



Volume XIV

A Quarterly Newsletter of Shalom Mission communities

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March 2010: Discerning God's Desire

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2)



Original drawing by Josh McCallister.

Discerning God's Desire

Discerning “the will of God” can seem like a daunting task, a task that causes us to fret and at points can bring our world to a standstill. Fortunately we worship a loving God, and as Jack Bernard reminds us in *How to Become a Saint*, God may not give us a roadmap to our lives but “will guide us into doing [God’s] will insofar as we sincerely continue to seek to do [God’s] will. Discernment doesn’t have to do with special instructions on specific matters but a recognition of ‘what is good and acceptable and perfect’” (138,140). Our job is to listen well and obey.

Though this promise to guide us is comforting (old, young, and in-between) we are still frequently faced with significant decisions that will

affect our lives and perhaps our relationship with our local church body. At such moments, Jack Bernard suggests it might be time “to invite others to speak into your life” (143). Our communities each have unique styles of exploring issues of discernment and decision making. The following are reflections from a few SMC brothers and sisters on their experiences discerning God’s desire.

**Jack Bernard’s book How to Become a Saint: A Beginner’s Guide is well worth reading or rereading, especially the chapter on discernment.*

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Reflections from David Hovde

In the spring of 2009, I had a decision to make and realized that I desired the help of others to make a good decision. For a number of years I had thought about, prayed about, and talked with others about joining Christian Peacemaker Teams. I was interested in being part of CPT's team in Iraq. In the spring/ summer of 2008 I was accepted to be part of CPT and could take the initial month long training at a future point. So, in the spring of 2009, the decision ahead of me was whether or not I should take the training that summer and make a commitment to CPT as a reservist (someone who works on one of CPT's teams two weeks to two months a year for three years).

Even though I had thought, prayed, and talked about this decision with others, did not



Anali Gatlin ceremoniously hands over the SMC files to Katie Piché at the SMC coordinators meeting in January. Katie is now the SMC Coordinator, Anali continues to edit and publish the newsletter, and David Janzen focuses on mentoring younger communities.

mean that I knew I should go ahead with this commitment. Questions started to invade my thoughts. Would I be able to do the work of CPT well just because I admired the organization? I had many relationships and involvements at Reba Place. Should

I leave these to spend time working with CPT? Could I thrive, or at least survive, apart from my community? Was CPT really the organization I thought it was?

Since I was not able to arrive at a decision on my own but felt that I should make a decision, I decided (with encouragement from others) to call together a discernment team. It was challenging to think of whom to ask to be on this team; I wanted people who shared my values. Since I highly valued my call to Reba Place Fellowship, I decided to ask RPF members to be part of this team. I wanted people I was close to, trusted, and who had wisdom from experience. I also thought it would be good to have some diversity of age and gender in the group.

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Shalom Connections

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I asked Julius Belser, Joseph Marshak, Char Oda, and Sally Youngquist to be part of the team.

We got together for a meeting and I shared my thoughts and questions about joining CPT. The team allowed me to share in great detail. People asked some important questions, and I answered them thoughtfully. After we were finished talking, I felt that I was no longer alone with my thoughts and questions. In short, I felt that the people in the group were carrying this decision with me. I felt ready to go ahead and make the commitment to CPT. I realized what I needed was to feel supported by others, and through the discernment process I found the encouragement I needed to move forward.

Membership Discernment at Sojourners By Tim Lockie

DISCERNMENT IS A CORE PIECE OF MEMBERSHIP FORMATION. Discernment is a part of the larger concept of Formation at Sojourners; this means that it starts happening before we actually meet to talk about it.

Formation starts with the apprenticeship - ALL new people go through the apprenticeship regardless of prior experience in community or age (we've had people over 60, we've had married with kids, we've had young singles). We emphasize that the apprenticeship

isn't a demotion in any way, but that in order to be at Sojourners there is a lot to learn - hence "apprentice."

Apprentices that stay become practicing members - usually a minimum of 2 years, though that's not policy, just the norm. Practicing Members that want to become covenanted members become Novices first - then covenanted members.

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By Daniel Erlander.

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GOOD DISCERNMENT COMES FROM APPRENTICING WELL. Our apprenticeship is designed to give new people enough experience and practical community life to make an informed decision about staying or moving on. Before the apprenticeship, new people felt like every day was a decision day (in a small way) "should I go"/"should I stay?" The apprenticeship allows the community to respond, "Don't even ask the question for 6 months; you can relax and just live into community for the time being."



Hope Fellowship welcomes Carrie and Fernando's new son Ezekial Pax.

SOME REQUISITES. There are some prerequisites for us that help make the conversation less intense and avoid some of the judgment traps. First, the discernment is process driven. Second, we assume that discernment is done with the Holy Spirit (otherwise we'd just call it a "Decision Process"). Third, the process is annual. We hold a discernment time for everyone that is

not a covenanted member in the spring so that they have time to make a decision about what's next before our entire community reshuffles living space. Fourth, we don't feel like people leaving is failure and we try to be explicit about that. One concept for this is "Clearly Lit Exit Doors;" we want everyone to know how and when they can exit with our full blessing.

HOW IT'S WORKED. This discernment process hasn't worked perfectly or solved all problems, but in general it is better than before. Our newer members are "getting it" much earlier than before. Also, it seems like those who should stay are, those who should move on are moving on. This process has allowed for us to be direct about the conversation instead of having it on the side in multiple, exhausting rounds.



Josh McCallister, Dale Gish, and James White deep in discernment at the coordinators meeting.

*Reflections from
Celina Varela*

This past fall, circumstances brought me to a life-changing crossroads. I was completing a season as part of the interim pastoral team of Reba Place church and considering whether or not to continue in a more permanent role. At the same time, Peter Velthuizen and I were feeling more certain about our

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desire to marry and my novitiate period with Reba Place Fellowship was ending. I thought about these three major life decisions constantly, obsessing over what I should do. I wanted desperately to make the right choice, but when I sat down to pray or journal about any one of these issues, I felt like I'd rather do anything else. My room was clean, but my journal pages were blank. It was exhausting to think about all my options, all the good reasons to say yes, all the good reasons to say no. It was frustrating to pray and sense peace but no real answer.

It was during a venting to my small group that a friend suggested I gather a group of trusted friends to pray closely with me and to help me through the discernment period. I had already thought about it, actually. I had even picked out the people I would ask to join me. I felt silly, though, asking busy people to join me in my obsessive thoughts and seeming indecisiveness. I felt bad asking people for their time. Having someone in my small group suggest I form a discernment group was freeing. I had the courage to ask people to help when I wasn't the only one who thought it was a good idea.

The night before the day we were to meet as a group, I began to feel upset again. I was certain that I was wasting everyone's time. If God was not responding to me in prayer, why would God re-



SMC Representatives take a break from meetings in January to browse a slide show.

spond during our time together? Almost as soon as that doubt rose in me, I realized how different my thoughts and actions were from what I am learning about how God speaks. I am, after all, a part of Reba Place Fellowship because I believe that we hear the Spirit together. I cannot test and know God's call without the help of my brothers and sisters who pray and listen with me. So the question became – Why wouldn't God respond to me in the context of a group discernment?

Our time together was meaningful. My friends patiently listened to every option I had thought about, asking questions and treating my concerns seriously. As we ended our time, I still had no answers, but I felt certain that people were praying for me. My friends assured me that it was ok for me to take some time with my answers and encouraged me not to rush.

They also helped me to realize how much grace had been given to me during my prayer times and encouraged me to be grateful for the peace I was sensing, even if it came without an answer. Those words were a great source of comfort and relief from the swirling thoughts in my head.

We closed in prayer. As I listened to the prayers of my consolers, I felt a strong sense of their care for me and of God's care for me. I heard someone allude to Matthew 7, a passage that had been coming to mind for several weeks. I had been thinking seriously about the words a lot: *Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for*

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bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

Images formed in my head and I found myself able to articulate the sentiments and thoughts that had come to mind before. Before when I thought about declining the offer to join the pastoral team of Reba Place Church, I would feel insecure. I went to seminary; my gifts matched the position; it seemed to be exactly what I wanted. Why would I want to say no? But now, it made sense. God cared for me and for Reba Place Church. Saying no to the position did not mean I was refusing a good gift from God. In fact, it was clear that finding the capacity and freedom to say no was the good gift I was receiving. I am grateful to my brothers and sisters at Reba Place Fellowship for their desire to bear my burdens with me in prayer and discernment. I continue to be grateful to God for responding when I asked and knocked.

Reflections from Allan De Laurell

I would like to make a decision about what path to take regarding future jobs/career. I am discerning two options at this point. One, enroll in nursing school here in Waco an



Fernando Arroyo and Allan De Laurell at the Hope Fellowship Men's Retreat.

continue to invest myself at Hope Fellowship. Two, use my agricultural development skills either in Valle Nuevo, El Salvador or with Water for All International, a small Christian NGO that trained me in low-cost water well drilling.

One major factor in this decision is God's call to community. Living in a developing country would change my expectations of community. I also have a personal desire to use my agricultural skills. I spent three to four years acquiring these skills and other people have invested a lot in my training. Another factor is a conflicting desire for life to be easy. Nursing and living in the US, in community, would be easier for me because it is what I know. Additionally, I struggle with loneliness, and the first year in a developing country would most likely be pretty lonely and difficult for me due to the cultural/language barriers.

Right now I in the process of forming a discernment group of three people. My hope is to meet four to five times over the next four to five months to discuss and pray over these things. I have never done anything like this before, but am confident that the Holy Spirit will lead us.

This is a difficult process for me because I have so many choices. I have so many options because I am rich and educated. I do not see this as a need for discernment of my personal vocation. The question is: what do I do while I am already attempting to live out my vocation, which is, as a member of Christ's church, "to become mature, attaining the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:13).

I also want to be open to God's silence. I want to be okay if the answer might be: "Wait and listen longer." □

News from
Hope Fellowship
By Gabriela Gatlin

Hope Fellowship just keeps on growing. In January, Ezekiel Pax Arroyo was born just a couple days after his older brother Jonas' birthday. For the second time now, Fernando and Carrie's pregnancy and childbirth have coincided with their ability to play the Holy Family in our Christmas and Epiphany celebrations.

The pastoral team has named our 2010 theme "Discernment." This year we will be discussing, learning, praying and worshipping about the "what" and the "how" of discernment in our personal life and corporate life. We already have many issues to put on the table of discernment, and who knows what other surprises God might have in store for us!

After spending time last fall discussing and praying about the joys and challenges of growing in numbers, the membership of the church decided to embark on several experiments in flexibility this year. Our first experiments this spring involve finding ways to worship and share monthly common meals in the space provided by our Meeting House.

We decided to have two worship services on Sunday mornings with a joint adult teaching/children's

Sunday school between. We also decided to have two monthly Common Meals and assign each cell group to one meal.

Who knows what might come of our experiments and who might still be around after it's all said and done!

In January we also hosted a SMC visitation led by Sally Youngquist, Laura Hare, and Anton Flores. They spent a couple days listening to individuals and various groups within our church and then shared feedback and encouragement with us. We appreciate their willingness to come, listen well, and encourage us.

New committees met for the first time in January – Council, Education, Finance and Facilities, Fellowship and Communication, and Missions. The church is buzzing with new energy and projects. There are new teaching rotations and curricula to develop, repairs to make on the Meeting House, more mailboxes to build and



Gerson and Joel playing after Sunday school.

contact lists to expand, new worship groups to form, and new ways to relate to our neighborhood and city.

More meals to cook. More children to play with. More questions to ask and more decisions to make. More prayers to pray. More grass to mow after all the rain we have had. God has filled our cup to the brim. □



Hope Fellowship folks busily checking off lists, writing checks, and organizing events.

News from Sojourners

By Katie Piché

The news here is that we are living a rather ordinary life in extraordinary circumstances. Our culture says it is extraordinary (or crazy) to share your house, your car, your money, or your decisions with people who do not share your bloodline. But this extraordinary act of community is partly dependent upon countless ordinary acts that at times feel mundane or uncomfortable, and at times causes us to question how we are bringing about the kingdom of heaven on earth. At other times it seems obvious that the small act have cosmic consequences. And so comes the news of our ordinary life together. A life of giving and receiving.



Gigi and Naomi look on as Rebecca whacks the piñata at the Epiphany celebration.

- Jenny Lockie threw a birthday party for Alexina.
- Dan fixed a water heater.
- Lily took her housemates' mail to the mailbox.
- Naomi played with Alexina.
- Rob mopped the floor.
- Renata gave up her bed for a guest, and slept on an air mattress in an unfinished concrete room.
- Krista drove Chirsti to work, extending her own commute time.
- Rick cooked dinner for his household.
- Tim Lockie went for a walk with Dale.
- Mary got up in the middle of the night to comfort her unsettled baby.
- Dawn washed the dishes.
- Teri asked "How are you?" to Jenny Prosa.
- Amanda read to Lily Ann, her almost two year old.
- Dale drove a guest to the airport on his night to be free without his kids.
- Hannah cleaned the worship room.
- John David carried Rebecca's back pack home from school for her.
- Naomi gave Laura a hug.
- Katie made a guest bed.
- Levi rested.
- Debbie made breakfast for her kids.
- Mike bought groceries for his household.
- Tim Otto read theology.

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Jenny and Tessa preparing Sunday dinner.

Edith made dinner when she couldn't stay to eat it.
Ruben played with his housemate Lily Ann.
Amy gave music lessons to the kids.
Gigi wrote thank-you cards.
Zoe cleaned the shower (not her chore) as a gift to her housemates.
Jon saved dinner for IvaJo while she was at work.
Claire smiled at Annie.
Rebecca gave Katie a hug.
Lizbeth walked the kids to school.
Mateo chose not to complain.
Jenny Prosa made an after school snack for John David and Rebecca.
Adam and Allan prayed together in the morning.
Nate served Edith communion.
Tessa and Tim F drove Donna home after worship.
Donna made Debbie a birthday card.
Jeff spent his day off doing church finances.
Steven walked to school with the other kids.
Laura washed the family laundry.
Annalise enthusiastically greeted Caedmon.
Matt Creeger played the guitar in worship.
IvaJo delivered our CSA boxes to each house.
Christi said, "Thank you" to her housemates.
Annie made music in her household. □



Mary Toney and Caedmon.



Sunday evening worship at Sojourners.

News from Reba Place

Fellowship

By Heather Clark

February in Chicagoland. A time when even hardy souls resort to heavy doses of A.A. Milne for comfort. Though it's unseasonably warm and sunny today, we've had plenty of occasion of late to hum along with Pooh bear: *The more it SNOWS-tiddely-pom, the more it GOES-tiddely-pom, the more it GOES-tiddely-pom, on snowing...And nobody KNOWS-tiddely-pom...how cold my TOES-tiddely-pom... are growing.*

Whatever the weather, we are daily faced with matters for discernment, for distinguishing things that can be hard to see clearly, especially when

it's snowing. Like Pooh and Piglet in the Hundred Acre Wood, we may fail to recognize some important distinctions (e.g., that what looks like a pile of sticks may actually be Eeyore's house). So I approach this news-giving task tentatively, knowing that I may well be missing many things that are worthy of noting. Each day brings small, often hidden choices about how to build.

Poor Eeyore's house might put one in mind of our latest property acquisition at 1528 Pratt Blvd in Rogers Park. It's a big pile of bricks (rather than sticks), but it's taking much more work and money to make it habitable than we hoped when it was purchased. Thinking back on our discernment process and remembering our sense of God's leading

to buy the building helps us to keep trusting for the resources to finish the task. So it was a wonderful sign of hope to move Jolyn Rodman and Nieta Jones into a newly-renovated first floor apartment there, which turns out to be the same spot (made bigger and better) where a couple RPF members met to begin an open Bible study group in the Rogers Park neighborhood. Jolyn reported happily that 10 neighbors visited them several days after their move to enjoy the bounty of some surplus food which Nina Frantz made available.

During an initial meeting of our newly-constituted leadership team (Heather Clark, David Hovde, Allan Howe, and Candace McCallister), community leader Sally Youngquist put forth the

image of Reba Place Fellowship as a rambling old house that started small and has been added to over the years as people have settled here in this community. As more newcomers join us, we want to make space for them to be at home and to be part of what God is building in this place.

We recently welcomed Kara Bender and Ric and Helen Hudgens as practicing members, who have joined



A view of the house David and Chizu are building in Japan. The house is next door to where Chizu studied as a child.

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Allan and Jeanne Howe, Josh and Candace McCallister, Hope Lane and Heather Clark in forming a new (as yet unnamed!) small group. The Clearing's hosting "honorary apprentice" Terry Lu, who's embracing this opportunity to experience community life as he awaits the results of a law school application process. He's also considering the possibility of moving to the 1528 Pratt building.

Not everyone who joins us feels at home here, and we've lately experienced the pain of saying goodbye to four of our six apprentices, who decided not to complete their 9-month stay. Our Apprentice Committee has been gathering to talk and pray, asking God's guidance in discerning what learning there is for us in this experience and how to move forward in a good way from it. We appreciate your prayers as well.

We recently spent an evening hearing stories from Chico and Tatiana Fajardo-Heflin's first year in the Ford Heights neighborhood, celebrating how the Lord has sustained, blessed, and given them a space (albeit a poorly insulated one!) from which to extend hospitality to their neighbors.

Practicing members David and Chizu Lottich recently returned from several weeks in Japan, where David, a skilled contractor, is overseeing the building of a small house near the home of Chizu's parents. When we serenaded Chizu



Jolyn and Nieta embrace in their new place!

for her 40th birthday, she reflected that she hopes to continue to learn and grow in the coming year. What a wonderful reminder of her first culture, which honors its elders for their wisdom and discernment!

We're all in a season of seeking God's leading and provision in the area of communal finances. Several of our members are looking for work during a challenging economic time. We rejoice with Lisa Selph over her recently-acquired job at World Relief (an international organization which resettles refugees), which fits her skills well and comes with full benefits for a 25-hour work week! We're grateful that our basic needs are well-supplied and our

homes warm even when the snow's blowing.

Back to Eeyore's house (in case you're wondering how that story comes out): *"It's a remarkable thing," [Eeyore] said. "It is my house, and I built it where I said I did, so the wind must have blown it here. And the wind blew it right over the wood, and blew it down here, and here it is as good as ever. In fact, better in places."* *"Much better," said Pooh and Piglet together.*

Indeed. The wind of the Spirit has a way of putting things together like nothing else can. May we all seek to abide where He dwells. □

Plow Creek Fellowship

News Update

By David Stahnke

Straight from the Plow Creek news desk.... For starters we have been enjoying the mild weather we have been receiving here at Plow Creek. A few special individuals have gone the extra mile (with tractor and snow plow) to make sure that our roads and drive-ways are clear, and for that we thank them.

On the 24th of January 2010 Plow Creek Mennonite Church officially welcomed Matt and Angela Adams, Matt and Joy Kaufmann, Matthew and Christiana Peterson, and David Stahnke as new members. According to historians this marks the largest group of people to join PCMC at one time.



Plow Creek Bakery is undergoing expansion and renovation these days. In anticipation of finding new avenues to sell our bread products (and to improve our chances with state inspection), we underwent the arduous task of ripping up the old floor in the Common Building kitchen so that we could install a new floor. As we continue to seek God's will and direction for the bakery we would appreciate your prayers.

The recent earthquake in Haiti took on new meaning and impact in our lives at Plow Creek. Pete and Leonide Begly have been members at PCMC for several years now. Leonide is originally from Haiti. Over the years this has provided Pete and Leonide with opportunities to host friends and family as they arrived in the United States.

One such friend, Leonide, has been living with the Begly's while working in the area and attending PCMC. A major goal of hers has been to pursue the proper channels so her children Sarah and Issac could join her in the US. Eventually the paperwork was complete and all that remained was for Lovana to pick up Sarah and Issac in Haiti. Lovana set down in Haiti about one hour before the earthquake hit. Lovana was able to reunite with her family within the first 24 hours,

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Plow Creek Tepee.

The Plow Creek Farm is happy to announce the arrival of several new (donated) chickens to the egg laying collective. We are also happy to report that both of the goats owned by the Adams and Peterson clans are pregnant and expecting soon.

but communication with family in the US was limited. This of course prompted no small amount prayer for Lovana and her family.

A few weeks later Lovana and the children were able to make it out of Haiti and back to the states. Sarah and Issac are settling in well, and we are very thankful for all that God

has provided in this situation. Pete and Leonide's family also need our prayers. Leonide's brother Wens lost his wife and youngest three children in the earthquake, leaving Wens and his two oldest children to pick up the pieces and rebuild. Finally, the arrival of Sarah and Issac brings the number of people in the Begly residence to 12, which makes for a full

household. Pete and Leonide also have an interest in going down to Haiti and helping in some way, but the details and finances for such a trip are up in the air. Prayer regarding such a trip would be appreciated.

And from all of us at Plow Creek, blessings and peace. ☐

An Invitation from Art and Peggy Gish

The Fall 2009 issue of *Conspire* describes Peggy and Art Gish as "elders and mentors in community." "[They] have been active in Christian community and peace and justice work for half a century. Art authored two influential books in the 1970s that helped spark a movement of intentional communities: *Beyond the Rate Race* (1972) and *Living in Christian Community* (1979)."

Peggy and Art Gish are now living alone on the New Covenant Fellowship farm near Athens, Ohio. The Gishes are open to others joining them, or turning over the farm to another Christian community. If interested, contact Peggy and Art at peggygish@yahoo.com.



Peggy and Art relaxing in the extensive woods on the property.



A view of the farm.



The farm house.



Manna And Mercy: *A Brief History of God's Unfolding Promise to Mend the Entire Universe*

By Daniel Erlander

Published by The Order of Saints Martin and Teresa, 1992

Reviewed by Chico Fajardo-Heflin

Several years ago, when I set out to be the most radical Christian this side of St. Francis, I imagined myself wandering the streets of Chicago as a holy fool, picking coffee beans on a Latin American plantation, or perhaps moving to an abandoned farmhouse and waiting for the ravens to feed me. I had (and still have) quite an imagination. What I didn't imagine was teaching Sunday School to a handful of giggling kindergarten girls in the basement of a Missionary Baptist Church. But since God seems to feel that this should be part of my lot, I am at it doing the best I can. I kind of enjoy it, actually. Partly because I love kids, partly because I enjoy telling stories, and partly because of the inspiration of a little booklet called *Manna and Mercy* by Lutheran pastor Daniel Erlander.

I first stumbled across *Manna and Mercy* while skimming the shelves of the Jubilee Partners' library last year. What caught my eye was its raw, card-stock cover; endearing hand drawn illustrations; and friendly, hand printed text. In a world super saturated with slick, manufactured products, *Manna and Mercy's* homemade look and feel has the warmth and charm of your daughter's second grade journal project (the one held together with red yarn and gluestick). Delighted, I brought it back to my cabin to spend more time with it. I quickly discovered that despite its playful appearance, *Manna and Mercy* is a work of serious theological depth and reflection.

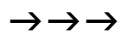
As its quirky subtitle implies, *Manna and Mercy* is a sweeping overview of the dominant biblical story, that of God Saving the World Through a People. Translating the work of both Anabaptist scholars (John Howard Yoder and Gerhard Lohfink) and liberation theologians (Paul D. Hanson and Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza) into simple, nearly storybook language,

MANNA
AND
MERCY

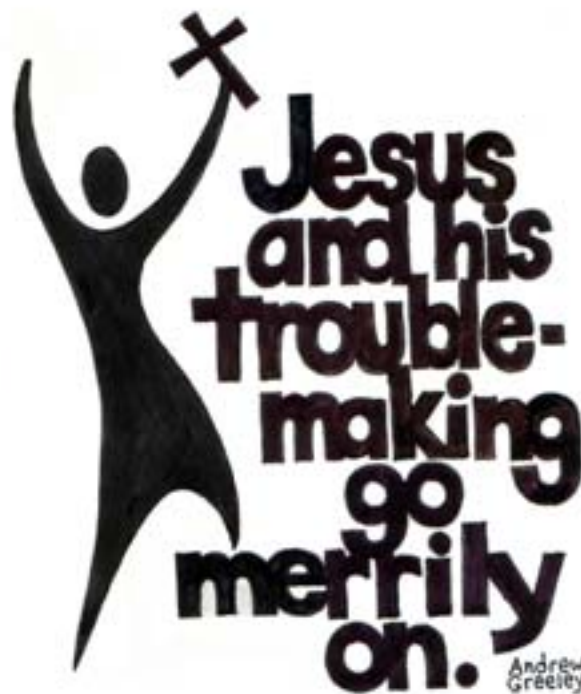


A BRIEF HISTORY OF GOD'S UNFOLDING PROMISE TO MEND THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE

Daniel Erlander



Erlander takes us from Genesis to Revelation in 80 riveting pages. By employing the word-symbols of “manna” (God’s way of justice, righteousness and economic sharing) and “mercy” (God’s way of covenanted love and forgiveness) throughout his retelling of the Bible, Erlander clearly and innovatively draws out the central themes of the Christian faith from what can sometimes be a very complicated book. This is perhaps *Manna and Mercy’s* greatest strength—using word-symbols to make complicated ideas accessible and memorable even to children. So along the way, we become familiar with the “big deals” (Pharaoh, Babylon, Roman imperialism), “little deals” (the Hebrew slaves, women and lepers), and the things that keep us from God, like our “manna piles” (money, power, prestige). Written with such refreshing language, *Manna and Mercy* makes familiar stories (like the Exodus) and less familiar ones (like the Maccabean Revolt) feel like they’re being told for the first time.



It’s hard to imagine a book as joyful and disarming as *Manna and Mercy* to also be described as “prophetic,” but I think it is exactly that. Besides challenging the limp, individualistic faith that plagues most North American churches, I think *Manna and Mercy* has a prophetic word for those of us within intentional community circles.

Over the years, I’ve noticed that there seems to be a spectrum of “communal theology” ranging from what I call “Matthew 25 theology” (communities that specialize in ministry to the poor, but often to the neglect of a healthy communal life) to “John 17 theology” (communities that excel at embodying a unified, forgiving Body, but often to the neglect of practically being good news to the poor). This spectrum seems to exist partially because it is very challenging to do both (care for the poor, care for each other) well. However, it also seems to exist due to the theological perspective our communities are formed by. I appreciate *Manna and Mercy* because by rightly pointing out that the people God gathers in covenant relationship to Himself are outcast, marginalized people (first, the Hebrew slaves; then, the poor of first-century Palastine), Erlander does not divorce the-people-of-God theology from justice-to-the-oppressed theology (and vice versa). The result is a stirring biblical vision that ought to challenge and inspire us to greater faithfulness wherever our communities fall on the spectrum.

Many books are written, few become classics. I know this is bold, but I’m going to risk foolishness and say it: whether used for devotional reading, as a text for serious biblical study, or for informing stories told to squirmy, little Sunday School gems, *Manna and Mercy* by Daniel Erlander is a masterful work that deserves a place alongside our other Christian community classics. □



Church of the Sojourners in San Francisco would like to extend an invitation to the SMC communities to participate in **Youth Week** this coming summer 2010. We are opening this invitation up to around 10 high school-age youth. The week will consist of service, learning, fun, and fellowship. Lodging will be with the Sojourners community and youth will participate in our life together. The schedule will consist of work in the morning (some kind of service project) and play in the afternoon (exploring San Francisco, etc.).

Youth Week will be held July 5-12.

Guests should plan on arriving in the afternoon/evening on Monday, July 5th and leaving in the morning on Monday, July 12th. Guests are expected to cover the cost of their transportation to and from San Francisco. If you are interested in attending this event, or if you have any questions please contact:

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