Meditation

By Anne Gavitt

The grass I crossed to get here
is miraculously green.
From where I now stand harmless in right field
I shade my eyes from the sunset blazing
level across newly raked dirt with its
curved ridges spiralling out from the
pitcher's mound—
a mystic labyrinth interrupted by pits our
cleats have dug in.

My friends are playing softball drenched in
slight,
which fills the infield and anoints each head
each arm, back, shoulder
with an oil of flame.
They stir a haze of dust by their moving meditation
their liturgy of bend, gather, throw
the ringing call of the bat
and the glove's antiphon.

I am grateful for the time I have
to stand and let the sunset haze reveal them to me
while I wait for the ball to come
while I wait to join the dance.

Shalom Connections
1821 Sanger Ave., Suite B
Waco, TX 76707

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

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June 2010: Celebrations

The Community that Parties Together, Stays Together
By Analí Gatlin

If community has taught me one thing, it is to never underestimate the importance of a good party. I have been told I am capable of overstatement, but I truly believe that celebrating together is one of the sincerest forms of worship and most profound theological practices we live as community. Jesus modeled this for us, frequently revealing important lessons to his disciples during the middle of a party or over a shared meal.

There are, of course, evenings when it would be more comfortable just to stay home than muster the energy to go to another community event full of children hyped-up on sugar and adults whom we have just seen at a committee meeting, service, or work project. At times like these we have to remind each other why our communities make time to celebrate together.

In Community and Growth, Jean Vanier put it this way, “Celebration expresses the true meaning of community in a concrete and tangible way. So it is an essential element in
community life" (p 312). We chose to live life together as a body, and celebrations help remind us why we make that choice. When we relate to each other in this way, we not only thank God for the gifts we have been given, we also acknowledge and proclaim the power of the resurrection. Learning to party well should be one of our spiritual disciplines. Even though we find joy in our shared life and have many obvious reasons to celebrate, we are overwhelmed sometimes by our inevitable disagreements, the stresses of daily life, or catastrophic events. During such challenging times in community it is even more important to celebrate, not as a means for escaping our problems but as an expression of hope. By the grace of God celebrations can renew a community, and the arguments and stresses of normal life seem to diminish when we laugh, eat, and dance together.

One thing I especially like about community celebrations is that our children, who usually do not have prominent responsibilities in our community services and meetings and may feel excluded, have a noticeably important role in our festivities. When it’s party time, the energy and enthusiasm of children serve as important models for the rest of us. As I watch the Hope Fellowship children collectively demolishing a piñata or Evan Alexander leading the adults in a goofy dance, I can imagine the joy God must feel as She watches her children enjoying one another.

Church of the Sojourners even has a yearly Kid’s Week celebration honoring the children in the community. Celebrations like this help shape our identity as a people and incorporate

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Shalom Connections

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If you need a translation of the above news from Reba Living Water, please contact Doug Selph.
As I said, I really do love you, but I am too much of a misfit to be able to say the nice things that the SMC newsletter needs.

Please forgive me ~ rick

Dear Rick,

Can I submit that to be printed anonymously in the SMC newsletter? I don’t think you are the only one that feels that way and people like to read things that they can relate to. Because ultimately people only love themselves and things that remind them of themselves.

Love,
Katie

Jenny Prosa consoles housemate Caedmon as they watch Renata’s birthday whipped cream game from the sideline.

Hey,

It don’t have to be anonymous, the only reason I’ve learned to control my tongue at all is because some people take me wrong, they think I’m just trying to hurt them- And No, I’m not just trying to hurt them, most of the time I’m just trying to get them to stop hurting themselves. Katie I think people really kid themselves about their holiness, and it makes me feel so terribly alone sometimes. I honestly believe that when we constantly seek each other’s approval it gets to be all that matters, and we build a prison around ourselves that shielding out God. We can’t be saints unless we admit to each other that our feet are dirty, how the hell can you want a pedicure when your feet stink?

Aw, I know I’m just a grumpy old man, but I used to be a grumpy young one. Love you, rick

Celebrations

Easter is an occasion of awe and confusion for me, and I’m very selfish about you and Dan leaving for 3 months – how do you get drunk and maybe even mourn a little.

Kids have become Idols.

And most people are never willing to even see their own violence which makes being personally non violent a taboo subject.

Forgiveness for myself and others is about the only thing I ever pray for.

I have a very skewed way of arriving at any sort of perspective, it’s just the way I’m wired (too many short circuits).

Our celebrations are not always elaborate events. I’ve seen a red wagon and a moderately steep hill turn into an evening of rowdy fun at Jubilee Partners. A meal in Valle Nuevo that, after a few hours of eating, talking, and laughter, turns into a music jam session. Whether our celebrations are well planned parties or merely spontaneous festivities, God just really wants us to enjoy each other’s company. So carry on, party animals!

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Love,
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The pregnant Matt and Krista.

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The pregnant Matt and Krista.

Jenny Prosa consoles housemate Caedmon as they watch Renata’s birthday whipped cream game from the sideline.
In a Church of the Sojourners bathroom I noticed a schedule of the Shalom coordinators’ gathering, posted for community leaders who might be sitting and waiting a minute with nothing better to do. . . . A mind is an awful thing to waste, you know.

In the Castanea Community in Nashville, next to the chore chart are some special reminders like “Clean the top floor of the chicken coop all the way to the wood and add fresh hay,” and “Please remove your personal food items from the fridge when they become inedible.” Some of us might have expressed that gentle advice with expletives added.

Jubilee Partners in Comer GA has charts for multiple purposes like kitchen duty, car sign-out, and teacher’s schedule for ESL classes at their refugee welcome center. But the one I like most is the chart of keys, dozens of them in fact, that open all the doors of the kingdom—at Jubilee, that is.

In the Knappsta household at Spring Water Community in Portland OR, I saw a whiteboard with the schedule of hospitality for their guest, along with a list that included “Mars Attack,” “Strange Brew,” “Axe Murderer,” “Dr. Strangelove,” “Young Frankenstein,” and “History of the World.” I imagine these were movie options for folks who had been as good as they could, for as long as they could, until their guest went back home.

Another favorite from Spring Water was a scribbled version of the mission statement they were working on which read, “Spirit help us to be the family of God, following the way of Jesus, living simply and sacrificially loving our neighborhood.”

One common feature of Christian community that has fascinated me is the creative signs, charts and schedules that groups use for countless purposes. As I go, I try to collect “best practices” to share with other communities, so here are some more community charts you might want to know about. . . . or not.

In other Plow Creek news:
• The weather has turned warm early this year, and the strawberries are coming on fast!
• The farm has welcomed three interns so far this summer; Bruce Schoenbein, April Kunieda, and Oscar Mendez, who liked his internship last year so much he came back. We are also happy to welcome Kate Bierma, from Reba, who began her farm internship in early June.
• David Gale suffered a minor stroke in mid-February. He has been recovering, working on physical therapy, and has begun driving again.
• Christiana Peterson is expecting her second child this fall.

Celebrations

News from Sojourners
By Katie Piché & Rick DiMicco

Dear Rick,
I wonder if you would be up for writing the SMC news. It is due this Saturday by midnight. I could do it, but I would prefer not to be told from my perspective this time. I have included some things that I know can be reported on. Can you let me know either way if you think you are up for this.

Thanks in advance for considering.

Love,

Katie

Topics:
• Adam and Amanda Wynant’s baby is due in May.
• Matt and Krista Creeger’s baby is also due in May.
• Tessa Richardson is engaged to Tim Fortescue- getting married in July.
• Decade Birthdays Celebrations (Ruben and Mateo -10, Zoe-50, Renata-30, Teri-60)
• Say something about Easter.
• Piché goes to work with Jaime and Marvin Trapnell, who run MCC’s SWAP program in Isom, KY. They’re just going for the summer.
• Kids Week/SMC Youth week Preparations

Church Study on non-violence

Prayer Requests:
• Lily Martinez lost the job she has had for the last 6 years.
• Christi Beutler is struggling with cancer.
• Zoe and her new daughter Gigi are doing well- pray for them as they continue to learn how to bond with each other.
• Gish Family health- the four of them have been fighting various sicknesses. Debbie has been diagnosed with walking pneumonia.
• Tim Otto as he works on his book.
• Lots of transitions for many Sojourners coming up

By Katie Piché & Rick DiMicco

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Boo sat under the maple trees on the meadow with thefew things she'd been able to save as she dashed out of the house: a handful of scrapbooks, the guinea pig in its cage. Evening was falling, but parts of the house still burned. The firemen continued working till well past full dark. A few of us still stood near, watching smoke rise from the ruins.

I hope you'll pardon me for telling this story from my own point of view. It is still all so vivid to me. Here are the other things I know.

Nobody knows how the fire started; the investigator ruled it "cause unknown." It started near the back of the house. When the children inside realized what was happening, they reacted very well: they shouted "Fire! Everybody get out!" and got out the front of the house. Boo and Martin tried to fight the fire which had by then engulfed the porch, and Boo suffered a first-degree burn from trying to push a burning box off the porch. But the porch roof had already caught on fire, and they could not stop the onslaught; so they grabbed what they could and got out as well.

Celebrations

The Grahams lost everything they had, with a few exceptions—things grabbed from the house or sifted out of the rubble afterward. They lost all the family's desktop computers, all their furniture and clothing and house wares, passports and documents, and most of all books, scrapbooks, photo albums of their life together, and family heirlooms. These things were precious and are a terrible loss to Boo and Steve.

The Prairie House was the most beautiful, solidly built, energy-efficient house at Plow Creek, and its loss is a terrible blow to the Fellowship, not only financially. It was the work of their hands. The house was built by Rick Reha, David Gale, and many others, with a unique post-and-beam construction and a passive solar design needing only wood heat to supplement it. Several Plow Creek families have raised their children in it. It was a well-loved house. The remains of the house, which was left partly standing after the fire, will be sifted out of the rubble afterward. They lost all the family's desktop computers, all their furniture and clothing and house wares, passports and documents, and most of all books, scrapbooks, photo albums of their life together, and family heirlooms. These things were precious and are a terrible loss to Boo and Steve.

At the Simple Way in Philadelphia, on a very troubled street corner, their door displays a plea and a prayer, "Heal all that is broken . . . in our hearts, in our streets, in our world. Amen"

The Grahams lived temporarily in the guestrooms in the Common Building basement after the fire, and have now moved to a partially repaired farmhouse a couple of miles down the road, which they are renting. It is not big enough to suit their needs nor in excellent repair, but does have land for their animals. They still hope to buy land somewhere and establish a farm and guesthouse for the poor. The Grahams are very grateful both to the Plow Creek community and to many in the surrounding community for the many kinds of help they have received. Friends, please pray for us all.

At the Simple Way in Philadelphia, on a very troubled street corner, their door displays a plea and a prayer, "Heal all that is broken . . . in our hearts, in our streets, in our world. Amen"

The devastation fire does not stop Plow Creek from celebrating the resurrection with a fish breakfast.

"The dishes will be washed by whoever has time to do them." Yeah, sure! By the third day it is obvious that no one has had the time except for one ... of reminders and nagging, everyone who remains is willing and relieved to see a chart on the wall. Then when people
News from Plow Creek
By Heather Munn

Around five o'clock on Saturday April 10th, I dumped a can of tomatoes into the pot and glanced out of the kitchen window. It was the loveliest spring day, the air soft and warm, the bluebells open. The leaves were still opening on the trees, so from our kitchen window in the Common Building basement you could still glimpse the corner of the Prairie House.

Bright flames were leaping from the house.

"Fire! The Prairie House!" I shouted as I ran out the door and up the stairs to the Common Building kitchen, where I could get a clear view. The entire back of the house was in flames.

"It's doomed," I whispered. I made a motion toward the phone in the freezer room, thinking, "If it's gotten this far, someone's already called 911, but I should call just in case."

"Fire," Steve shouted as we ran down the stairs to the Prairie House, where I could get a clear view. The entire back of the house was in flames. "It's doomed," I whispered. I made a motion toward the phone in the freezer room, thinking, "If it's gotten this far, someone's already called 911, but I should call just in case."

So when you see community charts, remember that they were probably created out of a shared sense of frustration. And their existence often represents a common creation, a Spirit-led consensus, a victory of peace—which is a wonder after all.

Believe: Why Christian Character Matters, p. 144.

Other people were arriving, hearing the news. The family members were all accounted for. Steve was picking up Charissa from a track meet, Gabrian was at the Moores' house, and the pets were safe except for four cats. The fire department was on its way.

We watched Steve's car pull in. He stopped in the middle of the driveway and we hurried toward him, shouting not to park there, the fire department was coming, assuring him that all his children were out of the house. He pulled up into a parking space, and he and Charissa got out, and watched the flames with us. We saw one of the cats streak away from the house.

When I see such community charts they represent unity, visible evidence a community has come together to do things a common way by voluntary association. Christian anarchism is freely agreeing to do what we do together because of Jesus.

Jesus said that new wine needs new wineskins. The kingdom of God will have structures, but they will be fitting for the new wine they are to hold. The old structures will probably not work. So it is appropriate for new communities to reflect on the needs they want to care for together because of the love of Jesus that has brought them together for mutual service and witness. The results will be creative and life-giving. And as the Spirit gives new wine, the Spirit also inspires new structures, or leads us to adapt the old ones for new purposes. The structures create new habits and the new habits create disciples of Jesus.

Charts are helpful to visitors as well since they are visible signs of some social structures that might otherwise be invisible to a newcomer. When I see them as a visitor in a new community, I feel welcomed, oriented, and know a little more how to belong.

Of course, each of us in community also needs time that is "off the charts," freedom to do the things that balance out our different needs. I need to read books, someone else needs to make music. Introverts need time alone, others go out for coffee. As the structures of our life become habitual, they take less effort, with the result that we become more like Jesus in our virtues, but also more like ourselves in uniquely eccentric and wonderful ways. Anyone who knows the inhabitants of the Clearing, our oldest continuous household at Reba, would agree. Over time we learn how to be flexible with expectations, supporting gifts and accepting limitations that come with being human.

"The virtues which Paul encourages the Colossians to develop are the virtues of community: mutual kindness, truth-telling, forgiveness, acceptance across traditional barriers of race, culture and class. It isn't just that building up and fostering such community is itself one of the virtues. Since 'love' is the primary virtue (3:14), community is the primary context. And . . . it is of the very essence of this kind of community that we are not clones of one another. All Christians are to exhibit the Christian virtues, but each one is called to a different set of tasks." (N.T.Wright, After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters, p. 144.)

What if someone's still in there.

Not knowing what I might need to do, I ran downstairs and put on a pair of shoes; then ran as hard as I could toward the house. Boo was picking up Charissa from a track meet, Gabrian was at the Moores' house, and the pets were safe except for four cats. The fire department was on its way.

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Finally the fire department arrived, one fire truck and a tank truck; like most country places, we have no fire hydrant. As the reservoir that the tanker truck would pour its water into for the other fire truck to draw from when it ran out. As the structures of our life become habitual, they take less effort, with the result that we become more like Jesus in our virtues, but also more like ourselves in uniquely eccentric and wonderful ways. Anyone who knows the inhabitants of the Clearing, our oldest continuous household at Reba, would agree. Over time we learn how to be flexible with expectations, supporting gifts and accepting limitations that come with being human.

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Shalom Connections

June 2010

Celebrations

(Continued from Page 5)
Celebrations

(Continued from Page 9)

• Our leader Sally Youngquist’s May 11 birthday, when we enjoyed ice cream and a slide show of the life of her father, Cyrus Bryson Schreiner, who passed from earth to glory this past year. We anticipate joining him at the heavenly feast, where we expect the ice cream will be “out of this world.”

• The annual banquet of Good News Partners (May 7), where Ronn Frantz was introduced as the new director of the organization, replacing longtime leader Bud Ogle. We bless Ronn in this new role and are grateful to all those taking over aspects of his work at Reunion Property Management.

• A “Friends of Koinonia” evening (March 27) when Koinonia’s director, Bren Dubay and co-worker Amanda Moore were with us, along with other Koinonia friends from the Chicago area. We heard about Koinonia’s inspiring return to a communal model of ministry, saw “Brians in the Cotton Patch” recalling the community’s history of persecution and perseverance, and then went halfway to heaven sampling the varieties of Koinonia chocolate-covered nuts. Check the Koinonia web-site, if you wish, and help them “ship the nuts out of Georgia.”

• A recent Sunday morning worship time when Jedidiah McCallister sat proudly next to his drumming daddy and played a toddler-size “high hat”, praising the LORD with clanging cymbals! Thanks be to God for the gift of gathering to celebrate, to feed our souls, through good times and hard times, at all times.

We are eagerly awaiting the births of two babies! Susana and Justin are expecting their second child in June, and Bethany and J.B. are expect- ing their first child in October.

We also give thanks for the miracle dog, Brazos, that Bethany and J.B. adopted from the local shelter a couple months ago. At Brazos’ first vet appointment, she was diagnosed with diphtheria, a 95% fatal disease. Tears were shed, but Brazos was allowed her life while she could enjoy it. And miraculously, it turns out that Brazos is the 5%! The vet says she fought her illness and won. Brazos now enjoys long walks with her growing family along the river for which she was named.

Gracias a La Vida:
News from
Hope Fellowship
By Gabriela Gatlin

As I’m preparing to write our church news for the spring, Anaí has sent me a link to a Habitat fundraiser for reconstruction after the Chilean earthquakes (www.vocesunidosasporchile.com). The link takes you to a new version of the song Gracias a La Vida originally composed by Violeta Parra and first released in 1966. The song is now an anthem for many Chilenos and Latin Americans. In many ways, Gracias a La Vida, “Thanks to Life who has given us so much” has also been our song this spring at Hope Fellowship.

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In April we enjoyed our annual and largest ever Easter retreat out in the country. It was a cool, sunny weekend with much laughter and games, five birthdays to celebrate and a resurrection. In the opening act of our Saturday night variety show, the Fellowship and Communications Committee intro-duced a Practice Dating Rotation (because we don’t have enough rotations and lists already!). The committee reported that due to the unfortunate imbalance between single men and single women in the church, our single men will need to have about six dates a month, and the single women will be allowed one date every six weeks. Perhaps your communities have some single men to share with us?

Granma Allene is delighting in the 162 Ranger baseball games that begin this spring. Phillip, Clare and Evan often drop by to watch a game with her.

Earlier this spring Michelle and Matt initiated the only active eating disorder support group in Waco.

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Warming up by the fire in the Patch backyard.

Reba folks celebrating life together at the pajama potluck party.

Ahhhhhh. □

Gracias a La Vida: News from Hope Fellowship By Gabriela Gatlin

As I’m preparing to write our church news for the spring, Anaí has sent me a link to a Habitat fundraiser for reconstruction after the Chilean earthquakes (www.vocesunidosasporchile.com). The link takes you to a new version of the song Gracias a La Vida originally composed by Violeta Parra and first released in 1966. The song is now an anthem for many Chilenos and Latin Americans. In many ways, Gracias a La Vida, “Thanks to Life who has given us so much” has also been our song this spring at Hope Fellowship.

We are eagerly awaiting the births of two babies! Susana and Justin are expecting their second child in June, and Bethany and J.B. are expect- ing their first child in October.

We also give thanks for the miracle dog, Brazos, that Bethany and J.B. adopted from the local shelter a couple months ago. At Brazos’ first vet appointment, she was diagnosed with diphtheria, a 95% fatal disease. Tears were shed, but Brazos was allowed her life while she could enjoy it. And miraculously, it turns out that Brazos is the 5%! The vet says she fought her illness and won. Brazos now enjoys long walks with her growing family along the river for which she was named.

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Shalom Connections

Slowly the group is growing, and Michelle and Matt are thankful for the opportunity to offer this service to the wider community.

Luis, Gwendolyn, Paloma, and Gerson will be spending the summer in Oaxaca and are preparing to lead an ecumenical conference on nonviolence with local religious leaders. Fernando will travel to Oaxaca to lead a workshop during the conference. Several others families from Hope Fellowship will also visit during and after the conference. We are praying together for God’s leadership during the conference this summer and also for guidance as Luis considers what future projects and community might grow out of these endeavors.

We are thankful for the desire of several individuals, couples and young families who are choosing to stay in Waco and make their home at Hope Fellowship. In May, Michelle and Matt moved to a house on Sanger Avenue a few blocks up from the Meeting House, and Bethany, J.B. and Brazos moved into another house on Sanger in early June. We are praying with other people in the church who are still in search of good living arrangements and employment.

At the end of May we celebrated Aranza’s baptism. In preparation for her baptism, Aranza shared her testimony with the congregation. Aranza recounted the narrative of her life, the journey from Mexico to the United States that as a young child she did not choose for herself and the ways in which she has built a place to call home that includes both cultures. Aranza admitted that as a child she thought everyone else must also be part of a “quirky church like ours,” an extended family. But as she grew up, she realized that wasn’t true. Because of Hope Fellowship, Aranza views church as a family.

Aranza shared about some decisions and choices she needs to make in the future, and she ended her testimony by stating, “I know that baptism is about making a declaration, and I want to declare today that God is my savior. God is taking care of me, and there is nothing I can do without God.”

Gracias a la Vida. Thanks to Life and to God!

Celebrations

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Celebrations

News from Reba Place Fellowship
By Heather Clark

The chorus of a 1970s song that we still sing occasionally during RPF worship begins “For our life together we celebrate” and ends with “Ah! There’s the celebration! Celebrate the whole of it.”

Through celebrating we grow in joy and unity as God’s people. This takes work (for anticipation and preparation) as well as rest (for reflection and recovery). And, if the celebration involves a bunch of 11 year old boys, a bonfire, and a beach (complete with sharp sticks and large sandpit), it takes recovery. Hence this weary post-birthday-party mom offers a brief and humble listing of celebrations in our recent past and near future:

Celebrations we’re anticipating:
• Our annual retreat (May 21-23), where we will unpack and admire “Treasures Old and New.” We’re looking forward to hearing stories from some of our senior members and to sampling workshop options ranging from woodworking and pottery making to the disappearing art of crafting the handwritten letter.
• Memorial Day, 4th of July, and Labor Day cookouts at Emmanuel Lodge, where the burgers (beef and Boca) will taste all the better because we’ve spent the morning working together to care for our lovely retreat spot.
• Celina Varela and Peter Velthuizen’s upcoming (July 10) wedding. What a joy to have them hand deliver their lovely invitations (original artwork by Anne Gavitt).
• The arrival (sometime in September) of a baby brother for Seth Vaughan, who has recently gone from crawling to walking. Lilia McCallister, a marathon stair climber, has been hot on his heels!

Celebrations we’re gratefully recalling:
• A pajama party potluck where lullabies and a Winnie the Pooh story (read in a proper British accent, no less) proved a feast for the ears.

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