us in staying in touch and sharing ideas.

As a former SMC kid, it is important to me to see the young people in our communities engaged in this relationship as well.



David entertaining the crowd with his jokes at the previous SMC retreat.

Barbara Bridgewater has begun planning a youth event for this summer, and I look forward to seeing what connections this will build. I always enjoy hearing what the children and youth are experiencing, and I hope in the coming year, we can encourage and support our youth to write and send other submissions for the newsletter.

I also look forward to strengthening our ties with the Valle Nuevo community. The relationship with Valle Nuevo, El Salvador, has been formative in my life. Pastor and Rosita's porch with its cleanly swept tiles, chickens running between legs, and promise of good company—has reminded me that the Church has no borders. As I've heard from folks in Valle Nuevo and folks within the SMC communities, this relationship is special and something worth continuing. Our yearly delegation is one way that we maintain this relationship as are visits from our Valle Nuevo brothers and sisters to our SMC camp meetings. This relationship comes with some extra challenges (political, cultural, and socioeconomic) and requires creativity in order to keep it a respectful, just, and Christ-centered relationship. However, I believe this connection with Valle Nuevo gives each of our communities a fuller glimpse of the gospel.



A quiet moment on Pastor and Rosita's porch.

I am eager to see the ways God will be working in our communities this year and the ways that we will be able to support each other. As our communities change, there is room for change in the SMC relationship as well. Please share your hopes and ideas for the SMC with me. Thinking back on the Sojo youth trip to Waco, I am reminded that we can never predict the outcome of our relationships and work together. So it is with hopeful anticipation that we see where God leads us in the coming years. □

"And you shall be my people,
 and I will be your God."
 (Ezekiel 36:28)

Hope Fellowship News

by Gabriela Renée Gatlin

“Have you ever danced with Javier?” Barbara asked us while we drove home from a dance class. She continued, “I did once. I didn’t know what was happening, but he had me do things I had never done before. We would end up on one side of the room, and I didn’t even know how we got there.” Javier and Norma are dancers *verdaderos*. In fact, Norma first came to the U.S. while on tour with a ballet folklórico troupe from Mexico. Many of the rest of us in Hope Fellowship are not true dancers, but this spring we branched out.

Christy and Neil, along with others in their cell group, took a Western dance class. Christy explained, “Being yankees and all, we needed some remediation.”

Matt, Michelle, Fernando, Carrie, Joe, Nancy, Philip, Barbara, Bethany, Laurie, Luz, Gabriela and Norma all took a Latin dance class at our community college.

We have celebrated our new abilities with a dance party in the front yard of our Meeting House (with amplified music loud enough to rattle the crumbling walls of the burnt Sanger Heights school building across the street), dancing at our Easter retreat, and dancing at an upcoming neighborhood block party.

We hope to dance with any of you who might be coming to Waco later



Hope Fellowship welcomes new members, Bethany Smith, Laura and Alan Caruthers, during the Easter retreat.

this year (hint, hint . . .). Should we have some mini-lessons, a Shalom Dancing with the Stars, a variety show? Give us your ideas! Above all, we hope to see Jeff Hare’s hula skirt and coconuts along with a come-back from the macarena-dancing, flower-print dressed Reba men of the 2001 retreat. We are waiting for you!

Through our church teachings, we have continued our 2009 theme based on Ezekiel 36:28, “And you shall be my people.” We explored our identity as a church through our calling to practice worship, discipleship, service, tithing and generous giving, and loving and respecting one another. We also took several weeks to learn about the expressions of Christian “peoplehood” in other cultures. Neil and Christy shared about their experiences with the church in

Haiti; Luis shared about his experiences with the church in Oaxaca; and Nancy and Gabriela shared about their experiences with the church in El Salvador.

Over the last year, we have been blessed to walk with six people exploring membership in Hope Fellowship. At our Easter retreat we welcomed three of them, Bethany, Laura and Allen Caruthers, into membership.

Now that the committees and council established by the 2007 governance plan are fully functioning, we have begun the process of seeking an addition to the pastoral team. Whatever and whenever the outcome of this effort, during our teaching times,



Above: Fernando Arroyo and Hannah Bridgewater demonstrate their moves at the Hope Fellowship dance party. Left: J.B. Smith and Norma Torres.

cell group discussions and other conversations we have been exploring pastoral attributes and have been challenged to consider how God calls all of us to live out these characteristics within the church. We have even taken the conversation of pastoral care to a children's time in worship. After J.B. led a serious discussion with the children of what it means to pastor and care for each other, Justin surprised us all when he brought one of his goat

kids into the middle of our packed worship room. The poor little thing!

Some of you may have heard already, but Dale Barron, a former member of Hope Fellowship and friend to many of you, has been hospitalized for a couple weeks with pneumonia, renal failure and a variety of other complications. Several times Lauren and the doctors were concerned that Dale wouldn't make it to the next day. Recently, his

condition has improved, but we continue praying for Dale's full recovery and comfort for his family.

Our news from the spring is brief while we hold our breath for the whirlwind of activity we expect to receive over the next few months – a graduation, a wedding, *bienvenidas* and *despedidas*, long trips and short delegations, maybe a new pastor. You can be praying that God be with us. □

News from Sojourners

By Katie Piché

On any given week there are all sorts of life-giving "gems" hidden in our life together. One such gem is the weekly meeting between Nate Pequette and Steven Guatemala, Lizbeth Guatemala's son. Every Monday afternoon Nate goes over to the Guatemala flat to teach Steven guitar and, sometimes, discuss the deeper things of life. We recently witnessed some fruit from these meetings when Steven was able to help lead a couple of songs during worship.

Teri Creeger led us in our Good Friday service this year. We reenacted a meeting between the disciples and other followers of Jesus that could have taken place the night after Jesus died. We all were assigned a character (James, Mary Magdalene, Peter's wife, etc.) and tried to think about what our charac-

ter might have felt, said, or done in the face of such a tragedy. On Friday we met after dark in character and shared information about what had happened, and what we might do in the future without Jesus. It was a chilling and challenging experience to think about Jesus' death without knowledge of the Resurrection.

We have just finished a sixteen-month study of the Gospel of John and will be starting a short series on non-violence led by Dale Gish.

We are approaching a housing crunch. We only have three months to remodel in order to add four bedrooms to our current amount of space. Please pray for us as we figure out how to add into our mix eight or so people in August.

We would also covet your prayers for Christi Beutler, an apprentice this year, who has been diagnosed with a recurrence of cancer in the back of her throat. We are waiting to know results of a recent radio-iodine therapy.

We are continuing to discern God's call upon the Lockie family. Tim recently returned from a two-week trip to Venezuela. Tim and Jenny are considering work with InnerCHANGE in Caracas. Please pray for them and for us in this process.

We give thanks that Baby Toney, the awaited child of Matt and Mary Toney, is growing healthily in the womb.



Steven Guatemala.

There is a hole in the baby's heart, but it is not connected with any other diseases. Baby Toney will need surgery a couple of months after birth, but should be fine. We continue to pray for healthy development in the last few weeks of pregnancy.

We also give thanks for ten years of life for Naomi Hare, daughter of Jeff and Laura Hare. The decade birthday celebration was complete with a Sojo dance... kid style. □



Sojourner Apprentices: Christi Beutler, Colin Redemer, and Annie Seward.



Rubén and Mateo Langston and Naomi Hare at Naomi's party.

News from Reba

Evanston

By Heather Clark

Cold wet days, hot windy days. Not knowing when to put winter coats away. Springtime in Chicago. Here in our neighborhood, magnolias flaunt their blooms, following the long-awaited appearance of another lovely pink blossom: Lilia Mercy McCallister, born at home on April 6 at 11:30 pm and weighing in at 8lbs. 6oz. We give thanks for the safe arrival of this tiny lily of the field, whose name means "what belongs to me belongs to God."



Josh, Jedidiah, and Candace welcome Lilia into the McCallister family.

From newcomers to new knees: Albert Steiner recently received one, with fewer post-surgery difficulties than accompanied his other knee replacement. Let's keep him and Carol in prayer as his recovery and rehabilitation continue.

Cana household recently celebrated its 10th anniversary with an open house that included, in keeping with Cana tradition, plenty of good eats, good laughs, and a slide show of the past decade of household life. We're grateful for the many ways Cana has offered hospitality over these years, even if water has remained water at all the parties. Then again, the wine hasn't run out, either.

In April-May the Fellowship's relationship with Good News Partners has moved forward. RPF leaders met with the executive committee of Good News to



discuss possible partnership arrangements. A big potluck "picnic" at Living Water Community Church ended with about twenty folks from Good News coops and transitional housing taking a walking tour of Reba's big old apartment building on Pratt near LWCC. Kate Bierma and Kara Bender have moved into an apartment in the nearby North of Howard neighborhood, where they hope that others will join them as they seek to be a welcoming presence in that place. In addition, the Recyclery just moved nearby to a storefront formerly used by GNP as a activity space for neighborhood youth. Rather than gathering for

dances, we hope kids will soon be dropping by to get their hands dirty working on bikes for themselves.

Yet another household-to-be: we recently received joyous tidings that Camille Hobbes and Daniel Walker will wed in mid-May in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Sometimes the Lord works *quickly* in mysterious ways! We look forward to celebrating with them at a big Reba-style shindig in July and wonder if maybe, just maybe, they might decide to settle in our midst...

Our weekly seminar focus since mid-March, Sexuality and Community, has given us opportunity to explore a number of topics together (e.g., thriving whether single or married in community, relationship development between friendship and marriage, coping with sexual temptation, engaging with the homosexual community in loving ways). Honest intergenerational sharing around these issues has proved a real gift.

Reba gardeners have begun to set out seedlings tenderly fostered in various indoor spots. Preparing soil

and planting takes faith, especially when April showers unexpectedly turn to hail! We anticipate the fruits (and veggies!) of their labors, as well as CSA boxes soon to come from Plow Creek. Digging in the dirt reminds us to →→→



Above: Many helpers showed up for Kate and Kara's move.

Left: Char Oda, Kate Bierma, and Celina Varela enjoy the new North of Howard apartment.

pray for Chico and Tatiana down in Ford Heights as they seek to connect with neighbors through growing food in an impoverished spot.

Seeds of creativity continue to sprout at the Evanston Atelier, where apprentice Andrea Buchanan, working with Karima Walker and a few other volunteers, is planning activities for the next several months which expand the artistic offerings into the realm of performance. And speaking of performance, a recent coffee-

house fundraiser (for Annie Spiro's upcoming trip to the Mennonite World Conference in Paraguay) got a number of us behind a microphone for poetry reading and music-making.

During April, the Patch household hosted Isabel Arnaiz, a young woman from Burgos/Quintanadueños, Spain. She works in the Remar office and attends church in the community there. Isabel worked cheerfully on volunteer projects, serving while improving her

English. *Gracias, hermana por tu tiempo con nosotros e entusiasmo para servir.*

Last but not least, we're pleased to announce that Sally Youngquist will serve as our next community leader, starting a three-year term in September. Seeing how the Lord has prepared Sally for this role strengthens our faith that the Lord will continue to lead through her and the team she gathers. □

Plow Creek News

By Rich Foss

Your reporter had pneumonia a few days before the deadline; thus, this lack of news from Plow Creek. The Lord loves us and good things are happening.



Above: Four Bhutan refugees came from Living Water in Chicago to help weed strawberries and plant tomatoes and melons for four days.

Left: Plow Creek celebrates resurrection Sunday with a Fish Breakfast. Here a skit shows the disciples bringing in a large catch of fish after Jesus appeared.



Plow Creek annual May Day party on May 3rd. Festivities included soccer, parachute, games, treasure hunt, colored egg hunts, and delicious goodies.

Addition by Louise Stahnke:

Strawberries are blooming (written May 4), so only a month till good eating. We're blessed to have four workers from Bhutan, via Living Water Church, helping weed the strawberries this week. Lots of other good things being planted. The blueberry plants are beautiful with blooms now in early May. The first of the farm interns, Oscar Mendez, is settling in. Other folks will continue to arrive throughout the month of May. We are preparing the Valley House apartment for the arrival of a new family--Matthew, Christiana, and six-month-old Neva Peterson will be arriving from Washington, D.C., at the end of May. We are also looking forward to Kevin and Lorie Behrens and family coming for a visit of several weeks after being gone from us for awhile.

A News Story from Reba Living Water

By Hope Lane

For the first month of our apprenticeship at Reba Place Fellowship, Jolyn and I were two unemployed women searching high and low for work. In what turned out to be a fortuitous synchrony of events, Reunion Property Management was just completing the purchase of a 51-unit affordable apartment building in Rogers Park. The building is located at 1528 Pratt, just a stone's throw from Reunion's offices and "the Pratt Building." It needed a lot of work, and we were ready...more or less. Jolyn had some experience doing "apartment flips," whereas I had never held a paint roller in my life. Ronn Frantz, manager of RPM offered us temporary work fixing up the place. Some might call this a mutually beneficial arrangement, but I still maintain it was an act of charity.

Our first assignment was patching some leaky places on the roof of this four-story building. There we were, two greenhorn manually-laboring ladies, spending our late summer days in the hot sun, slathering trowelfuls of sticky, black roofing cement onto parapet walls. We had a great view, and many hours to get to know each other.



Hope mixing the roofing cement.

As the weather turned, Jolyn and I began working inside on vacant apartments. We got to know a few folks around the building—like Otha, the resident janitor, who carried our heavy buckets up the stairs when the elevator was broken, and Emiliano, an elderly gentleman, who would sit by the entryway and greet those coming and going.

The work helped us think a lot about what it must be like for single people and even families with children to live in cramped studio apartments. We groaned over the messes tenants left behind—the abandoned belongings and sticky films of cooking grease on walls. We wondered how people dealt with some of the serious problems that had gone unaddressed by previous landlords—constant running water, mold, pests. We were glad to be working for a management company concerned with their neighbors' good, to know this building and its tenants would not continue to be neglected.

One night, at about 1:00 AM, Jolyn's cellphone rang. It was a tenant, calling about cockroach problems. In one of those midnight moments of unusual clarity, Jolyn realized she *liked* communicating with clients, even at odd hours. She dreamt up a new role for herself at Reunion Property Management—"Tenant Representative." More ideas were on the way. After several months at Reba, Jolyn began feeling "right at home" in her household living situation and delighted in the relationships she found here. She felt called to share the gifts of community with the tenants at the 1528 Pratt building, too. She noticed there was a real lack of cohesion and neighborliness between tenants. The question



Jolyn completing her rooftop jumping jacks.

began rolling around in her head, "How could a sense of community be fostered here?"

Lately, Jolyn has wondered if the answer to that question might include her becoming a tenant at 1528 Pratt *herself*. She says, "It's kind of funny—to most of society it appears desirable for me to be able to leave my present 'household' situation, where I live with four other 'strangers,' and get my own apartment. To me, it feels like a sacrifice to give up household living! And some people ask 'Are you sure you wanna do that?' because of the kind of building it is."

Jolyn is excited about the possibility of this move in its own right, though: "As I got to know the people that live in this building, I realized this great potential, the great wealth here. I want to know them more fully, and for them to know me. As she discerns this call, Jolyn is looking to be joined by others who feel led the same way. "I can't do it on my own. I need God's help, and I need to other people who hear a call to this building, and the people there." When asked to explain what she desires to see happen at 1528 in the future, Jolyn says, "I don't want folks to feel like their responsibility for other people ends where their apartment door shuts. I don't want them to feel isolated. Right now, the attitude is 'You mind your business, I'll mind mine.' I want there to be a greater sense of identity and ownership within this building." □

God is All Around us: A Ford Heights Update

By Chico Fajardo-Heflin

I've never been fired before. So when I was shown the door after only four days in the back room of Village Discount (a warehouse-sized thrift store in nearby Chicago Heights), I knew I was treading new ground. "You're just too slow, too slow." My manager was right. I was too slow. I tried my best to keep up with the thirty-articles-per-minute pricing quota, but maintaining this pace for five straight hours was beyond what I (or anyone) was capable of. My feet ached, my arm cramped and when Linda, my 55 year-old co-worker cut her finger on the rusted blade of a donated saw and didn't stop to tend to it ("Gotta meet the quota," she hastily explained), I didn't feel so bad about being let go. Jobs like that shouldn't even exist.

And yet, "a job's a job" as folks 'round here say. I used to cringe at that saying. My theological convictions would kick into gear, and I would mentally dissect the biblical unsoundness of that mindset. But after four months of being on the job hunt and still coming up empty, I am beginning to understand the sentiment. We've investigated over thirty different job possibilities, everything from factory work and farm field labor to daycares and food service at psychiatric wards (work common amongst our neighbors). But still, nothing. And I won't lie, we're beginning to worry.

"Where is God in all this?" I sometimes seethe to Tatiana. We believe God clearly led us to Ford Heights, so why hasn't God brought us jobs yet? We both struggle with feeling like God has abandoned us out here in this wilderness of poverty and neglect. We get angry, scared, and confused, and like the psalmists, we question God to His face: "Where are you?!"

After the end of another frustrating day on the job hunt, I plopped myself down on our living room couch. I began mentally interrogating God again when I heard a knock on our door. Four smiling, ragamuffin kids poked their heads inside the house. "Y'all can come in," Tatiana said, and soon there was a rowdy little circus poking and prodding each other right there in our kitchen.



Chico and Tatiana enjoying their garden last Fall.

We were treated to Soulja Boy beats, pom cheers, and stolen licks from the cornbread batter. As they jostled themselves out the door that evening, I knew I had my answer.

God is in the gaggle of kids who turn our tidy kitchen into a dance

floor. God is in our next door neighbor shoveling our walk every time it snows. God is in the drug dealers who befriend us on our block. God is in 93-year-old Mother Williams inviting us in for greens, soda, and another episode of "Judge Judy." God is in the onion bulbs neighborhood kids begged us to plant in their backyards. God is in complete strangers offering us rides when they see us walking in the rain. God is in Mr. Tillmon, an old black farmer, offering to help us dig up our garden. God is in Felicia, a First Union teen, inviting us to her mother's birthday barbecue.

We fret and we worry about finding work and paying bills, and we demand God to show Himself. But all we have to do is look around because through the friendship and generosity of others, God is blossoming up in a dozen different miracles every week. No, God may not have found us jobs yet, but He is giving us something much greater—a rich life in community with our neighbors. And that remarkable gift reassures us that God has not at all abandoned us, but is indeed, all around us. □

[Some names of Ford Heights residents have been changed to protect their privacy.]



A winter workday at Chico and Tatiana's Ford Heights home.

Update from Koinonia



Bren Dubay and Norris Harris lead the Koinonia community members to their second annual covenant renewal celebration. Twenty-six members in various stages of commitment, made or renewed their vows on April 24th before gathered board members and friends of the community. This covenant renewal ceremony is an expression of transformation at Koinonia to return to its roots and its name as an “all things in common” core community.

Linda Fuller was also present to give special thanks for those who had dug the grave and helped to bury Millard Fuller in the Koinonia woods next to his mentor Clarence Jordan.



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