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Nurturing Communities

An excerpt from “A Preface the Author Hopes You Will Read First,” the Preface to The Intentional Christian Community Handbook by David Janzen of Reba Place Fellowship.

With some books you can skip the introductory stuff where the author tells you what he or she is going to say again later on. However, in this preface I tell stories you’ll find nowhere else in the book—about the title, about how I grew up in such a way that nurturing communities has become my passion, and about a group of friends from many different communities who have collaborated to bring together the stories and insights for growing communities that are found in this book. Thank you for coming along.

We live in exciting times when many new intentional Christian communities are springing up, where young people (and older folks, too) are making a courageous experiment with their lives, moving into “abandoned places of empire,” trying to live by the words and example of Jesus to “love one another as I have loved you.” Along the way they are discovering what monastic communities and lay communities have discovered in every generation: to be capable of authentic community we need to undergo a major conversion of life. This is especially true if we have grown up in the soil of a society like ours that has become toxic to community, worships self, money, and power, and scorns the poor. We may know what is wrong with the old world, but we seldom realize how much of that world we still bring along with us as we



Sojourners: Amy, Gigi, and Alexina at Celebration of Yahweh’s Kingship

plant seeds of a new society in the manure of the old. (Hey, I get to say that word because I grew up on a farm.) Although we may be idealists and hypocrites, there is hope for us and for the world if we stick with Jesus—who will surely stick with us.

Concerning idealists, many of us long for community because of our critique about all that is wrong with society, the church, and the people we have lived with so far. Our vision of an ideal world and a model community may bring us to the door, but it will not show us how to live in the house of community itself. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote in 1933, “The man who fashions a visionary ideal of community demands that it be realized by God, by others, and by himself.” Unless we let go of our ideal community, we will end up hating the sisters and brothers who, inevitably, do not live up to our expectations, and so, Bonhoeffer warns, we become the destroyer of that very real community God is already growing up around us. We need honest people to help us channel our idealism into practical work and who love us anyway.

Now about hypocrites, the distance between ignorance and knowledge can be a moment (or the latest book), but the gap between knowing and faithfully doing with others what we already know can be more than a lifetime. We love to judge others by their worst behavior and ourselves by our highest ideals. As alcoholics learn in AA, there will always be a hypocrite lurking within us, ready to take over our lives in a moment of self-confidence. We might practice introducing ourselves in community meetings with the confession, “Hello, my name is David, and I’m a hypocrite.” Hypocrites were some of Jesus’s favorite people not to be like. We believe that



Plow Creek: The Peterson family in front of the corn crib between bundles of amaranth hung up to dry.

Christian intentional community is a support group for recovering hypocrites who discover by living together the great chasm between what we know and how we live—and find out that we are loved anyway.

So where does this impossible love come from that makes community possible? As you might have learned if you went to Sunday school, the answer to every question is “Jesus.” Alas, with Jesus the right words don’t get us to first base. “Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom of heaven.” We come close to the love of Jesus as we join a particular band of his disciples, learning from him the “one another” skills of community. “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock” (Mt. 7:21–24).

“The whole point of what Jesus was up to,” according to the Bishop of Durham, England, Dr. N. T. Wright, “was that he was doing close up, in the present, what he was promising long-term in the future. And what he was promising for that future and

Continued next page...

<i>Table of Contents / Sept 2012</i>	
Nurturing Communities	1
News from the SMC delegation to El Salvador	6
Reba Place Fellowship News.	8
News from Hope Fellowship	10
News from Thirdway	12
Church of the Sojourners News.	14
Greetings from the New SMC Coordinator	15

Shalom Connections

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doing in the present was not saving souls for a disembodied eternity, but rescuing people from the corruption and decay of the way the world presently is so that they could enjoy, already in the present, that renewal of creation which is God’s ultimate purpose — and so they could thus become colleagues and partners in that large project.”

“That large project” is what this book is about: Spirit-led movements that are giving birth to new communities and new vocations for community in our day. These communities are called to be living demonstrations now of the future that God has for the whole world. “Behold, the kingdom is among you.”

This book was created by a “we,” a team of young folks of all ages who have banded together to learn from and to nurture this most recent crop of intentional communities. But before I tell you about how the book came to be, I think it would be fair for you to know some of the life experiences that gave me this passion to nurture Christian intentional communities.

As you have already been warned, I grew up on a farm, in a Kansas Mennonite family, learning how to milk cows, drive tractors, and sneak away whenever possible with my sister and two brothers to play basketball on a goal hanging from the south side of the barn. Church was a regular part of our week, as were devotions at the breakfast table and bedtime prayers. More formative, perhaps, was our parents’ insistence that, whenever there were fights during the day, we confessed our faults and were reconciled with each other before going to bed, because the Bible said, “Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry” (Eph. 4:26). Once I remember my father waking me in the night and asking my forgiveness for losing his temper and chewing me out before my friends. I grew up learning about a radical peacemaking Jesus in the Gospels, but I also encountered enough rigid and authoritarian church leadership that I had a hard time seeing this Jesus embodied in the church.

At Bethel College, a Kansas Mennonite liberal arts college in North Newton, Kansas, I felt the freedom to figure out who I was apart from the pressure to conform. I tried on whatever philosophy I was reading at the time and decided I could not honestly call myself a Christian. In my senior year (1961), during Kennedy’s presidency, I found myself in a delegation of peace-movement activists, fasting and picketing in front of the White House in Washington in opposition to atmospheric nuclear testing. In a mysterious and wonderful way, I felt God entering my life and calling me to be a peacemaker in a world preparing for total war. I was a young radical angry about injustice, but God promised me companionship on this journey—not just an inner personal relationship, but also a community of fellow seekers who would experience something of that reconciliation we would proclaim to the world.

Back on campus I sought out Joanne Zerger, a peace club coworker who was willing to hear about my calling to some kind

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of prophetic mission. Joanne herself belonged to a renewal movement on campus led by Al Meyer (John Howard Yoder's brother-in-law) and other mentors. They were not content to read about the recovery of the Anabaptist vision and the communalism of the Early Church, but they formed small groups of students to *be* the church with each other in community, with Jesus's teachings at the center of their life.

Let's fast-forward through two years of divinity school where I discovered I was not becoming a pastor, marriage to Joanne, history study at the University of Kansas, and then high school teaching in the newly independent Democratic Republic of the Congo under the Mennonite Central Committee—my alternative to military service during the Vietnam War. Wherever we went we found ourselves gathering with like-minded friends into base Christian communities to read Scripture—often Jesus's Sermon on the Mount—and asking how to live together in response to this call of radical discipleship.

Back in the States in the early 1970s we plunged into "the movement," resisting the Vietnam War and seeking more of that intentional community life that we had tasted while in the Congo. We were idealists with visions of the model community that would change the world and hypocrites filled with prophetic rhetoric of all the great things we were going to do in contrast to the rest of the church, which slept while the world was burning.

God was merciful to us and allowed our first attempt at community to fail for many reasons, but mostly because we



Dan Walker and David Stahnke shootin' the breeze at Plow Creek

pursued too many good causes without clear priorities, and with people who were not sure about Jesus as the center of our life. After some floundering first steps, a new community, New Creation Fellowship, was born in 1971 with some essential coaching from Reba Place Fellowship (RPF) in Evanston, Illinois, and from other communal groups who soon banded together into the Shalom Association of Communities.

We were half a dozen families and some single people intentionally living within a block of each other, sharing in a common treasury, tending community gardens with energetic children running in a tribe from one house to another. We experienced the Holy Spirit baptism and launched a charismatic, communal, peace-and-justice Anabaptist church that met in the basement of our largest house. I led a construction crew that gave us an economic base from which to organize other

revolutionary projects.

From the outside, for a while, it looked like we had it together. But we would come home from antiwar rallies and fight about the right way to clean, or not clean, the kitchen. Peace for the world, but not for each other. We offered hospitality to a few troubled souls and were quickly overwhelmed. Mental breakdowns and marriage crises caused us to urgently look for help from therapists and wiser mentors in other communities. The traumas of our lives were catching up with us, and we realized we needed to get wise about resources for personal healing if we wanted to continue living together and not devour one another. We joked about how God was gracious to us, allowing us to take turns with our breakdowns. "No shoving in line. Your crisis has to wait 'cause I'm not finished yet with mine."

We learned what Jesus meant by the first beatitude, "Blessed

Continued next page...

are the poor in spirit, for they shall see God.” We learned to pray for love and forgiveness with sincere desperation, with empty hearts that God was eager to fill. We learned to let go of our community ideal—achieving something we could be proud of—and just accept who we were with each other, broken people in whose presence Jesus dwells. Through many struggles we received the gift of a tender love that began to nurture us and other people as well, where we and our children were bonded together in ways that still run deep. The Scriptures came alive for us when we heard Jesus say, “Today salvation has come to this house” (Lk. 19:9).

At New Creation Fellowship we soon wore ourselves out trying to make all our decisions by consensus. By God’s grace, the weariness set in about the time we learned to trust the pastoral gifts of those who could conduct our meetings in peaceful and orderly ways. We began to function more like a body where each one had gifts to exercise for the good of all. Community proved more educational than a college campus. We were learning basic community-nurturing lessons and skills, usually finding a good path after trying all the others.

I discovered that others experienced me as a judgmental, principle-driven idealist who had a lot to learn about listening and extending grace in relationships. Fortunately, these folks—mostly sisters—put up with, corrected, forgave, and hugged me anyway because we were all trying to learn the courageous and humble way of Jesus.

I tell this story so that you can get acquainted with me a bit, know what experiences and biases I bring to this project, and also to illustrate that newly forming intentional Christian communities go through similar discoveries and developments if we wait for God to change us while persisting in forgiveness.

Others felt the love of Jesus in our life together and came closer in hopes of finding healing, too. We organized vigils at a local missile silo aiming destruction at the people of the Soviet Union, and we had a part in launching the Newton Area Peace Center.

However, by the mid-1980s, some of the original communal members had moved on and the common purse was abandoned in a time of harassment by the Internal Revenue Service. The community morphed into a Mennonite congregation, which has grown over the years, retaining some of the community character from its birth. At the time of these changes, Joanne and I, with our two middle-school-age children, were taking a sabbatical year at Reba Place Fellowship. With New Creation’s blessing, we chose to stay on at

Reba where we had found good work, healing, and community that more closely fit our sense of calling.

Now that I look back on this demise of the communal life in Newton, Kansas, with the eyes of someone called to “nurture communities” and be a guide to their sustainable development, I ask, what happened? Well, actually, the life of community still goes on in many ways with intimate small groups that retain a knack for deep relationships, traditions of common work, ministry, and celebration from communal times. I see now that the challenge of growing community brought together some insecure young people who had more leadership gifts than they could figure out what to do with on one pile. We were peers without older mentors who might have nurtured a vision of working together using all our gifts. Our leaving was actually a sending, a healthy development for the church that continued on with a generation of younger leaders eventually finding their places. ✨

The Intentional Christian Community Handbook will be available in October 2012 from Paraclete Press.



Tomasa, from Valle Nuevo, and Dawn, from Sojourners on this year’s delegation

News from the SMC delegation to Valle Nuevo, El Salvador

By Nancy Gatlin

God is good! As Yesica, Pastor and Rosita's daughter and now a university student, said to me while sharing a meal together, "Our friendship is so mysterious to me. Never in my wildest dreams would I have imagined being friends with all of you from SMC." I shared the same sentiment back with her.

Our relationship is about relational connections over now 20 years! There have been some projects along the way but once the projects are over, we are still relating, visiting and eating together and connecting. Some of us are emailing, facebooking, calling and going on delegation trips.

Land Legalization and Truck Financing

Due to a new law as of July 7, the land legalization process seems to be finally at the very end. We hope to hear wonderful news in the next few weeks. The Ministry of Agriculture has noticed Valle Nuevo and has offered them the help of three machines that will help them be able to produce their

own feed instead of having to go out of their community and pay for it. One of the machines will require a double-axle truck to take it out to the fields. The Directiva has asked SMC for financial help in the purchase of a used double-axle truck. The SMC coordinators have approved this request although we are waiting to here of the final approval by the Ministry of Agriculture along with Valle Nuevo's own organization and accountability for the use of the truck.

Often different folks from Valle Nuevo talk about their gratitude for being remembered. Many times they ask us in despedidas/ farewells, to remember them. Our own Lord asked us to remember him with the breaking of bread and the cup. We invite you to remember our friends, brothers and sisters in Valle Nuevo and the gift that God has given us!

A Visit with Fernando Llort

The SMC delegation to El Salvador is making an annual visit with Fernando at his gallery, El Arbol de Dios, The Tree of God, in San Salvador. In this year's visit we learned of the tragic action by the Catholic church's officials to tear down the 3,000 tile façade of the National Cathedral, a work that Fernando was commissioned to do in the early 1990's. We met with Anibal the ceramic master of the work who sadly told us of the tragedy and impact of this act. We saw some of the gathered broken pieces of tile stored in plastic crates and grieved the loss with them. I had the privilege of connecting Yesica to Fernando's daughter, María José, who runs the Llort Foundation. Yesica is now gathering a group of fellow university students from Valle Nuevo of Santa Marta to set up workshops in order to learn the style of Fernando Llort and take this back to Valle Nuevo as another form of income producing work.

In this year's delegation we also presented Fernando with an invitation to our SMC gathering



Anibal, the ceramic master in charge of construction of Fernando Llort's facade for the National Cathedral, with the original design

next August in Evanston. Our theme has to do with the role of art in faith. Fernando has accepted and he, his wife and daughter will be traveling to join us, first with a stopover in Waco the last weekend in July before heading up to Evanston/Chicago for our SMC gathering Aug. 1-4.

Encounters at the Lempa River

by Bethany Smith

When I feel self-conscious and tired, the difficult moments of our time in Valle Nuevo stand out in my mind, like a silent van ride, feeling aloof and ungracious, when I just didn't have the energy to try using my small amount of Spanish. There were many such moments, and those stories need to be told to understand the fullness of this relationship. But the stories I like to tell are of those moments in which the unity we



The 2012 SMC delegation at the Fernando Llorca gallery. back row: Tom Finger, Joe Gatlin, James White, Melissa Stocking, Bethany Smith, Dawn Beutler, Ruth Anne Friesen, Megan Herring, and Nancy Gatlin

share in Christ transcends our cultural, linguistic, and economic divisions.

Some of those who trekked to the Lempa River this year—Juana, Pedro, Felipa, Margarita—had fled for their lives in the cover of night 31 years ago. As we walked down the steep and rocky bank, I felt out of place, entering a story that was not my own. As I walked down the steep and rocky hill in the comfort of my good sandals, my well-fed stomach and the broad daylight enjoying the beauty of the place, I felt like an intruder on a story in which I have not earned a place.

And yet, as I walked down the hill, there was Douglas, a young man from VN, offering his hand as we climbed over the rock barrier of a cow pasture; there was Carlos with his machete blazing a trail through the high grass; there was Felipa lending an arm as we stumbled on the rocky slope. At the river, Margarita sang for us the songs she had written since the crossing about Archbishop Oscar Romero, about her community, about the crossing and the refugee camps. As they shared their memories, they were inviting us to be part of their ongoing story. They want us to hear and remember their stories, to understand their suffering, and to be part of their lives in the present. ☞



Margarita sings one of her own songs by the Lempa River as Pedro listens and Juana sings along

Reba Place Fellowship News

By Sally Schreiner Youngquist

In May we hosted a small School for Conversion for three visitors from Springfield, IL and visiting teacher Evan Howard from Montrose, Colorado. Since then, two men have made a return trip to RPF and have subsequently incorporated their household as Capernaum House Fellowship. We hosted summer visits from the Cherith Brook Catholic Worker house in Kansas City, Lotus House in St. Louis, Common Ground Christian Church in Indianapolis, and the Unrau family from Grain of Wheat in Winnipeg. We happily welcomed visitors from Church of the Sojourners who came here in July for the Ekklesia Conference on “slow church.” Tim Otto gave some helpful input to our LGBT issues dialogue while he was in town.

We added Derek and Heather Jung and Dan Leroy to our circles as incoming practicing members. Since arriving from Pennsylvania at the end of April, the Junges have been working long hours to establish themselves in locally sustaining jobs. Darryl Connolly left us in July to move to the one of the Bruderhof communities and explore possible membership there.

We celebrated the high school completions of Hannah Blackwood and Micah Clark and college graduations of Kessa Frantz (Goshen) and Rachel Hudgens (North Park). Bethany Blackwood returned from a satisfying MCC SALT term in Rwanda and landed a job teaching math in Chicago for the fall.

During a record-breaking summer of heat and drought, we experimented with how to grow organic local vegetables around and beyond us by participating in an “exchange economy” with two sister communities. Kate and Joseph Marshak and other occasional volunteers worked a couple days a week at the White Rose Catholic Worker



RPF's Ruth Anne Friesen, Hope Fellowship's Nancy Gatlin, and Reba Church's Tom Finger contemplating the memorial wall in San Salvador, El Salvador. The wall is engraved with the names of thousands of people who died in the civil war.

Farm in Monee, IL, and Dan and Camille Walker lived half the week at Plow Creek Fellowship to help with farming there. Many local Rebites helped to cultivate and harvest veggies and herbs from the new raised bed garden in front of the Reba Services office at 737 Reba—the sunniest spot in Reba-land. Chico and Tatiana have continued their massive gardening and food

preserving efforts with local friends in Ford Heights.

Under the direction of soil scientist Susie Kauffman, we are working at eradicating buckthorn (an invasive species) from the Point at our Camp Lake, Wisconsin retreat house grounds. A number of us enjoyed attending prayer retreat days July 14 at Emmanuel Lodge and in Evanston to ponder our connections to the vine and the branches, as set out by Jesus in John 15.

We sent David Hovde back to Iraq for a third term as a Christian Peacemaker Team reservist June through August. Ruth Anne Friesen went to Colombia on a CPT delegation in May. She, Megan Hering, and Tom Finger represented RPF and Reba Place Church on the SMC Valle Nuevo delegation to El Salvador in June. Josh and Candace McCallister and their two young children made an exploratory trip to Taos, NM in August to investigate beginning an intentional community there with some other interested parties no sooner than a year from now. They entertained the rest of us with an interesting slideshow of their findings at a packed-out August RPF potluck.

Josh McCallister took up the role of SMC Coordinator from Katie Rivers early this summer. He also represented the “Nurturing Communities” cloverleaf on the RPF Leadership Team while David Hovde was in Iraq. Celina Varela has been hard at work corresponding with RPF apprentice candidates as we clarify who will be joining us for the next nine months as apprentices. So far we have confirmed Jason Brown, Rachel Daley and Eric Gustafson—all of whom have been traveling internationally in the last year.

Peter Varela took a summer job working with youth in Reba Park. The park has been a focus for community concerns about adequate basketball venues for neighborhood youth, with RPF and RPC members taking a lively role in neighborhood discussion. Allan Howe, Sharon

Moriarty and Carol Youngquist worked heroically as board members of Reba Early Learning Center to oversee some major staff turnover and new student recruitment in the summer months.

We celebrated Julius and Peggy Belser's 60th wedding anniversary Aug. 18 with some great slides, stories of people who have influenced them, stories of how they have influenced others, and mountains of ice cream and pretzels. Their role in sharing hospitality at the Clearing Household since 1972 has made a huge impact on the life and outreach of our community.

After taking a break from Monday night seminars for the summer, we expect to open our potluck and seminar doors to a new group of Greg Clark's students from North Park University Aug. 27. They will be using David Janzen's new handbook on intentional Christian communities as one of their texts. David and Josh are gearing up for hosting a gathering of community leaders at St. John's Abbey Sept. 25-26 just prior to the Christian Community Development Association meetings in the Twin Cities. David enjoyed a summer visit to St. John's to meet this Benedictine community and familiarize himself with where the Nurturing Communities Project group will be gathering. David also completed his editing work on Das Madimadugu's I Remember, about Das and Doris' work in India. We celebrate David's hard work producing not one but TWO published books this past year! ☞



News From Hope Fellowship

By Joe Gatlin

Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints.
Ephesians 6:18

There is much about being a Christian that isn't easy. Jesus wasn't joking when he said we should count the costs before we take up the cross. And his insistence that we have to do this together only increases the expensiveness of the proposition.

So it's nice when we come to an exhortation that seems pretty easy. "Persevere in supplication for all the saints," closes out the armor of God passage in Ephesians 6. Not only can we do that, we are doing it! We recently completed a several-month study of Ephesians by looking at that verse. Actually, we can't help but pray for each other. Our emotion and our need take us to prayer constantly.

At one of our recent monthly all-church worship services (some of us call these our mega-church gatherings since we meet in four different homes the other Sundays of the month) we had a succession of three prayers with the requisite laying-on-of-hands.



Four beautiful expectant women at Hope Fellowship: Kelly Lawson, Carrie Arroyo, Sarah Land, and Allison Allen

First, standing in our midst, was the slightly battered and bruised Cramer family -- Andrea, David, three-year-old Wesley, and baby Liza. On a July trip to see family in Indiana, late in the evening, at a point on I-44 that would have been an hour south of St. Louis, they had a tire blow out. After flipping over several times their car came to rest upside-down against an embankment. Despite the destruction of both of the children's car seats, David was the only one who was injured beyond some surface scratches. He is hobbling while his knee mends and he can't turn his head for a

few months due to a neck brace that will help broken vertebrae heal, but he will be OK. Prayer was very easy, and very emotional. We are humbled by the fragility of life, by God's protection, and by the stories of several Good Samaritans who went to great lengths to help them that night and responded to their needs over the next several weeks.

Second, we prayed for the Scott family. Joel was leaving to teach at Boston University for a year. He's excited about the opportunity, and he will get to come home for a long weekend about once a month, but it still won't be an easy year for him.

And it certainly will not be easy for Becky who will miss her husband and co-parent nor for Emmi and Kohen who will miss their daddy. And it will not be easy for others of us who will miss our brother. This was not an easy discernment, and the issue of whether this move is short-term or indefinite has not yet been decided. We have to pray about this; there is no other option. No one other than God has the wisdom or the love to help us through something like this.

Third, we dedicated Jeremiah and Evelyn Porter. The journey of getting to the dedication was a long one for Matt and Michelle and all of Hope Fellowship, involving discernment on decisions about staying in Waco, having children, and buying a house, followed then by foster care and a difficult adoption process that was finally resolved well for everyone (Jeremiah and Evelyn, former cousins, are now brother and sister!). We have prayed regularly during this process. It has been quite a sequence of events that has strengthened our faith, and now, in gratitude, we ask for God's continued provision and growth in love for the Porters and all of Hope Fellowship.

These were just the prominent prayers in just that one service. We've really been praying and supplicating constantly for all of the saints.

We have said many prayers in the last few months for the Lawsons, Kelly and Billy and soon-to-be-a-sister, four-year-old Eisley. Their pregnancy felt like it would last forever! We knew the baby would come--they always do--but it seemed appropriate and helpful to groan corporately and say, "Yes, now Lord, this is a good time. Please!" We're happy to report Jubilee (that's her name!) is here, and all are well. We've got more of this obvious praying to do. The Allens, the Arroyos, and the Lands all have babies on the way (and those are just the ones we know about).

Annali Smucker and Zac Bryan were married a few weeks ago -- we prayed for them (and for ourselves since it was over 100 degrees the day of their outside wedding). Sarabeth Stoltzfus has

also left to begin a graduate degree in Austin. Sarabeth came three years ago as a Brethren volunteer and stayed on to invest her life with Hope Fellowship. She contributed so much -- in her small group, in worship planning, and in work on immigration issues. We've prayed for her -- and for ourselves because we miss her.

Just a week before the Matias-Ryans expected move date, Luis' mother died and he needed to make a rushed trip to Oaxaca. It would be unthinkable with the grief, the stress, and the concern for traveling mercies not to pray. Their final move ended up getting delayed for a couple of weeks because of closing problems on their house sale. It was frustrating, although we were glad to have them here for a bit more. Now they are gone, but still on our minds and in our prayers -- prayers for Gerson and Paloma as they start school, for Gwendolyn as she discerns her future beyond this next year, and for Luis and others as they continue to explore Christian community in Oaxaca.

Persevering in prayer means, I am sure, praying even when it doesn't come naturally. But when we know each other well, when we care for each other deeply, when we have come to understand our human finitude, and when we have faith that God is love, it's just not that difficult. Thank you, Lord. ☞



Clare, Lydia Blue, Ellie, Miranda, and Jose having fun at Youth Week in July

News from Thirdway

By Jessie James with contributors

For many members in our community, this summer marked an end and a new beginning to community housing. Since the beginning of Thirdway our community has been centered around two community houses (the Hamline and the Thomas house) which eventually turned into one large community house (the Thomas house). The houses have been the central place of communal living, spiritual discipleship, and service. Over 35 people have spent periods of their lives and seasons of growth living in these houses throughout the 4 years they were running. This summer, after much discussion and prayer, the Thomas house members decided to end the community houses all together. As Thirdway is growing in new directions and forming other more family based pockets of living it seemed a good time to try living together in different ways. I wanted to do a tribute to the people who have lived in the community houses, and who better to write it than the people who have lived there? Below are stories, lessons learned, thank you notes and writings that I collected from a handful of them. Hope you all enjoy reading their thoughts on their experiences of communal living.

Natalie Potts

The Hamline House started in a spirit of innocence and even naïveté. Danny Churchill and myself got hold of this vision for shared living, and in our excitement we drew a group of 5 folks around us who were prepared to give the next year of their lives to starting a shared household together. We didn't call it that at the time. We didn't know that such things existed elsewhere! We called ours a "community house," "ministry house," or "intentional house."

Our conflicts that first year were simple: what should we name ourselves? How will we clean our house? What items will make it on our grocery list? How late can our parties and gatherings go?

All these small details were very important to some of us. We made some great strides forward in that year. We hosted monthly community meals, and the house filled up with hungry folks--friends, family, and neighbors. We brought homeless folks home with us, we prayed together, ate together, met together, learned together. We began learning to see the world through each other's eyes--we were an inter-racial and inter-cultural household.

At the end of that first year, we wanted more than what we had. We decided to start a second household with some folks from our church who were interested in living with us. And that second year was fraught with relational tension and dangerous power dynamics. The ease of our life together faded, and I believe that both households felt pressure to do more, do it bigger, and grow faster. In fact, those were some of our direct goals. At that time, we looked back on our first year together and we felt dissatisfied with how it had gone.

From where I sit now, at the end of our fourth year as a household, I find myself *most* satisfied with our first life together. We didn't much know what we were doing, but we were pliable media for the dreams of God. We were a reconciling household, a praying household, a house of hospitality, and our deepest heart was to live in the ways of Jesus. As the households continued into the second and third years, we still named learning to live like Jesus as our number one goal, but I think we got distracted by our own ambition. Our ambition was a distortion of our desire to serve God--as though we believed the pressure to "do more and do better" came from God.

I'm very sad and also very grateful that this era is over. I'm hopeful for how shared household will continue to look in our community, and want to be intentional about making space for the new dreams of God to be birthed in us. Here's to the next season of rest and play and knowing God.

Continued next page...

Amanda Titus

When I try to think of a word to sum up my 3 years of living in the Hamline and Thomas houses, the first one that comes to mind is 'transformation'. I feel like an entirely different person! Living in community and sharing my life so closely with people gave me the space and safety to open myself up in a way that I never had before. I look back and see countless ways that God took my selfishness, my insecurities, and my fears, and turned them into opportunities to be vulnerable, to learn to depend on the Father and on my brothers and sisters, and to die to myself and find new life. I always tell people that choosing to live in intentional community was one of the hardest things I've ever done, but one of the most meaningful and life changing things I've ever done as well. I have deep, rich relationships that have grown in the houses, and I feel completely transformed! I'm grateful for the time we all had together, and I will miss a lot of things about it, including the random kitchen clean up dance parties, hosting prayer nights, all the good talks on the Hamline house porch, and I'll even miss our crazy meetings and grocery shopping for 8!

Pearl Cavalier

Before the Thomas house existed, there was the Hamline house. It was located just a few doors down from what would later become the Thomas house. My husband and I were newly weds, and we lived a few doors down from the Hamline house. We became actively involved with the Hamline house and ate many meals with them. During these meals we would share the highs and lows of our weeks and spend quality time together. Sometimes we would be laughing so hard we would all be in tears! The following year the Thomas house started, and my husband and I decided to move into community and lead the new house. While living there, we continued to share many meals and laughter together. The conversations, tears, and laughter we shared while breaking bread together will forever be treasured

Kevin Kneisl

Hi Shalom Communities, my name is Kevin and I have lived at the Thomas house for 2.5 years. God has been humbling me through my community. Before I moved in, I believed that I was pretty much self-sufficient, had it all together, and didn't really need others...oh was I in for a surprise. Community has forced me (in the best sense of the word) to come face to face with my limits, and has helped me to realize that I need others to help me make decisions, to help me work through my emotions, and to help me continue to pursue God. Although I am a part of the Body, I alone am not the Body of Christ. This is a difficult thing to learn in a culture that values independence and rugged individualism, and I am thankful that God has helped me to rely more on His Bride. Thanks for letting me share with you all. Blessings!

Terrie Arama

To Dumont, thank you for LOL cats. I can't tell you how much joy they brought to my life. To Kevin, thanks for introducing me to puns and hink-pinks. I am still struggling to come up with one from the latter but I will get there one day. To Marco, who knew beef jerky could be that delicious!! Thanks babe:) Rudy, you are an inspiration. I have never met someone who is as creative and passionate about his work as you are. Thank you! Amanda thank you for introducing me to coffee shops, thrift stores, colors (a whole lot of them), people, and quick wit. I love you! Anna Buck, I smile whenever I think of us sharing a room, let's make it happen again. To Sarah thank you for being the only person in my life to understand why a girl just needs her chai and bollywood movies to relax. Danny Churchill I can't picture life before "Flight of the Conchords." Thank you for introducing them to me. Last but not least Natalie Potts! Thanks to you and others who shared the same vision of an intentional community, and asking the rest of us to join in. I will forever be honored to have walked the same path as you. I can't express how much gratitude and joy I have experienced being your friend. Thank you dear and I definitely anticipate there will be more dance parties in our future:).

On Being a Russian Novel Together: A Metaphorical Rendering of Life at Church of the Sojourners

By Katie Rivers

Christian communities, like Russian novels, have plenty of characters. Have you ever thought of telling your story to a person unrelated to any SMC circle? I never know where to begin, and in my mind the storytelling involves a lot of charts that resemble family trees and periodic tables scratched onto a chalkboard. Characters are affecting other characters who are living with the effects of the actions of yet more characters. For better or worse? Yes!

The stories become woven at best and tangled at worst. The plot thickens around us until it explodes and we pick up the pieces.

We make a mosaic.

One chapter brings joy; the next, devastation.

Can we sustain this? Or rather will we be sustained?

Each person has a story and a perspective. Does the truth collide or coincide? Only a



Ian, Nate, and Laura dance at the North West All Church Retreat

novel, only a story can hold perspective upon perspective and make some sense of it.

Sojourners is a story in which each participant, each character matters. Not one is forgotten though the mess flings black residue this way and that. What can show us the way? Where can we find the space to repent of our sins and be healed from the

wounds that have been inflicted upon us?

We can write the psychological equations of healthy relationships backwards and forwards now-- but the living of them is a novel.

Steady the rhythm of the breath.

Read the pages.

Be written on the pages:

One thought at a time

One movement at a time

Turn the page.

The front cover and the back cover hold the Russian Novel. The Alpha and the Omega hold the Christian Community. We keep turning the pages. ↻



Greetings from the New SMC Coordinator

Hello communities, my name is Josh McCallister. My family and I have been living with Reba Place for four years. Recently I accepted the job of SMC Coordinator, and I'm looking forward to serving in the ways I can to keep this network vibrant and helpful to all of you. I've worked with David Janzen on the Nurturing Communities Project for several years now, planning gatherings and making visits to some new communities. At some point I have visited all of the SMC communities and Third Way by now.



One reason for my interest in SMC and Nurturing Communities is that Candace and I have been discerning a call to initiate a new community in the future. Recently we met some folks who may be partners in starting something in Taos, New Mexico. Todd Wynward and Peg Bartlett are pictured here with my family (I'm in the front) - and yes, they live in a yurt. We had time to begin friendships, discuss priorities, look at site locations, and generally get acquainted. There is a lot to celebrate and dream about at this point, as well as a few points that need further clarification. We'll keep you posted. ☺



Two more images from life at Plow Creek Fellowship this summer:

On the far left, Dan and Camille Walker from Reba unloading mushroom compost to improve the soil of the Plow Creek community garden. Neva Peterson is helping!

In the closer image, Erin Mucu setting out from the Common Building with a loaded cart



Pastor reads a back issue of Shalom Connections in Valle Nuevo during SMC's visit this year

Shalom Connections is pleased to welcome the community of Valle Nuevo to our official mailing list! Bienvenidos a la comunidad de Valle Nuevo, que ahora recibe este periodico.

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