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Making connections: Plow Creek's Paul and Heather Munn on "the Big Rock" with Camille Walker from Reba

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Immigration and Incarnation

By Lucas Land

If it is about the journey and not the destination, then our family has certainly been in the midst of *it* for the past year or so. After our family, my wife Sarah and our two kids Asher, 5 and Lydia 3, lived at World Hunger Relief for a year as the Urban Gardening intern and became a part of Companerismo de Esperanza in Waco, TX, we made the decision to accept a position with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) in Bolivia working with their Low German Program. Even though MCC takes care of all the financial needs of volunteers, we still considered ourselves sent and commissioned by Hope Fellowship. We felt their support and connection throughout our time in Bolivia, skype-ing with people when we could and reading emails and minutes of meetings.

We also made the decision that storing our things for three years of our lives seemed like a waste of resources. So we began to give our things away, to shed ourselves of that heavy, dead skin that so easily weighs us down. We gave away things that did not seem like a necessity to own such as a stereo, movies, books, toys and kitchen gadgets. We also gave away things that feel more like necessities: beds, dressers, pillows, pots and pans.



Many people mistakenly think the Christ statue in Rio de Janeiro is the tallest in the world, but this one, Cristo de la Concordia, in Cochabamba is taller.

We were on an adventure and there was no telling where it would take us. We were excited about learning Spanish in the context of Latin America. We were also nervous about learning a second language and culture of the Low German Mennonites, old colony Mennonites who are culturally similar to the Amish, who speak Low German, and have migrated throughout the Americas. There was a world of unknown possibilities, anticipation and excitement ahead of us.

We arrived in Cochabamba, Bolivia on November 8, 2010 with our entire lives stuffed into eight suitcases. We were there for a month for language school. We lived with a host family and slowly adjusted to our new surroundings. Every member of the family got sick in the first weeks as our bodies adjusted to altitude and new microbes in the food we ate and the air we breathed.

After language school we flew to Santa Cruz, the largest city in Bolivia, for orientation with MCC, where we lived with another host family. There we experienced Christmas and New Year's with a Bolivian family. Then in January we lived for three weeks with a Low German family in Chihuahua colony.



The Land family in Bolivia -- wearing their Hope Fellowship t-shirts.

The little that I have learned about the history of Low German Mennonites (Low German Mennonites) is a fascinating tale. Like other Anabaptists, they were persecuted for their beliefs in Europe. They eventually settled in Russia with an agreement between their people and the government that has come to define their history. They were initially granted the right to their own land, their own schools in their own language, and their own form of governance. For all intents and purposes, colonies were (and are) their own separate entities apart from the nation-state in which they exist. This was their way of living out their two-kingdom theology which draws a sharp distinction between the church and the world.

After many years the Russian government decided that these colonies should become more integrated into the broader society and, at the very least, learn Russian. The response by the Low German Mennonites eventually was to leave Russia and settle in Canada where they were able to secure a similar agreement with the Canadian government. This pattern repeats itself throughout the Low German Mennonite history, mixed in with internal disagreements over how to

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power wheelchair December 19.

Dion Smith, friend of Chico and Tatiana Fajardo-Heflin, from their neighborhood in Ford Heights, spent his winter break from 11th grade at the Clearing Household, volunteering for Reba Apartments and playing basketball at every opportunity. Chico and Tatiana recently became acquainted with a mother of four children who just moved to Ford Heights and attends their church, First Union Missionary Baptist. They watch her four children, ages 9-10, three days a week and spend two overnights a week with them.

The year 2011 ended on a good note: RPF member income exceeded expenses, for which we are grateful to God. The year 2012 began with a quarterly prayer retreat and a celebration of Helen Hudgen's many years of leading the worship and music ministry at Reba Place Church. Helen and Ric accepted the call from Second Baptist Church, the oldest black church in Evanston, to serve in music and pastoral ministry there.

Josh and Candace McCallister travelled to New Mexico mid January to participate in a conference and to test out the possibility of starting a Christian community in the area. God provided surprising and meaningful connections with like-minded people. We prayerfully await God's leading for them as they discern their next steps.

Teachings at recent RPF meetings focused on the environmental crises and our relationship to creation. Allan Howe and Kate Marshak are researching the opportunities for RPFers to buy some vegetables and fruit in bulk from local farms in the future. Speaking of Allan, he celebrated his 70th birthday February 5 with a big party that included food, sharing memories, and skits that included a snow shovel. (Allan is famous for shoveling walks all around the neighborhood.)

We are in a process of listening to each other about our experiences with and views about homosexuality. We formed a LGBT Dialogue Committee, which pulled together a resource list of books and writings from different perspectives. The committee encouraged RPFers to read on the topic, particularly from a perspective different from their own. The committee also recommended that individuals share their experiences and perspectives on the topic with



Joan Vogt's Quilt

those in their small groups. The goal of this is not to change each other's views, but to try to understand each other and the topic better through truly listening to each other.

Several RPFers participate in a Reba Place Church small group that focuses on racial justice. We recently read the book [The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness](#), by Michelle Alexander, about racism in the US criminal justice system. A number of us heard Michelle give an inspiring speech at Garrett Seminary February 1. The issue hits home as we support one in our RPF extended family whose son is in prison as he awaits trial. ☺

Reba Place Fellowship News

By David Hovde

Joseph Marshak and Kate Bierma's wedding on November 26 brought together their families, friends, community and church to celebrate their commitment to each other. It was a joyous occasion. Kate and Joseph now live in a Reba Apartments building (a.k.a. "the Nest") where four other young Reba families live. This evening we will celebrate Kate becoming a covenant member and Ruth Anne Friesen's transfer/return to membership at RPF.

This fall the Cana Household again hosted a North Park University class on Christian community. The class attended Cana's Monday night potluck, small group sharing time, and seminar. Celina Varela and David Janzen led the class this year, unlike



Ruth Anne Friesen's transfer of membership ceremony

past years when RPF member and North Park professor, Greg Clark, led it. The class studied a draft of David's book titled: Nurturing Community for Idealists, Hypocrites, and

Wannabe Followers of Jesus. In their end of semester presentations, the students shared very personally about topics related to Christian community and about what they learned from the class and Monday nights at Cana.

Four women from the Thirdway community visited us in early November to make connections and participate in life at Reba for several days. In our December RPF meeting, we celebrated Joan Vogt completing a 14-year project of making a quilt, wall hanging, and book for each of her 14 grandchildren. Joan brought homemade bread to our meeting to celebrate. We also rejoiced with Bob Lembke as he got his long awaited new



Kate and Joseph's Wedding Rehearsal

Shalom Connections

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deal with these changes. When the Canadian government challenged the colony educational system, many colonies and families moved to Mexico and eventually throughout the Americas.

Often when colonies became divided over an issue (such as whether or not to use rubber tires on their tractors), the more conservative groups would find their way to Bolivia. So, Bolivia became, in some ways, a repository for the most conservative of the conservative Low German Mennonites. However, the colony we stayed in was considered the most progressive in Bolivia, which primarily meant that they used



Low German Mennonites driving a tractor with steel wheels.

a lot more technology, modern tractors, combines, cell phones, computers and the internet. Worship is still segregated by gender, however, and their theology is very conservative.

It was a wonderful experience to live with an Low German Mennonite family and understand their culture in a more personal and intimate way. Similar to our experience living for many years in the shadow of the largest military installation in the free world (near Fort Hood, Texas), it was a lesson in loving people with whom we have fundamental disagreements, in humanizing "the Other".

After our colony stay, we made the decision to move to Charagua, a small town in southern Bolivia in the foothills of the Andes and seven hours from Santa Cruz by bus. Charagua is divided into the pueblo, the main town, and the Estación, the small community around the train station about 8 kilometers from the pueblo, which is where we lived.

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Charagua is the largest municipality in Bolivia in terms of land area.

The largest population is the indigenous Guaraní who were famously portrayed in the movie *The Mission*. Their territory covers areas of Argentina, Paraguay, Chile and Bolivia and is known as the Chaco. This area crosses lines arbitrarily drawn and fought over by both Spanish conquistadors and multinational corporations.

The second largest population are the Low German Mennonites that live in four colonies to the east of Charagua Estación. They are one of, if not the largest, economic drivers in this region as agricultural producers.

Since Low German Mennonites do not believe in using modern vehicles, they contract Bolivians for transportation. This includes transporting their produce—primarily sorghum, sesame, soy and corn—as well as themselves for travel primarily to Santa Cruz. While the colonies in this area are among the poorest in Bolivia, they enjoy a standard of living well above many Bolivians. There were also other indigenous people in Charagua including Quechua and Aymaras. The smallest population is referred to as “Spanish-speaking Bolivians”.

Our work focused on water issues and small-scale agriculture with both the Guaranís and the Low German Mennonites. Part of our work was also what MCC refers to as “connecting peoples.” MCC put



Sitting around drinking terere, cold yerba mate, is a tradition many Low German Mennonites picked up in Paraguay.

together workshops at which indigenous people and Low German Mennonites learned from each other about soap making and agriculture.

Our neighbor in Charagua was a Guaraní sociologist, who had worked for the Bolivian government, traveled the world and represented his people on a national level. One day he was showing me around some land where he was working to establish a new community. As we walked through fields of sesame, he shared with me about an international conference of indigenous people that he attended in the United States. The conference came to an agreement about some of the basic rights that indigenous people wanted. These included access to land, their own education system in their own language and their own

form of governance.

Then he made the connection that these were the things that the Low German Mennonites had secured from the Bolivian government in 1963. It was eye-opening to see that two very different people with very different cultures and worldviews had something very fundamental in common.

Charagua municipality voted in December 2009 to become one of 11 “autonomous indigenous zones” under the new Bolivian constitution. While we were there, we helped the Autonomy Assembly organize a meeting with Low German Mennonite leaders in which they explained the autonomy process and invited them to participate. The Low German

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Fellowship, a Mennonite intentional Christian Community (www.plowcreek.org). We are currently seeking volunteers to visit and work on the farm this summer primarily between the months of May and August, and to a lesser extent during the months of April, September, and October.

Volunteer stays are between 1 and 4 weeks and in exchange for working 20 hours/week on the farm, volunteers will receive housing in either an apartment on the property or with a host family. Volunteers will also receive food from the farm and a weekly food stipend (if they are not being fed by a host family).

Most of the volunteer hours will be spent working on the



Erin and Sebastian Mucu Kindy in the "Food Room" where the Plow Creek Food co-op is housed

weeding, harvesting, and general care of strawberries and blueberries. There is also a

small, diversified vegetable garden on the property which volunteers most likely will have a chance to help out with if they are interested. In addition to work on the farm and garden, volunteers are also encouraged to learn more about the Plow Creek Community during their stay and get involved in community life as they see fit.

If you have interest in volunteering this summer please send an email to farm@plowcreek.org and let us know a little bit about yourself and why you are interested in volunteering on the farm, when you are interested in volunteering, and for how long.



John Foxvog dries the dishes

I give

I give you my body
The sweat of my brow
The strength of my
shoulders
Exhausted, poured out
Into the furrows
Into the land
Into this fruit
That I place in your hand.

I give you my body
The strength in my veins
The life in my bosom
Offered and drained
To nourish and warm you
To help you grow strong
My child, take joy now
Drink deep and long.

I give you my body
I give you my word
In bread I am broken
In wine I am poured
I love you as you love
The ones whom you feed
I give you my body
Take it and eat.

A poem by Heather Munn

Plow Creek Farm looking for volunteers

By Rich Foss, Plow Creek Fellowship

Plow Creek Farm originally grew out of a community garden that produced fruits and vegetables for the community. Over the decades the farm expanded to selling fruits through u-pick and ready pick and then both fruits and vegetables through farmers markets and community-supported agriculture.

Recently we have had a substantial turnover of leadership and workers on the farm. In response, we're doing three things. One, we are taking time to talk together and seek the Lord for his vision for the future of the farm. Two, we decided to reduce the number of crops we grow and market this year. Three, we are inviting volunteers to help us this summer to care for our two largest crops—blueberries and strawberries.

Plow Creek Farm (www.plowcreekfarm.com) is an organically managed farm located on 189 acres in a beautiful area of NW Illinois and part of Plow Creek



The Dinner Bell at Plow Creek

Mennonite's two-kingdom theology sharply distinguishes between the church and the world. The Low German Mennonites believe that secular authorities, such as the Autonomy Assembly, are ordained by God and therefore submit to any decisions they make. They politely thanked the Assembly for informing them about the process, but declined to participate in any way. They were very reluctant to even give any opinions, ideas, questions or thoughts. It was fascinating to see these worlds collide.

Not long after that meeting, we received a phone call early one morning from our country representative informing us that Bolivian immigration had called and said that we had to leave the country and would not be allowed back into the country for five years. We were in shock. We had three days to pack up our eight suitcases, say goodbye to all of our friends, my son's kindergarten class at the local school and the people with whom we worked. Our neighbor and his family threw a wonderful *despedida*, or going away party, for us the day before we left.

The reason we were given for being deported was that we had overstayed our tourist visa with which we had entered the country. There were also clearly political tensions between the Bolivian government and the United States. The U.S. Ambassador was expelled from the country and Evo Morales continued ratcheting up his rhetoric at the United Nations and elsewhere. There are clear historical precedents for many Latin American leaders' animosity toward El



Like the Amish, this is how the Low German Mennonites get around the Charagua area.



Patro Garavizu facilitates a workshop on beekeeping for folks in Caipepe, a Guarani village.

Norte. However, the Morales' administration began to seem paranoid.

The Bolivian government announced plans to build a road, partially funded by Brazil, through a national park that is home to three indigenous groups. The indigenous groups responded by denouncing the move as unconstitutional since they were not consulted. When the government continued, they protested by marching in the streets and blockading roads. The morning that we were supposed to leave our home for Santa Cruz so we could be at an immigration hearing, the Guaranís blockaded the only road to Santa Cruz in solidarity with the other indigenous groups.

While Evo Morales is, himself, indigenous, he belongs to the highland indigenous, who have historic animosity toward the lowland indigenous which continues today. The Morales' administration claimed that these protests by

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News From Hope Fellowship



The "Pink House" worship cluster at Hope Fellowship

By Gabriela Gatlin

It is a well-known fact only among loyal Wacoans that our city lays within the Balcones Fault Zone. Waco has never experienced an earthquake, but we proudly impart this piece of trivia to our children. Although the spiritual fault zone that Hope Fellowship might rest in has yet to be identified, we have actually been experiencing a few tremors or maybe a slight shift of tectonic plates in our church over the last few months.

Supported by the creative thinking of many folks and the good intentions of google docs, countless emails, announcements, lists, and meetings, we have ventured

and unused gifts among us as we grow into our new form.

We are now eight small koinonia groups that meet weekly to grow together in Christian discipleship. These eight "K-groups" pair up to form four clusters that meet on Sundays in living rooms near the Meeting House. One Sunday evening a month, we all gather for worship and potluck in the fellowship hall of a larger church in our neighborhood. For many people, it has been a joy to worship in the smaller clusters and participate in adult teaching in a more intimate setting. At the same time, we all miss the weekly Sunday morning sightings of each other under the old structure. A few people in the church carry a sharper grief.

Last fall, our small groups revisited our membership commitments, and in January

into our new structure. By the grace of God, we can also see the Holy Spirit calling out new



Youth Group Oscar Party at Hope Fellowship

type A personalities, we keep tabs on the finances for Thirdway and Groundswell, coordinate community and serving events, problem solve and strategize opportunities for growth. Jessica Smith and Dan Churchill are the leaders of the Soul Team and have recently created a music blog (check it out at <http://soundofsouls.blogspot.com/>) where they put up weekly playlists to inspire. The Soul team has welcomed on two new important members, Justin James and Rudy Arnold, who will head up Music and Art at our community coffee shop. Justin has been doing a wonderful job booking almost weekly musicians to play at our coffee shop and even started an open mic night called Mild Mondays. Rudy has miraculously continued to come up with monthly talented artists from around the area to display their art on the walls of the shop and there is even an art opener night for them at the beginning of each month. Groundswell coffee shop is up and running again better than ever - with its new makeover and passionate involvement from the Soul Team. It has been amazing to see people walking in their gifts as part of the Heart, Mind and Strength, and Soul Teams!



Rudy Arnold at a Groundswell music event

In other great news, the Gilbert Family's (Tim and Alisha, girls Sage and Eden) adoption has gone through and we have the great privilege of welcoming our newest member to the Thirdway community: Rollins Anthony Gilbert! He is a healthy and beautiful little boy. The Gilberts' arms and house are full of Joy! We also had a lovely weekend visit with David from Plow Creek and encourage others to come check us out. Seth and Natalie spent a thoughtful weekend in Waco,

Texas at the Coordinators meeting where they re-discussed our commitment to the Shalom Mission Communities, among other things. We are blessed to be a part of this group of unique communities doing life together in such intentional ways. We look forward to Spring and seeing the ways in which Christ will be moving and growing amongst us all. For more info on Thirdway community check out our website at www.thirdwaychurch.org. Peace! ☺

News from Thirdway

By Jessie James

This winter in Minnesota has been a weird one! The weather has been unlike any winter before—hardly any snow, surprisingly few days below zero and many warm sunny afternoons. Although I am not complaining, I still find myself ready to turn the page and move onto the next chapter: Spring! I cannot help but think there is a similar feeling within the Thirdway community. There have been lots of great changes which take some time adjusting to, improvements that are initially lots of work, and sunny afternoons when we have the opportunity to sit back proud of what we are doing and the directions we are moving. And in the end we are all excited for spring and the life and growth that comes along with this cheery season!



Thirdway Zoe Ward and Glory McCoy



Thirdway's Rollins Anthony Gilbert

Our community is now operating under three teams: the Heart Team, The Mind and Strength Team, and The Soul Team. We have recently hired Daleen Ward to be in charge of the Heart team as she is clearly gifted in Pastoral Care and was already playing this role within our community in so many ways. Daleen, along with her seven teammates (Natalie, Brooke, Matt, Brian, Alisha and Amanda), is in charge of covenant member and visitor care, spiritual formation and experiences, checking in on the covenant groups and any pastoral care needs. The Mind and Strength team consists of myself, Seth McCoy, Damaris Axelson, Nate Pentz and our newest member Jen McCoy. Together, with our

we celebrated a membership reaffirmation. Three members did not reaffirm their membership. Then in February, we celebrated Jennifer Adams' decision to join the membership of the church.

More babies are on the way! More folks in the church family are seeking ways to move into the Meeting House neighborhood. We continue connecting with Valle Nuevo – Neil Miller visits often as World Hunger Relief continues to work on agricultural projects, a farm volunteer who visited Hope Fellowship last year is living with Juana for several months, and several of us from Hope Fellowship are anticipating the delegation this summer.

Within one week in January, the Bridgewaters lost both Barbara's father and a dear friend from Ohio who had just visited over New Years. Allene Gatlin lost her brother in early February and is now the last survivor of her generation.

We have received the opportunity to know joy and sorrow at the same time. Some of us feel the gift of joy more while some of us feel the gift of sorrow more. Our year-long theme in worship and teaching is "One body, one spirit, one hope." You can pray for us to learn the art of carrying joys and sorrows at the same time . . . and together.

Once we find this balance, the "newsy" news we have to share will most certainly surface again! ✨



Kohen and Gwendolyn at the White house worship cluster

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indigenous groups were orchestrated and backed by the United States.

So, you can begin to understand the atmosphere under which we faced deportation. As privileged people of European descent, it was certainly a new experience for us to be uprooted and expelled by a government for reasons that were flimsy at best. We felt rejected and ashamed. We had done nothing wrong. In fact, we were there to help.

Yet, while we felt some solidarity with what many of our immigrant brothers and sisters experience in the United States, we also realized how different our experience was. We had native speakers working on our behalf with the Bolivian government. Not many immigrants in the U.S. can afford that. We had a safe place to stay while the situation was worked out. Many immigrants in the U.S. are taken away from their families to detention centers and held without contact. We had a community to come back to in our home country. Some immigrants in the U.S. who get deported were raised there, do not speak Spanish and have no support system in their "home" country.

Our experience moving to Bolivia and ultimately being deported is one of immigration and incarnation. We were immigrants in a foreign land, "extranjeros, imigrantes, exiliados." This is part of what it means to be a pilgrim people. We are not Jesus, but in imitation of him we cross borders and boundaries. We cross over to the Other to understand, embrace and love those whom God has made and gifted. In many ways we continue to grieve the loss of our time in Bolivia, but in others, as you can see, we have been

Church of the Sojourners News

By Katie Rivers

It is an honor to be alive—period. And it is an honor to be alive in the company of fellow Sojourners. Within this life of honor and privilege questions still arise: Why are we here and what are we doing in this life together? The thing that I am currently “doing” is attempting to construct a news column that will tell the recent history of Church of the Sojourners from the perspective of the hairs on the head of Jeff Hare. The next thing I am “doing” is abandoning this endeavor. It isn’t coming together as I had



Peggy Gish, Dawn Noelle Beutler, Dale and Debbie Gish celebrate Advent



A buoyant epiphany pose

hoped. The hairs on Jeff’s head open up mysteries too vast and astounding for this brief account.

Jeff has experienced the passing of his mother from this life into her death and the next life. Jeff has faced this with courage, respect, and peace; it is an honor to be a Sojourner with him during this time.

Both Gigi and Alexina, friends and building mates in Sojo Land, have experienced the completion of 10 years of life. Sojourners at large have experienced the celebration of these lives. Again, it is an honor to celebrate lives that give us joy.

Sojourners is jumping on the “let’s have a communal business” band wagon. Ladies and Gentlemen, I present to you, **Now It Matters**. This

business comes from the mind of Tim Lockie who has combined genius with Dale Gish, and now Sojourners has a business. It is a salesforce consulting business for non-profit organizations. It has been a slow and rocky start, but business is trickling in, and NIM has earned the respect of many in the salesforce world. If you know of an organization that needs internal structure and organization, might you consider recommending Now It Matters? nowitmatters.com

As Sojourners together, we are engaged in a 12 Steps experiment. We have adapted the system into a “12 Steps Light.” What might happen if each Sojourner takes responsibility for addressing one core internal issue that inhibits him or her from having fully reconciled relationships with others, self, and/ or God? We are finding out. Pray for us, if you would.

The 12 Steps is one way that we open ourselves to regular epiphanies from God. There are other ways too. On the day of Epiphany, we broke up into little groups to search the city for the presence of God and the revelation of the Christ child dwelling with us. In riding a carousel with Jenny Prosa, Naomi, and Gigi- I believe that I discovered that God is in the present always. There were other epiphanies: everything will be ok. And as one companion shared her epiphany, another epiphany was revealed to one of us who listened and so forth and so on. Sometimes truth becomes clear and then we get a glimpse of Jesus. I think that might be why we are here. Glory to God. Amen. ☺



An Advent Pilgrimage



Sojourners kids celebrate Gigi's birthday