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December 2010: Advent—The Gift and the Gospel

Luke and Advent:

The Gift and the Gospel

By Matt Porter

The Advent according to the Gospel of Luke makes clear why the giving and receiving of gifts marks even the most secularized version of the Christmas season. Luke pays more attention to the details surrounding the birth of Jesus than his counterparts, and these details provide insights into the Kingdom of God that endure in Christmas even as other kingdoms and principalities may influence our collective celebrations. For Luke, the coming of Christ and the Advent of the Kingdom of God is a gift, an unmistakable interruption to what is normal or customary and an opportunity for something new to take hold.

Many of us have participated in the giving and receiving of gifts since we were young. Holidays and birthdays rarely come and go without the customary exchange of baubles between friends and families, and yet we also sometimes become aware that many of these gifts lack the very things that seem essential to the idea of a gift. We often spend a good deal of time agonizing over selecting a gift for particular people. Sometimes it is because this person is quite close to us, other times it is because there is actually very little we know



Jenny and Renata at the Sojo white elephant exchange.

about or share in common with the intended recipient. Either way, the agony is the same: What gift seems *appropriate*? What gift communicates the thought or emotion I intend? When we are forced to consider our gifts more carefully, we may realize that even the smallest gift given may create a change in our relationship to the recipient, so we know we must be careful in our choices.

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We also know that a “gift exchange” is a contradiction in terms, although we may not admit it to ourselves.

Decorum and propriety call for us to *exchange* gifts with those who give us a gift, but we know that this is simply in the name of politeness. A gift is a gift because it is not part of an exchange. A gift is not an expected social transaction of equal value. A gift is not an agreed-upon exchange of goods. Do we consider our paycheck a gift? Is a fair price for our goods or services a gift? We know that our economic interactions call for just economic exchanges between parties, and yet we also know that a gift is something else entirely. In fact, we know that a gift must destabilize the ordinary balance between two parties or else it can scarcely be considered a gift. Whether given from an overflow of riches or from great sacrifice, gifts are not governed by fairness, justice, or propriety but instead by love, grace, and humility.

Furthermore, not only do we know that gifts are not part of an equal economy of



Hope Fellowship women enjoying a break in the countryside.

exchange, we know that the items given should not be customary but should be a surprise. Any child who has received socks, gloves, scarves and similar items for Christmas could easily explain this. It is not that these items are not welcome, or that (most) children are not grateful to receive them. It is that children expect to receive such things from those who love them and care for them. To not receive them would be

a sign of neglect, and surely gifts are more than the inverse of neglect. Does a farmer who buys a new plow tell his laborers he purchased a gift for them? Certainly not, for we know that a gift is given in addition to whatever customary exchanges take place between two people. This is why we may wrap presents in bags or boxes, and why the anticipation of a good gift is so intoxicating: it is an opportunity for something new to occur.

Finally, there is the most elusive aspect of the notion of a gift. Many of us will live an entire lifetime and only experience this aspect a few times, but it is an essential part of what we know to be true about gifts. A true gift is impossible. Not only does a gift go beyond

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Shalom Connections

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equal exchange or customary needs, but a gift brings to us what is impossible. This impossibility may be found in our inability to receive the gift given. Maybe it is simply too valuable, too extravagant, or perhaps too difficult for the giver to part with. We may recognize that the inequality between the giver and ourselves will be too great after this gift. It may be impossible to continue as we were. Or we may recognize that this gift can only be received because it would be impossible for us to obtain it ourselves. Husbands whose wives bear children may know something of this, as would prodigal children received back by their family. It would be impossible to obtain such things, as these things can only be received as gifts.

This impossibility that haunts our understanding of gifts reminds us why we try so hard to make the giving and receiving of gifts into a harmless routine or a relic to be discarded. Gifts destabilize our customary patterns of life and challenge us to begin again. We all spend a great deal of time hammering out lives of justice and fairness, determining what is proper and what is deserved. And gifts destroy such arrangements in their extravagance and grace. Many of us still give gifts, at best trying to testify to the delightful aspects of

gifts or, at worst, trying to avoid the possibility that gifts might actually guide us toward greater mercy and grace. But when we relegate the gift to a secondary or expendable aspect of our Advent celebration, we ignore some of Luke's best insights into Advent. Could it be that it is this unsettling and destabilizing character of gifts that teaches us most about the Kingdom of God?

Luke was writing of such things when he shared the story of the two announcements that begin the Advent we celebrate. Zacharias and Elizabeth, old in age and righteous in stature, are told that they will receive the child who will confirm before everyone that God's favor is upon them. Mary, young and unmarried, is told that she will receive the child that will save the world but also likely be

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Tim and Jenny examining a white elephant gift.

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her public shaming. Both children are gifts of God, and both women recognize the favor of the Lord upon them albeit in radically different ways.

To Elizabeth, Mary's gift is a reminder that God's economy is not an equal exchange. Her years of faithful service surely did not earn her child anymore than Mary's innocence gained hers. Is it at all fair that Mary be given this gift so quickly, and so undeservedly, when Elizabeth had to toil for most of her life? Is it at all fair that Mary be given such a burden? Is the extravagance God is showing to Mary not also infuriating? Does God not care at all for human standards of what is fair? Or proper?

To Mary, Elizabeth's gift is a reminder that God's economy is unconventional. If God had only given this gift maybe five or ten years earlier, Zacharias may have believed it. But God



Hope Fellowship joins local DREAM Act supporters for a candle light vigil.

waited until it surprised him, until he could not have been prepared. And then God surprises Mary with an unexpected engagement gift. There is nothing customary about these gifts. Women of a certain age and marital status are supposed to bear children. That is the way of things, and shouldn't God respect that? How dare he upset social norms and even challenge nature itself?

Upon meeting, both women instantly recognize the impossibility of God's gift in the other. Elizabeth had proven to herself and her husband that a child was unobtainable. They had suffered and waited for naught. It was impossible to have a child, and yet it was to be so. Could it have been anything but a gift? Mary was unmarried and young, still secure in her purity. Certainly it was not →→→



Dawn's 40th birthday celebration at Sojo.

possible to have a child, but standing before her family and peers, it was impossible to receive a child. It could only disrupt her relationships and threaten the domestic and civil tranquility all good young women hoped for. It would put her into a dangerous and vulnerable position, not only before God but Joseph as well. This gift of a child would begin a new chapter of her life, and anything this new is at least a little terrifying.

Why would God do this? Why would God give gifts without regard for what humans deserve or earn? Why would God give gifts that destabilize our well-tended economies and social customs? Would that not create chaos? Sow inequality among us? Make us hate and envy each other? Luke's account shows otherwise. When Mary runs to Elizabeth, she

finds a new kind of relationship. Both women know what it means to receive a gift now, for all of its terrifying wonder and dangerous promise. Both women know that their respective gifts leave them with no shared economy, no polite exchanges to fall back upon. They can now only receive one another as a gift. Their relationship is no longer a typical kinship governed by social and familial obligation but is now to be characterized chiefly by the mercy they have each been shown. God's disruptive gifts of grace set the standard. They must now begin again, after

This is Luke's Advent, the appearance of a gift that disrupts every human relationship and begins something new.



Third Way sharing food at the Fall Retreat.

the gifts they receive make everything new.

This is Luke's Advent, the appearance of a gift that disrupts every human relationship and begins something new. The gift of the Kingdom of God is no exchange of equal value between Christ and humans, and Luke enjoys describing the surprise felt by the sinners, women, and tax collectors Jesus gives to along the way. Equally startling is the impossibility of the Kingdom. Could we ever hope to deserve this gift? Do we dare receive this gift? For when we do receive this gift, our world can be and must be remade. This is the Advent of our Lord and the hope it brings. May the gifts we bring to each other create new possibilities for grace, and may the gifts we receive open us up to new understandings of God's Kingdom. □



Ezekiel and Shannon getting to know the donkey during the HF women's retreat.

News from Reba Place
By Heather Clark

*Advent again
and you with this news:
Noelle, and now a new one to
come.*

*Audacious surprise of the sea-
son!*

*Outside my kitchen window
the parkway pear trees
flap their last few leaves
in gleeful anticipation.*

Some years ago I composed this poem for my friend Mary, unexpectedly pregnant with a sibling for her firstborn, Noelle. Though we don't have a single Mary in our midst, we're learning to say yes to "audacious surprises," rejoicing that our holy God keeps his promises to all generations.

So here's some recent Reba news, some of it surprising, all of it lit with good tidings of God's faithfulness.

Unto us a child is born. Adrian Marpeck Vaughan arrived safe and healthy on September 17th. (Quick history tidbit: Pilgrim Marpeck, an early 16th century Anabaptist leader known for his dialogues with Catholics, Protestants, and early Anabaptists, held prominent civic positions in between being run out of cities for his beliefs).

And a new household is born. Dan and Camille Walker shared their dream for a new household when the spacious green house at 714 Reba became available in November. They're eagerly awaiting the arrival of Barb Grimsley (who's bringing along her current housemate, Heather Robins) and Johnmark Hatfield and are happy to have an intergenerational beginning for this endeavor.



Reba children making music during the Michaelmas Celebration.

And some apprentices are come from afar, bringing their gifts and settling down in Rogers Park. We're glad to be getting to know Ben Anderson, Ariel Carver, and Drew Daniels. Ben has taught in Spain and at Native American Tribal School in his home state of South Dakota. Drew (from Columbus OH) is an alum of Greg Clark's Christian Community Seminar who recently spent time cycling through the U.S. to show a documentary he made during a summer of being homeless. Ariel (from Pittsburgh PA) has experience working with young children and enjoys reading and writing theology. She arrived in October after traveling through the Middle East with her dad.

And some wise elders undertook journeys with courage and the help of loving others. Early in November, Dorothy Konsterlie traveled with Barb Grimsley to Minnesota, where they visited Dorothy's sister. After a long day of travel back to Chicago, Dorothy (soon to be 90!) showed up at our evening meeting

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Seth spending some time with his new brother Adrian.

glowing with gratitude for the blessing of reuniting with Beatrice after several years of long-distance relating.

By mid-December Vera Stoehr will have moved to a more accessible apartment, having accepted the challenge to grow in trust during the process of downsizing and relocation.

Ruth Ann Belser Friesen has returned from putting her affairs in order in Argentina and has settled in at the Clearing. We're honored to walk with her "through the valley of the shadow" as she grieves the loss of her husband Richard and waits to see what the Lord has in store for her.

And some who'd been traveling in circles (of practicing and novice membership) were counted for the census. We recently welcomed Bob and Linda Hovde (David's parents, recently relocated from Florida), Pete Manzella, Susan McClelland, Kacie Mulhern, and Dillon and Irene Ross as new practicing members, joining others continuing on in that capacity. Andy and Kristin Ross stepped back from RPF involvement to focus on caring for their little one and getting Andy through his newly-undertaken graduate study.

Our new novices, Kara Bender, Eric and Katie Dahlaw, Gus Roddy, Johnmark Hatfield, Ric and Helen Hudgens, and Dan and Camille Walker, join continuing



Camille and Dan on the porch of 714 Reba.

novices Kate Bierma and Brandon Lane. Novices Josh and Candace McCallister are extending their discernment process briefly. Jim Fitz has decided on practicing membership. Barbara Stern left the RPF novitiate to marry Matt Faberson Sept. 4, but she remains among us in employment as a senior bookkeeper.

Finally, we're thrilled to have Jesse Miller and Jolyn Rodman committing to covenant membership!

And all of us were challenged to travel further with the One who lifts up the lowly. Ched Myers came in October and spoke on "Discipleship and Economics: Jesus' Call in a World of Injustice." The following day, he led a seminar focusing on eco-regionalism and how to love the place to which God has called you. Ric Hudgens oriented us to Ched's writings

in two Monday night seminars prior to the visit.

Some of us attended this year's Christian Community Development Association conference and celebration of John Perkins' 80 years of fruitful life and ministry. Many were encouraged by the inter-racial partnerships and raising up of younger leadership modeled in this 20-year grassroots association.

And the whole flock rejoiced to hear the noises of babes (and decided to hire childcare help!) It's wonderful to have up to eight little ones at our gatherings and to have the assistance of Micah Clark, Jaden Janzen, and various adult volunteers in keeping them happy.

And some wise women got organized! In between wiping noses and keeping

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Advent—The Gift and the Gospel

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track of who's got which superhero powers on a given day, Candace McCallister and other mothers of young children have been collaborating to launch family-friendly potlucks, a bimonthly Mom's group, a monthly Parents' Night Out, a preschool co-op, and special celebrations like a recent Michaelmas gathering (where volunteers brandishing a wooden sword portrayed the archangel Michael slaying the dragons of fear, depression, and oppression).

Another wise and organized woman, Celina Varela, joined the Leadership Team in November to care especially for our "community of discipleship" cloverleaf.

And three wiseguys had surgery (and recovered successfully). Bob Lembke

has two mended femurs, after falling forward in his wheelchair and breaking both legs in late August, requiring time in the hospital and several weeks at a rehab facility. (Please join us in praying for continued healing and improvement in Bob's circulation, especially to his feet.)

Doug Selph has been minus his appendix since early October, when it turned against him.

Dan Walker is down to one kidney, after graciously giving his other to former apprentice Luke Hintgen in September, becoming the third kidney donor in Reba history with the name Dan!



Michaelmas Celebration.

A fourth wiseguy (who will turn 70 on Three Kings Day) got a book-writing grant.

David Janzen received a Pastoral Study Project grant to pay for six months of his work on a manual for growing Christian intentional communities. He anticipates collaborating with others from the Nurturing Communities Project as the writing goes forward. (From David: "The latest title I'm testing for this book is *Growing Christian Intentional Community for Dummies, Idealists, Hypocrites and Wannabe Disciples of Jesus*. If you have a better suggestion, please help me").

And our souls proclaimed the greatness of the LORD, and our spirits rejoiced in God our Saviour when Corey Helms, Jessie Miller, Katie Dahlaw, and Karima Walker gifted us with an original rendition of the Magnificat (think guitars, banjo, drum, and dancing!)

Whew—what a season! We send joyous Advent greetings to all of you. ☐



Michaelmas Celebration.

News from Hope Fellowship

By Gabriela Gatlin

Before sharing communion during worship this past fall, Lucas Land asked us to remember special meals of good food and fellowship. Several children quickly recalled spectacular meals of pizza and ice cream. J.B. Smith remembered sharing many family meals with the Gatlins when he lived in their house, and Carlos Hinojosa remembered doing the same when he lived with the Bridgewaters.



Lasagna Luncheon to discuss growth at Hope Fellowship.

Karine Zamora then shared that immigrants often remember the first meal they eat after crossing the southern U.S. border, and they recall these stories of first meals whenever they remember their crossings. Years ago, Karine crossed into Laredo, TX with a group of women, and her first

meal on this side of the border was at a Church's Chicken in a gas station. Karine ordered what she thought was "just" a chicken, but it turned out to be a combo. In total delight, with grease running between her fingers, she ate the most delicious chicken the United States could have prepared; it

was a "pollo **muy** sabroso" [a **very** delicious chicken].

Remembering is the action we have studied over the course of the fall as we continue to explore our year-long theme of discernment. As Micah 6:8 reminds us, we have to remember what God has already shown us and then act on that learning when we seek discernment for our present reality and direction for the future. During adult teachings, we have studied the lessons already learned but often forgotten in parables of justice, mercy and humility. In our covenant groups, we even worked on writing our own parables.

In other church news, Benjamin Henry was born in late October to J.B. and Bethany Smith. After months



Nancy Gatlin enjoying the HF women's retreat.

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of waiting for a child to adopt, Matt and Michelle got a phone call one afternoon about a 3 month old boy in need of foster care, and later that night, Jerimyah was in their home.

After graduating from high school in June, Jesse Miller left Waco to attend college at the University of North Texas.

Lucas and Sarah Land and Asher and Lydia began a three-year volunteer term with the Mennonite Central Committee in Bolivia. Our selfish hope is that Waco will draw them back to us after their volunteer term is completed.

Alan Caruthers recently decided to seek a bone marrow transplant after submitting himself to several unsuccessful experimental treatments. He and Laura



Hope Fellowship joins Waco DREAM Act Alliance for the Mexican Independence Day Parade.

have organized a care group for support during the transplant process, and Milagro Mullet has already volunteered to host a pupusa fundraiser in her home.

Cristina Dominguez and Nancy and Joe Gatlin have

held a semi-regular peace vigil for several years now. Several folks in the fellowship have recently joined them, and the group decided to move the vigil from a commercial sector of town to the neighborhood of the Meeting House. Our neighbors have responded with interest to the vigil, and Nathan Alleman recently received an unsolicited \$10 while standing on the corner. It might be interesting if the shadier businesses that operate on our streets found our peace vigil to be more profitable.

In October we held our first public forum on certain economic, legal and theological aspects of immigration. A neighborhood church with a large fellowship hall hosted the forum, and we enjoyed the opportunity to strengthen relationships with other leaders in the Waco community

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Nancy Gatlin, Christy Rowe-Miller, and Alan Caruthers welcoming folks at the pupusa fundraiser..

who volunteered to lead workshops.

In October, the women of Hope Fellowship also enjoyed a weekend retreat led by Enuma Okoro.

The challenges faced by undocumented youth is a particular concern for many of us at Hope Fellowship. This past summer, Anton Flores of Alterna community gave Gabriela a helpful Austin contact that eventually led her back to Waco and a Baylor University DREAMer. Together Gabriela and the DREAMer, along with Aranza Torres, Analí Gatlin, SaraBeth Stoltzfus, Teresa Mullet, Gwendolyn Matias-Ryan and Luz Rueda, founded the Waco DREAM Act Alliance. Many other students and young adults in Waco have joined the group, and they have enthusiastically organized several events in

the Waco community to educate and advocate for the DREAM Act.

Hope Fellowship continues to grow in numbers. This growth is a joy for our community, but an obvious stress on the physical space in the Meeting House. In responding to our physical needs for more space, we want to also be faithful to what God has already shown us and discern how to direct this growth into deeper expressions of community and new humanity.

Our experiments with the



Barbara Bridgewater reflecting during the women's retreat.

format of worship earlier this year did not result in any long-term solutions for directing our growth. The Council is now leading us through a time of discussion and reflection on three new possible strategies for directing this growth, and the membership hopes to make a decision by Easter of next year. The strategies currently under consideration appear to hold more promise than the experiments of last spring because the discussions of these strategies will be held over Sunday afternoon "lasagna luncheons." Again, we're working on remembering what we've already learned; God is present when we share good food and fellowship. □



Milagro and Teresa Mullet making pupusas to raise funds for Alan's bone marrow transplant.

Glimpses into

Sojourners

By Katie Piché

The following is a recap from Jeff Hare's history as celebrated at his retirement party at the end of October.

Jeff goes AWOL: Jeff was drafted for the Vietnam War and was eventually fed up with the whole War thing and was not willing to take another human life or fire his weapon. For 8-10 weeks Jeff hid out on the actual base sleeping in whatever spare bunk he could find, church pews, and the backs of cars. In addition to sleeping on the base, he still had his mess hall pass and ate breakfast everyday undetected. After breakfast, he spent most of his day time in the library

protected by the librarian who forbid typical military type conduct in her sanctuary of silence. Jeff was safe there.

Eventually Jeff rode out of the base in the front passenger seat of his friend's car. For the next several years he stayed under the radar working at establishments like Battery Guy and Ponzetti's Pizza, until a lawyer convinced him that he was an embarrassment to the Army, they didn't want him, and if he turned himself in they would discharge him. The Lawyer was right. Jeff turned himself in and was "undesirably discharged," which is two degrees less severe than



Gigi celebrating her adoption day.

"dishonorable discharge." Today Jeff himself says, "I couldn't have asked for a better discharge."

Paraphrased from Debbie Gish, teaching from Exodus.

I want to argue that the oppression of the Israelites by Pharaoh is not unlike a child being strangled by an attacker. Would not a rescuer demand that the child be let go? And the more the attacker might refuse, the more serious the attempts of the rescuer become? The plagues are dramatic attempts to get attention. This is a story of justice not mercy, perhaps to show how serious sin can be. But this is one story in the context of a much larger story, one where God is forming a people, one where God is mending the universe and redeeming all creation.



Analise and Debbie enjoying Dawn's birthday celebration.



Celebrate with us God creating a family in Zoe and Gigi.

On November 5, 2010 we celebrated Gigi's adoption day.

Sojo-together: A time of learning to just be together. A time to grow in friendship with each other. Activities have included and are not limited to:

- Card games in costumes (with accents)
- Pie baking workshops
- Massages
- Scavenger Hunts
- Drum Circles
- Trampoline Jumps
- Quilting
- Asian Games
- Party Runs- groups of three or more joggers
- Reading out loud together
- Frisbee on Sunday afternoon



Nate, Gigi, Zoe, and Jon inspecting a white elephant gift.



Zoe, Alexina, and John David celebrating Dawn's 40th birthday.

Sabbath:

Rest. Rest in our struggles: with cancer, with loss, with grief, with tantrums, with anger, with lies, with truth, with anxiety, with depression, with unemployment, with changing life stages, with housemates, with family baggage...

Rest. Rest in our joys: delighting spouses, growing children, Caedmon, Asian cooking, interpretive dancing, laughing, housemates, guinea pig searches, gardens, **God is Enough...** □

News from Third Way
By Natalie Potts

Third Way began the autumn season with a church-wide retreat! Our retreat took place in our neighborhood; we borrowed space at a church building nearby. The retreat was a time for our community to worship together, deepen our relationships with one another, and do some planning for this upcoming year.

We spent time in corporate worship both Friday and Saturday evenings. We spent most of Saturday morning meeting in smaller groups, each a committee with goals and purpose and tasks to accomplish. Saturday afternoon we played a lively game of Big Base (which is a lot like kickball!), and some folks sat at the park knitting and chatting. Each meal was hosted in a different home, and we ate together the entire



Pumpkin carving at Oktoberfest.

weekend. On Sunday morning, we concluded with a worship service and a message that drew out some of the themes that God had been speaking to us over the weekend. The following are five actions we feel God is leading us into this coming year:

1. A year of **freedom and joy!** Jesus has given us the Kingdom. We've seen some hard things the past few years, but the Lord has brought us through those and will continue to sustain us. May words of freedom and joy be on our lips, in the decisions we make, and in the ways we approach one another and the Lord.
2. A year of **contribution.** We are learning to work together in order to fuel the life of our community. And we are all priests. We are part of the body of Christians, and each of us has a role to play.
3. A year of **adventure, mission, and risk.** How can we take risks that build faith? We want to live in



Third Way's Mission and Service Committee.

such a way that we must depend on our Father to sustain us.

4. A year of **family.** We are beloved sons and daughters of God! The doors of our homes are thrown open to one another and to the stranger. We are to be a community of hospitality, and of devotion to each other and to Yahweh.

5. A year of **healing.** We offer forgiveness to each other—to those both within the community and outside of it. We want to share our wounds with one another, and partner with God in binding up the brokenhearted.

Some news items:

The Gilberts adopted a baby on October 1! They have been in the adoption process for over a year, and at the end of September, they traveled down to North Carolina to bring home their new daughter. We welcome Eden Cherish Gilbert! Pray for health for Eden and that

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joy would be abundant as their family grows.

Early in October, the two intentional community houses developed a proposal to merge the two households into one! This action became necessary for several reasons, including the fact that some folks have had trouble making rent. Bills are shared between the two households, and the expense of two homes has become too much. There were a few folks who moved out of the Thomas House at the end of the summer. The dwindling numbers in the house led us to reflect on the mission of the household. Can three or four people constitute a household in a house that is big enough for ten? We decided it is time for something new! Pray for us as we form a new household family together!

With the households merging, we are losing our current

meeting space. We are searching for places on University Ave, the central corridor that runs through our neighborhood. Pray that we find something that is financially feasible, and in a location the Lord would have us be!

Seth and I traveled to Parnell, Iowa in October to visit over the weekend with folks from West Union Mennonite Church. We were warmly welcomed by both the leadership team and other members of the church. We discussed ways for our churches to relate more and connect with other churches rooted in the Mennonite tradition. We know we have a lot to learn from them, and we are excited to continue building the relationship.

At the end of October, we celebrated Third Way's first annual Oktoberfest. It was an afternoon spent in the Thomas



Third Way welcomes Eden Cherish Gilbert.

House backyard that included lawn games, a pumpkin carving contest, donuts and hot cider, and lots of fun for kids and families. The winning pumpkin was a rendition of the glowing batman beacon, created by Matt Axelson and Joshua Como.

The formation of our community committees is officially underway. We plan to have a community event each month, service days in our neighborhood, and greater organization in both the administrative and spiritual life aspects of our community. We are also continuing to explore participation in the Shalom Mission Communities, including visits to each of the other participating communities. We look forward to meeting all of you! Please continue to pray for discernment in this time and that we would continue to stay in step with the Spirit. Peace to you all! □



Seth McCoy teaching during the Sunday meeting at Third Way.

With Christ, God has injected himself into history. With the birth of Christ, God's reign is now inaugurated in human time.

On this night, as every year for twenty centuries, we recall that God's reign is now in this world and that Christ has inaugurated the fullness of time. His birth attests that God is now marching with us in history, that we do not go alone.



Humans long for peace, for justice, for a reign of divine law, for something holy, for what is far from earth's realities. We can have such a hope, not because we ourselves are able to construct the realm of happiness that God's holy words proclaim, but because the builder of a reign of justice, of love, and of peace is already in the midst of us.

Archbishop Oscar Romero
December 25, 1977

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