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A Quarterly Newsletter of Shalom Mission communities

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December 2009: Standing Firm in one Spirit (Philippians 1:27)

The following is a version of the speech Debbie Gish presented at the SMC Camp Meeting on October 16, 2009. The theme of the event was being the People of God.

The Road to Unity for the People of God

By Debbie Gish

Sometime back now I came to the realization that one of the most important things we are doing when we gather together as the people of God, when we worship, when we share the bread and the cup, when we hear a sermon and hopefully what we're doing here this weekend, is remembering the story, remembering and reminding each other of the story, the gospel story we're called to live in together in the here and now. All day long we are being told a different story, one that's being fed to us, marketed to us, quietly whispered to us in subtle ways and even shouted at us in overt ways. And because that is unceasingly true, we need to repeat, remind, retell the Jesus and his people storyline often enough that it has a fighting chance to remain the dominant storyline of our lives and our life together.

Our brother Tim Otto, also from Church of the Sojourners, has a wonderful talk he gives when



Celebrating communion at the SMC Camp Meeting.

we host groups who come to us interested in community. He entitles his talk "God is forming a people." In quite an astonishing fashion, in about 45 minutes, Tim walks folks through the entire bible from Genesis to Revelation highlighting how, from the get go, God was and still is today forming and drawing to himself and to each other a people, a people with the mission of together being a light to the world. The classic Sunday school romp through the Old Testament highlights the heroes, the individuals who stand out above the crowd; their context as part of the people of Israel, God's chosen people is kind of incidental. The moral of the story?

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“You too can be a hero, a superhero in fact, and take on any enemy single-handedly like young David against Goliath, or stand up to the powerful like Moses before Pharaoh or ‘just say no’ like Daniel to the temptations of the royal court.” But unlike the Hollywood storyline where the hero rides off into the sunset alone or possibly with one side-kick (or this week’s dazzlingly beautiful lover), the biblical heroes are meant to inspire, to lead, to guide and to correct a PEOPLE. They, like us, are deeply embedded in a specific and ever-unfolding story of the people of God. This story, this people, this context is not an incidental backdrop, but matters deeply. When Moses walked off into the sunset, he was far from alone. Not because the single set of footprints he saw trailing him in the sand were God’s and not his own as the popular poem “Footprints” suggests, but because he was leading and being accompanied by thousands of fellow sojourners, brothers and sisters of Israel leaving millions of footprints in the sand. (Thanks to Tim Lockie for this imagery).

Truth be told, as we grow up and look more closely and truthfully at the biblical heroes and characters (and I do mean “characters!”), they quickly start to lose their Precious Moments qualities and start taking on more truly human colors and forms. We realize how very like us they are, how fallen and complicated and compromised they are. David, a man after God’s own heart? Really? Solomon, wise? All the time?

Part of the beauty of the biblical story is that there’s been very little doctoring of the characters. These heroes are painfully and beautifully human, and in their stories, Israel’s God, Yahweh, emerges as the true and faithful lover and leader of his people who never tires of wooing, welcoming and embracing his beloved yet wandering people. So much so that he chose to enter the human race as one of us, as a Jew in the Jewish story; Emmanuel, God with us. Thanks be to God.

Probably to your relief, I’m not going to walk us through the



Morgan and Monica sewing at the Camp Meeting.

entire bible building an apologetic for the legitimacy, necessity and centrality of the people of God to the biblical story and to God’s purposes and mission. But I do want to highlight some things that we often forget as we struggle along in the day in and day out of this journey we’re on with our brothers and sisters.

We at Church of the Sojourners spent the fall studying the book of Philippians. To give some context, Philippi is in Greece and at the time of the writing of Philippians it was a Roman colony, a loyal Roman colony that enjoyed honorary Roman citizenship with all the rights and responsibilities. A fairly small port city of 3,000 people, situated in a fertile valley along a lucrative trade route. Were the Romans occupiers or

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Shalom Connections

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Postmaster:

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Editor	Anali Gatlin
Copy Editor	Bethany Smith
Creative Consultant	Gabriela Gatlin
Publisher	Anali Gatlin

Contributing Artists:

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

Contributions/Permissions/Reprints:

Contact Editorial Office, below.

Subscription/Address Changes:

Contact the Publishing Office, below.

Publishing/Editorial Office:

1821 Sanger Ave, Suite B
Waco, TX 76707
(254) 214-1511 voice
(847) 328-8431 fax
anali.gatlin@gmail.com
www.shalomconnections.org

Shalom Mission Communities are:

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

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

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

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

liberators? Your perspective was probably informed, as always, by which rung you occupied on the social ladder. Some argue that Philippi was the colonizers' dream colony. Overall, folks were proud to be Roman citizens. Roman was the passport to have at the time. Rome was a democracy, of sorts. And Romans wore the coolest togas (just kidding).

Worship in the imperial cult was the norm and the expectation. To refuse to bow to Caesar was both a religious and a political offense. To call anyone Lord other than Cesar was simply and straightforwardly an act of treason. Paul was more than aware of this as he wrote this letter.

Michael Gorman, in his book entitled "The Apostle of the Crucified Lord," asserts that the purpose of this letter was to aide the Philippian church in living out her "citizenship" in the kingdom of God, not Roman citizenship. Paul encourages them to live out their citizenship in the divine "colony" of the Philippian church—not the colony of Rome in Philippi—in a manner worthy of the gospel, which, Gorman asserts, is beautifully defined in what is called the Philippian canticle in chapter 2, which Gorman suggests functioned as this colony's "city charter."

Paul writes this letter from prison, and he knows the Philippian church is suffering as well. He writes to encourage them, to help them persevere in all circumstances.

But he also wants to call them to unity.

I want to look a bit at the canticle. Earlier in the letter Paul writes, *"Only live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are (what? What is a manner worthy of the gospel?) standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel and are no way intimidated by your opponents."* He expands on these points in the canticle: *"If there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete; (and how will they make his joy complete?) be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind."*

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Photo by Abby Nafziger.

Tales from the SMC
Camp Meeting
By J.B. Smith

Our 2009 Shalom Missions Community Camp Meeting in Waco this October resembled a big family reunion, even if we didn't necessarily resemble each other.

There were dreadlocks and tattoos, long dresses and head-coverings. We heard the rolling r's of Latin America, the long vowels of the Canadian prairies and the drawls of the Deep South. We ate lasagna, ceviche and peach cobbler.

But it wasn't hard to see what united us: Our identity as the "People of God, the People of the Resurrection," as the weekend's theme summed it up.

Hope Fellowship hosted the biennial three-day event that included about 50 of its own flock and 80 visitors from communities around the continent, including Illinois, San Francisco, Winnipeg, Georgia, New York and El Salvador.

We shared and demonstrated our visions of Christian intentional community through worship times, break-out workshops, speeches, dinners and an epic three-hour "lack of talent" show.

Our venues included a borrowed Baptist church basement, a neighborhood park and World Hunger Relief Inc.'s farm near Waco, and Hope Fellowship managed to place all visitors in homes.

Hope Fellowship people I talked to about the weekend agreed that what was most valuable was the relationships they began and the chance to see how other people approach community. Communities represented ranged from start-ups like Springwater in Seattle to the long-established Platte Clove community (formerly named Bruderhof) in upstate New York.

Lucas Land, a father of two who interns at World Hunger Relief, said he was struck by the longevity and commitment of Reba Place Fellowship in Evanston,



Hannah absolutely loved the SMC Camp Meeting!

IL. He said the farm where he works is a "quasi" community, because of the short-term nature of its residents.

"It forced me to ask questions of what it means for the farm to be a community," he said. One example of the fruitful relationships that grew out of the weekend involved the farm's executive director, Neil Rowe-Miller, a member of Hope. He was able to talk at length with Carlos Avalos, a Habitat for Humanity El Salvador official who is working with SMC in community development in Valle Nuevo, El Salvador.

That discussion led Neil to make his first visit to Valle Nuevo, where he befriended several farmers and began what we hope is a lasting dialogue about sustainable agriculture there.

It was a deep disappointment that our brothers and sisters in Valle Nuevo were denied a visa by our government to come to the camp meeting. But Hope Fellowship co-pastors Joe and Nancy Gatlin said Avalos' stay at their home and his presentation about Valle Nuevo were a blessing.



Alterna Community shares their love of show tunes at the Lack of Talent Show.

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“Carlos’ presentation was just so moving,” Joe said. “It’s really a testimony to God’s faithfulness. God put the right person at the right place at the right time. He really understands our relationship with Valle Nuevo.”

While the adults went to workshops on jubilee economics, worship, and forgiveness, the youth from various communities had a chance to bond through fun activities and guided discussions about social justice issues.

Hannah Bridgewater, 13, said she enjoyed seeing Shalom youth she had met earlier this summer, such as Antonia Guatemala of Sojourners, and they are keeping up with each other through an “e-mail ring” until they can meet again.

Children, youth and adults had several chances to have fun together, including the Friday night talent show that included music, jokes and even a movie by Justin “Hollywood” Clark, the auteur-director and goat farmer.

At World Hunger Farm, we had a skill-share event where we



Orwin, Brandon, Corey, and Pam creating art at the Skill Swap.

exchanged know-how on everything from sewing to bike repair to guitar chords. As night fell, we learned how to do liturgical dances, followed by salsa and merengue dancing.

Looking back on that joyous and sometimes exhausting weekend, many Hope Fellowship members said they only wish they’d had more “down time” to have informal discussions with visitors from other communities.

Nancy Gatlin said a highlight for her was a

workshop on “stories of reconciliation,” and she hopes future SMC gatherings will give opportunities for telling stories.

“In essence, that’s what it is to be the people of God,” she said. “We need to do more storytelling.” □



Emmi wowing the crowd with her violin.



Stand-up comedy provided by Rebecca and Debbie.

News from Sojourners

By Katie Piché

Every other year Church of the Sojourners celebrates Thanksgiving together. Sometimes we take the weekend to go on a retreat; this year we created an at home "Thanksgiving Festival." We broke into four groups for the meal on Thursday. Then on Friday and Saturday we had various "festivity stations" happening throughout the day. We wanted a way to spend time together without stress. People signed up to host various events with the hope that there would be something fun for everyone. Activities included drumming, a tea party, gaming, banner making, free fun down town on black Friday, a visit from a musical group called The Blessing Tree, and of course a dance party. We also included the more traditional spiritual practices of prayer in the morning and evening. Overall the "Thanksgiving Festival" was a good way to spend time together and to invite others into our common life.

We have spent the last three months studying the book of Philippians together and have tried to corporately memorize the Christ hymn through prayer,

lectio divina, song, and posters in bathrooms and above the kitchen sink. (Pizza may or may not have been used as an incentive for memorization). We have been looking to this hymn for direction in how to live out the life of Christ.

In an earlier edition of the newsletter we claimed that we would have our remodel done at the end of September. Unfortunately the water department has had a different plan for us, and we are waiting at their mercy for the installation of new water mains. We were also surprised to find that in addition to redoing our own foundation we would need to redo our neighbor's foundation. As it turns out our houses share a foundation. Our communal roots go down deep. We have hopes that in January things will be ready, but until then we continue to pack the people in.

We give thanks to God that Caedmon Toney has successfully come through two heart surgeries. The Toney family spent almost four months in hospitals, but are home now with a happy healthy baby. After struggling to eat and maintain his weight, Caedmon is making up for lost time by gaining over an ounce a day. We also give thanks that



The Blessing Tree. In a recent project, they set the Beatitudes to music. Each Beatitude is it's own song (somewhat like Taize in form, but a bit more alternative in style).

Rick DiMicco came through his surgery well.

We are excited that the Creeger family will be growing by two. Matt and Krista Creeger are expecting a baby as are Jadie and Ian Creeger (Church of the Servant King- Eugene). Apprentices Adam and Amanda Wynant are also expecting a baby.

Tim Lockie is taking a sabbatical year after seven years of work with InnerCHANGE. We celebrate with Tim the good things that God has done during his time with InnerCHANGE, and we pray that this year is a resting year for the Lockie family.

We have some regular prayer requests around here these days: for Christi Beutler as she continues to live with cancer, for Tim Otto as he recovers from knee surgery, for Zoe Mullery's adoption- matching process, and for the Hare family as they walk through some trials with Jeff's mom. □



The Toney family at home.

News from Plow Creek

By Heather Munn

The sun rises bright in a chilly blue sky, and frost is on the grass. Nature here at Plow Creek is settling in for the winter; and we humans prepare for it as best we can.

It's a time of transition in the community here, but it is not yet certain what the direction of the transition will take. Plow Creek Fellowship has invited everyone who lives in the community to join them for Wednesday night meetings to discuss the shape of our future together as a community. We have met every week since September 18 with one break to allow the Fellowship to have its own meeting of just the folks who are in shared funds. We've brainstormed ideas and proposals, discussed the values of the community, and many of us have shared our thoughts and dreams for the future and where we hear God's call. We continue to discuss and seek what God may have for us.

Many of you may already know this, but I don't think it has been



Annual day after Thanksgiving "Wood Frolic" at Plow Creek. The community gets a serious start on cutting and splitting next year's firewood.

mentioned yet in the newsletter that Rick and Lynn Reha have moved away. They moved to Bloomington this summer to pursue training for Rick in psychology, working towards a degree in music therapy. Please pray for God's support for them.

The Graham family have announced their decision to withdraw from Plow Creek Fellowship's shared funds and to begin working toward moving off the Plow Creek property. Their dream is to move into a greater focus on

ministry and open a house of hospitality. Please pray for God's guidance and provision for them.

We're all grateful to Steve Graham for one of the great gifts he is leaving behind: a new high-speed, broadband internet system for the entire community. Those of you who live in the city cannot imagine what this means out here! (Except, perhaps, the hard-working teens from Sojourners and the farm interns who valiantly dug and sweated to make it happen. Thank you!) Steve used a trenching machine to dig over half a mile of trench to lay a fiber-optic cable over terrain that was inaccessible by radio link—up steep Blueberry Hill and down again, through two pastures and across Plow Creek—and many brave volunteers filled in that trench with shovels and heavy hoes. Now we no longer have to limit our bandwidth to 50 MB per household per day (i.e. three minutes of video or ten minutes of audio or one large file upload for work); those who use the internet for their jobs are especially grateful.

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Carlos and Erin welcome their new son Sebastian.

December 2009

Standing Firm in one Spirit (Philippians 1:27)

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Plow Creek welcomes the happy arrival of Sebastian Mucu Kindy, born to Erin and Carlos on Saturday, October 10th. Erin was in the garden hoeing when she went into labor--just kidding! She did take some well-deserved time off during the weeks before the birth. Sebastian is healthy, cute, burps a lot and can generally be seen strapped to Erin's chest by a long, complicated pink wrap. She says it's like being pregnant except your center of gravity is higher! Incidentally, his name is pronounced the Spanish way.

The farm has had a good year. Though the growing season was much colder and wetter than usual—not ideal corn-and-tomato weather—we had a record crop of blueberries; the bushes were simply laden. We continued sending vegetables and berries to Reba through our

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program, which has 47 shares this year and will continue again next year.

Angela Adams has initiated a winter women's group and Bible study, and we've started by studying Proverbs and pondering what wisdom and guidance mean. Some dear friends of the Adams' will soon be staying with them for a while as they work out their next steps after a sojourn in Germany. Pray for guidance for them. Angela was also one of the leaders of a women's gathering Plow Creek hosted this summer, at which participants discussed faith, womanhood, and their search for the best way of life, and learned some unfamiliar skills like gutting deer and killing chickens! It was a blessed time for many.

Christiana Peterson, who moved here in June with her husband Matthew and baby Neva, has

written a novel for teenagers about a small town in Texas where children are born knowing how to fly--and Zondervan is now considering it for publication! Heather Munn's novel based on events in Le Chambon, France during WWII is also under consideration by Kregel Publications. Stay tuned!

Last but not least, please pray for Rich Foss's health. He is not as strong as he used to be, and still works very hard. A back injury has been causing him a great deal of pain lately, and the coughing brought on by his chest condition has kept the injury from healing. Please pray for God's grace in his body to free him from pain, heal his back, and keep him going.

Please pray for us all, for God's love and grace, as we pray for you. ☐



Plow Creek's Thanksgiving bounty.

Shalom Connections

Hope Fellowship News

By Gabriela Gatlin

Our most outstanding news from the fall was the weekend we shared with many of you. After several months of planning and anticipation, Hope Fellowship hosted the biannual Shalom Missions retreat in October. It was a great joy for us to host you in our homes, reconnect with old friends and build new friendships.

A conversation about a potential World Hunger project in Valle Nuevo that began under a shade tree during the SMC skill swap, has since then taken another step in the direction of becoming reality. In November Neil Rowe-Miller visited Valle Nuevo to consider the possibility of beginning a World Hunger Relief agricultural project in the community. Emily Rowe-Miller also joined her dad for a second visit to Valle Nuevo. We look forward to seeing what the future holds in the growth of our relationships with the community of Valle Nuevo.

Before Thanksgiving, Gwendolyn Matias-Ryan held a viola

recital to fundraise for the Valle Nuevo land legalization project. During Thanksgiving, Analí and Gabriela Gatlin were privileged to visit Jubilee Partners and celebrate the community's 30th anniversary. After Thanksgiving, Allan DeLaurel returned to Hope Fellowship after spending several months at a monastic community, and he quickly moved back in with Carrie, Fernando and Jonas Arroyo.

Over the course of the fall we have been reflecting and studying the ways in which we are a migratory people. We read *Christians at the Border* by Dan Carroll, and focused on specific ways of understanding and responding to Latino immigration and immigrants. We read Romans 15:7 – “Welcome one another, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God” – and considered how we can all tell a story of migration, how God uses the scattering of people for divine purposes and how God expresses a preference for multilingualism. During Sunday worship, we made the space to hear diverse individual stories of migration.

Most recently, we experienced the joy of consensus in affirming



A discussion between Habitat for Humanity El Salvador, SMC, and the World Hunger Relief Farm takes place under a shade tree.

Fernando Arroyo as an addition to our pastoral team, which also includes Nancy and Joe Gatlin. We praise God for guiding us through the almost year-long process of discernment about the pastoral team.

We have continued to consider our response to the growth we have been experiencing in our church body. There are 49 people participating in cell groups, and the pastoral team has encouraged the groups to recognize shared leadership and pastoral care within each group. The Hope Fellowship membership has also decided to embark on a series of experiments with the time and setting of our worship – the regular event that draws the most people. For a few weeks we held worship on Sunday evenings instead of Sunday mornings, and this coming year we may make two more experiments – having two services in our Meeting House and renting a larger space from a local congregation.

But that's next year. Right now we have parties and Advent celebrations to attend to! □



Hope Fellowship acts out immigration issues on Sunday morning.

Reba News

By Heather Clark

Advent greetings from Evanston! In honor of our long-awaited King, our Alpha and Omega, this edition of Reba Evanston news is being brought to you by the letter A.

Sally Youngquist, our new community leader, has been giving able attention to gathering her leadership team, encouraging each of us to get connected with a mentor or sharing partner, and finding ways to highlight the importance of spiritual practice in nurturing ourselves as individuals and as a community.

A number of us serenaded Albert Steiner at a post-potluck celebration of his retirement from a long (42 years!) and distinguished career in Northwestern University's computer department. Thanks to Penny Lukens for this inspired adaptation of a Thanksgiving hymn:

*We gather together to honor our Albert
His loving and serving through all the long years:
As Fellowship steward, and as computer guru,
As tenor in the choir, and as fixer for cars.*



Albert and his most ardent admirer.



Celina and Peter, aglow with anticipation.

*As Allan Howe's roommate,
as Carol's dear husband,
Befriending, attending so cheer-ful-ly
While we were awaking, to Northwestern he was biking.
A rest he well deserves, as a re-ti-ree.*

Prayers were answered for a successful hip replacement surgery for David Janzen. He has amazed us with his return to action, including a mile-long hike in a forest preserve a week and one day after the operation!

More glad tidings: practicing members Peter Velthuizen and Celina Varela recently announced their engagement. We're joyously awaiting their wedding day

(July 10)! Since their arrival in late August, a number of our six apprentices (Pam Evans, Bradley Hagen, Corey Helms, Pete Manzella, Laura Sullivan, and Leah Warner) have aided in the rehab of our most recent real-estate acquisition at 1528 W Pratt in Rogers Park. As always, there's more work than was anticipated, much of it arduous, but we're trusting the Lord to provide what's needed to make this a good place to live for refugees and others needing affordable housing.

In their spare time (*ahem*), Allan and Jeanne Howe have been assembling half a century's worth of accumulated RPF history into an archive, an ambitious undertaking. That's just one example of the assorted steady efforts which sustain community over the long haul.

Sometimes those small, faithful efforts add up to artistic accomplishment and adulation. We recently applauded Anne Gavitt, whose poem *The Prodigal* won first prize in a poetry contest sponsored by *Inspirit*, a literary journal published by the Baughman United Methodist Church of New Cumberland, PA. Anne continues her disciplined attempts to write a

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poem every day. Here's a recent sample, a haiku about the Clarks' aggravating family animal (who adores Anne):

A Greeting from Scocci

No rug-rushing speed
sufficient for the baying

tongue-armed love attack
Advent: the annunciation of an awesome love attack. Adore Him! Alleluia. Amen.

And here ends, abruptly, this abbreviated edition of what's up in Evanston. For additional informa-

tion, address your enquiries to anyone here, who may add to this account. The author offers apologies to ☐ all those annoyed by alliteration.



Okra in bloom at the World Hunger Relief Farm.

The following is a poem written by Anne Gavitt while at the World Hunger Relief Farm during the SMC Camp Meeting.

Stream of Solitude

*I am sitting the solitude of
a rock in a stream, or something softer
a mound of earth
waves and currents of sound and motion
plucking at my attention
eroding it on one side
stealing thoughts and sending them downstream
but on the other side
collecting something that might
be just as good
if I could get hold of it
before it, too, is lost*

*There is a kind of wholeness given
by the flow and chatter
punctuated by shouts or
drumbeats, laughter and dancing, or
even the coming and going
of thought
that makes one sun-warm
breeze-cool open place in this day
and makes these days
an island in the stream of weeks
ahead and behind
to remember the coming together
that has happened
is happening
will happen one day
not to be undone
forever*

a gavitt / 10-17-09

(Continued from Page 3)

The call to unity, to being one as the body of Christ was something I hadn't really noticed before in Philippians. There are lots of other biblical pictures of this in the New Testament, but when I noticed the "we" in this book, the call to living as the people of God in love and unity, it struck me as important. Philippians had always inspired me as an individual, challenged me in my faith and actions as a disciple. But noticing this was kind of like realizing that the 10 Commandments are extremely relational and were intended to form the character of the people of Israel. Paul is challenging, exhorting, showing the way to a specific congregation in a specific place.

Although this call to unity is one the church universal needs to hear and act upon, I am addressing you, the concrete, face-to-face communities of faith represented by Shalom Mission Communities and friends. Like the classic bumper sticker says,



Orwin and Sally sing at the Camp Meeting.



Lisa viewing the long timeline at Living Water Church. This was used as a visual to chart church history; and included specific events, themes, and what the church felt God doing along the way.

"think globally, act locally."

So, "same mind, same love, full accord, one mind, one spirit". Living life in a manner worthy of the gospel will have unity as a byproduct. I won't just stand out as an extraordinarily good or faithful sister. My faithfulness, your faithfulness, our drawing encouragement, consolation, compassion and sympathy from Christ, will somehow draw us together, will bring us to one mind. One mind with the guy down the hall, the one next to you at dinner, the one across the room in bible study, the one pulling weeds in the next row, the one with whom you share the bread and the cup.

But Paul gets even more specific about the nature of our unity and the road to it. As Gorman suggests, the canticle is the city charter, the covenant if you will, for this little colony of the kingdom. And in it the road to unity is described. Be of one mind? How? The canticle goes on to say, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your

own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind (remember: one mind) be in you that was in Christ Jesus, (and what was his mind like?) who though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness and being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross."

I want to argue that our unity will be found in living a life worthy of the gospel and that life is characterized by self-giving love for one another. Our road to unity, brothers and sisters, is regarding each other as better than ourselves, loving each other in tangible and costly ways. It's not about having perfect consensus on lifestyle, mission, or vision. It's not about whether you have a common purse, or a well defined covenant or whether you even like each other. These things are important; don't get me wrong. What we believe and what we are committed to in the practicalities shape and form us deeply.

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And yes, we're going to have long meetings hoping to come to a place of agreement and unity about issues and commitments. There's no question about that, but at the end of the day, and frankly at the beginning of the day, sharing the cruciform, cross-shaped mind and actions of Christ in the day in and day out will be our bond, will be our unity. And practically that means at times laying down our preferences and opinions and probably at times even our convictions, our dreams or our needs.

I'm sure I'm pressing some buttons for folks here. I can imagine people arguing that this kind of teaching can leave our communities wide open to abuse of power. But Paul was writing to the whole community at Philippi, the leaders and the congregants, the slave and the free, the men and the women. Our self-sacrificing Christ-like love, our cruciform love is our great equalizer.

Don't be confused; self-sacrifice isn't the motivator for Jesus or for us. Love is the motivator. When Paul says "*though in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped,*" the "though" is also legitimately translated "because" – "because he was in the form of God." The love that led Jesus to the cross characterizes the love of God for us. Self-sacrifice is in the very essence of God's love. (Thanks to Dale Gish for his Greek grammar lesson in a recent sermon on Philipians).

Why am I pressing this? Why did I decide to focus on our unity and how to get there? Like I said, I'm working on the assumption that most of you all are participating in real flesh and blood communities of faith, not just

Facebook affinity groups of shared ideas and convictions. And with that, once you've been at this a while, you come to realize how difficult it actually is to be in unity, to come to agreement on things, even with folks who on first blush appear to be on the same page with you. Our tendency is to try to convince each other that our way is the better way, or even the more Christ-like way. Or we insist on a consensus model that leaves the guy holding the veto card with all the power. As we seek to live radical lives of faith that look different from what the world is offering, I want to remind you what the bottom line is.

Yes, learn to agree on issues. Yes, work hard at being in unity about how to live, how to focus your energy as a church or community, who to reach out to, whether to serve wine or grape juice in communion, whether we all need to be vegan or dumpster divers. But work harder at listening and honoring, work harder at deferring to the preferences of others, at considering the needs and longings of your brothers and sisters. Wash the other guy's dishes – often. Say yes at times to interruptions and have those conversations you were hoping to eternally avoid. Save energy for your sister at the end of the day. Make lunch for the brother who drives you crazy with all his petty complaints. Carnivores, cook vegetarian for your household even though you aren't convinced it will make a difference. Vegans, grill a steak to delight that brother on his birthday.



Thanksgiving fun on the new Sojo trampoline: Nate, Annie, Ruben, and Mateo.

If I know that I am loved, I'm going to listen differently to your idea or proposal or conviction. I'm going to take risks with you that I wouldn't dream of doing if I only experience you as agenda driven. When I know and experience that I am worth sacrificing for, that I am worth more than you getting your way or being right, hopefully I'm going to defer to your conviction or even to your preference or that of the body's knowing that we're in this together because we're experiencing our unity as Jesus-inspired and Jesus-empowered. Through that, we will know and experience a love-based unity.

Creating unity in the love of Jesus takes a lot of work and a lot of heart. Is it worth it? I want to argue that it is. It's worth it and it's profoundly important. Our unity is central to our witness, to our being light to the world. What we do

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inside the walls of our churches, inside the boundaries of our communities matters deeply.

How many of you have heard some version of “Hey, Jesus is cool; it’s the church that I could never be a part of”? Sadly we know why people say that. We know the world finds the church filled with hypocrisy, divisions and lovelessness. I don’t need to list her sins (or I should say, our sins). The interesting part is that what happens inside the walls of the church is actually extremely public and extremely visible and intricately a part of the church’s witness.

I grew up in the suburbs. My father was a successful businessman, a member of a prominent country club and mayor of our city, Whittier, California, the hometown of Richard Nixon. We had a beautiful home and a picture perfect family of mother, father and three kids. But hidden behind that picket fence was a family barely holding on by its fingernails. By the age of 13 my



Seth (Reba) and Analise (Sojourners) connect at the Camp Meeting.

sister was becoming an alcoholic and by late teens was showing significant signs of serious mental illness; my parents were coping with ever-greater avoidance and alcohol consumption. My brother and I were hiding away in sports and the homes of friends.

This isn’t by any means an unusual story. Probably half of this room can recount similar stories of growing up. But it just illustrates that we all know that the façade doesn’t matter and in the long run doesn’t actually hide anything. What goes on inside of the family and, I’m arguing, what goes on inside of the church, inside of our communities, really matters. If there isn’t love and nurture and honesty and confession and integrity, it’s just a show. And sooner or later, as much with the family as with the church, the truth comes out. And in the case of the church, like it or not, it ends up being her witness.

When Jesus listed the “woes” to the teachers of the law and the Pharisees, he was quite clear that cleaning up the outside did nothing if what was going on inside was greed, self-indulgence, hypocrisy and

wickedness (Matthew 23).

What’s true for the individual is even more true for the body of Christ. If we’re honest, we don’t just want to look different, we want to actually be different. The world is watching! The church’s life together and the lack of unity, the lack of reconciliation, the lack of repentance (not necessarily the lack of sin), are often some of the biggest stumbling blocks to the world believing the Jesus story to be true.

You and we will fail at this. But not even attempting to do it is a tragedy. Someone who shaped our thinking about this was John Alexander. He was a contemporary of Jim Wallis and after honestly facing his own sin and the sin of his fellow radicals, chose to step out of the limelight and live as brother and pastor to us at Church of the Sojourners. He died of cancer in 2001. Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove is in the process of editing and publishing John’s last, incomplete book he entitled “Stop going to church: Be the church” or “The love book.” He articulates very well what I’m trying to say when he writes, “... I don’t expect us to live up to the Sermon on the Mount. But I do expect us to fail in such a way that people watching →→→



us will know what we're reaching for, what we're failing at. By now I don't expect us to be as united with each other as Jesus is with the Father, but I do expect us to live in such a way that outsiders will be able to tell that being united with each other is what we intend to be about. ... my problem isn't that we fail. Nor that we do church badly. It's that we're doing something else. We seem to be playing the wrong game against the wrong team at the wrong time."

I want to argue that loving one another well as the people of God for the sake of the world is the game we are supposed to be playing. It's not a waste of time, it's not naval gazing, it's not self-absorption. It's actually how we are able to function as the incarnate body of Christ on earth. More than we know it, the world is watching and the world is hungry for the gospel to be truly good news. Jesus said *"by this all will come to know you are my disciples, if you love one another."* I will show myself to be a disciple of Jesus not by my personal piety or faithfulness, but by my love for my brothers and sisters and theirs for me. The corporate demonstration validates the witness. That's quite astonishing. If we don't love each other, it would be kind of like following the Good Samaritan home and discovering that he beats his wife! That might be a bit dramatic, but you get my point.

When loving each other feels futile or invisible to the world's eyes, a verse that helps me keep going is Ephesians 3:10. *"His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms."* I believe the world is watching,

but when I think I'm hiding, when I think our private riffs, broken relationships and lack of love-based unity is my own private affair, I remember that the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms are watching. When I choose to love, when I choose to lay down my life, when I choose to find a way to reconcile, I can be confident that the powers and principalities are being defeated. Our love bears both terrestrial and celestial witness and has both terrestrial and celestial power.

None of this happens over night like the intimacy of a summer camp experience. We can't just practice loving each other and then move on to the next guy or the next church or the next community to learn a little bit more so eventually we can be "good lovers." Frankly, it takes a lot of time and energy and heart and long-term commitment to love well, love deeply, love sincerely, love without hypocrisy and with-

out coercion. Let's learn through our loving commitment to each other the very love Jesus has for his bride. A "through sickness and health, for better or for worse" kind of love.

So in conclusion I'm asking us to recommit to LOVING ONE ANOTHER. Know that this love matters and that this love is our witness and that this love will be our unity. It's the kind of love that requires commitment, stability and a ton of humility. Loving over the long haul is messy and beautiful, mundane and drama-filled, hope draining and hope infusing, and in its very life sacrificing nature, is ultimately life giving.

Love one another and make it the glue that holds you together over the long haul as the people of God who, as Paul promises in Philippians, will *"shine like stars in the universe as we hold out the word of life."* □



Neil and Emily Rowe-Miller presenting a banner to the Valle Nuevo directiva. Neil, executive director of the World Hunger Relief Farm, recently traveled to Valle Nuevo to explore a future relationship between the Farm and Valle Nuevo. Neil's trip report is posted on the World Hunger Relief Farm website www.worldhungerrelief.org.



Happy 30th
Anniversary
Jubilee Partners!

The lines for Jubilee's Thanksgiving celebration. Over 200 people came for the feast.

Jubilee Thanksgiving worship service.
Everyone participated!



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1821 Sanger Ave., Suite B
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