



SHALOM
MISSION
COMMUNITIES

VOLUME XVIIV

A Quarterly Newsletter of Shalom Mission Communities

NUMBER 4

Winter 2014: Singleness and Community

Singleness in the second half of life

by Lee Kuiper



Edith of Church of the Sojourners

I imagined the topic of “singleness in community” would bring forward a lot of youthful perspectives, and I certainly had my own opinions, but it seemed appropriate to take this opportunity to listen when I felt so ready to speak.

Edith Bernard has been widowed for the past 12 years while living within our community, Church of the Sojourners. Together, we found many overlapping experiences of singleness despite our 42 year age

difference. More importantly, Edith enlightened me on the specific difficulties she faces as an “older” single person. Her experience is one of which we all need to be continually reminded.

I set my voice recorder out on the table and began to interview Edith on her perspective of singleness but it wasn’t until after the “official” discussion had ended and the recorder had been shut off that I got to see Edith glow. I began asking her about her late husband, Jack, and watched her light up and smile over the things they did together and the way they interacted. I began to imagine Edith- someone I have only known as a single person- in her married life. I saw the gift that Jack was to her. I saw the gift that Edith was to him. I was able to bask in the glorious joy of Edith’s reflection and, for just a brief moment, we were unaware of our current singleness; we were lost in the act of remembrance.

When Edith and I first began talking, she mentioned the tendency of a person’s community to naturally become their assisted living. For better or worse, Edith’s kids (who are grown up) accept that she will not be requiring their attention regarding her health and well-being. In her own words, “They don’t have to figure out what to do with mom.” This, of course, does

Continued next page...

have its benefits: the family doesn't have to go out looking for assisted living if the community naturally assumes that role. Also, it takes away the anxious uncertainty of not knowing whether her kids are going to take care of her or if she will be abandoned to an "old folks' home" and never visited. At the same time, if the kids are not responsible for taking care their widowed parent, there is less incentive for them to visit and check in with their parent during a time of life when it is needed most.

Sadly, Edith alluded to her singleness in community as having many lonely difficulties with age. In juxtaposition, I was struck by my perspective on singleness and my sense of liberation attained from being single and young. Indeed, it is gift to be able to do so many things freely because of my circumstances. But although it is a gift to be able to have more free time to hang out with friends or read good books, we must remember that everything in life is a compromise: I do not get to experience the intimacy of one partner with which I share my daily life. I often feel like I am left to solitude when couples naturally pair off during the routines of daily life. Yet Edith does not have an older partner with which to share in her later stage of life and is left out and restricted to solitude far more often than I am because she cannot do all the ambitious things a young, single person can do.

More than not having one partner in an older stage of life, Edith shared her desire to share the company of many more elders within community. She expressed that there needs to be a critical mass of people within a community who are going through the same stages/experiences of life, in order for the needs of older single people to be understood and met. Otherwise- with just one or two older single people- a community goes on doing its normal thing and sometimes unintentionally forgets to think of its elders. As with any minority,

Christians in the majority must cultivate curiosity and actively take part in the empathetic work of listening. We must remind ourselves to give voice to the voiceless lest we ignore and thus, oppress, simply by going about as we would.

Like myself, Edith mentioned that it is important to be needed- to be relied on and have some sort of role (and purpose) within a community. I believe that being needed transcends age and marital status; it is absolutely integral to have a role in which one can find purpose and meaning within a community, regardless of status. However, within our larger Western culture, our elders seem to be frequently disregarded because of perceived irrelevancy. Sometimes, for the sake of efficiency, they are not even consulted and simply left out or left behind. Part of the reality of growing old is the body's decreasing abilities; if we combine that with the fact that Western culture seldom reaches out to give roles to our elders, then we can see plainly that the act of finding one's utilitarian identity becomes increasingly difficult with age.

Perhaps the best way to love singles in communities is also the simplest: to see them, hear them and invite them into our lives. In doing so, we help create a relational role full of meaning and purpose that contributes to the internal health and structure of community.

Table of Contents September 2014

<i>Singleness in the second half of life</i> by Lee Kuiper.....	page 1
Plow Creek News.....	page 3
<i>Seeking understanding for singles</i> by Diamante Maya.....	page 4
The News from Hope Fellowship.....	page 6
A conversation between Chico Fajardo-Heflin and Sage Woodruff.....	page 8
The news from Lotus House.....	page 10
Reba Place Fellowship News.....	page 11
<i>Love far exceeding</i> by Karna Larson and Megan Greulich.....	page 12
<i>Reflections on singleness and community</i> by David Hovde.....	page 14

Plow Creek News

by Christiana Peterson

We continue through the seasons of life here in rural Illinois. The spring and summer brought a rather disappointing farm season as blueberry crops felt the effects of the harsh winter of 2013. But we are hopeful as next year's growing season begins, and the farm is excited to start their CSA program again. They are changing things up, adding new help (Camille Walker), and coming to the program fresh with new ideas.

The Fellowship was thankful for a Visitation from Sally Youngquist and Allen Howe to get some help in reworking some of the challenges that come with financial sharing.

The season of Advent, that often seems bright and cheery on the surface as we await the coming of our Lord, has deeper things brewing underneath. Advent isn't just about the joy and hope of birth. It is also about the pain and discouragement of waiting for the kingdom to come. In this spirit of challenging anticipation, Tom and Kay Fleming (former members of PCF) came and led a Service of Lamentation focusing on Rich Foss's declining health and his stepping out of leadership roles due to this. The service also became a wonderful time to thank Rich for his many decades of wise and compassionate leadership at PCF.



Jude loves holding his little sister Annalee



Our regular crew gathers to worship on Sunday mornings at 10:30am

An actual birth came just before the start of Advent: The Petersons welcomed their third child, Annalee Dorothy, on November 2. Annalee joins big sister Neva and big brother Jude, and they both adore "their baby."

A lot of labor has gone into the corner house on the meadow to make it accessible to David and Margaret Gale. An outside lift is being built so they can move in the coming months into the house that David built many years ago. Plow Creek will soon welcome the SMC coordinators for a meeting in January. We look forward to sharing meals together, planning, and preparing for the coming year.

Seeking understanding for singles

by Diamante Maya

I've been attending Hope Fellowship for over four years now. I'm 30 years old and I have been single for much of the last 10 years. Any dating relationship I have had in the last 10 years has not lasted more than 2 months. When it comes to singleness and community, some of us at Hope Fellowship are not afraid to say boldly "Singleness sucks!" including myself. This is not to say that there are not great advantages to being single or that I feel there is something wrong with those of us who aren't married, but for some of us it comes with challenges. Hope Fellowship has felt like a family to me, which has helped me a lot in my singleness. Part of my longing and one way I feel cared for as a single is simply to feel genuinely understood.

About nine years ago, Hope Fellowship started talking about the topic of the LGBT community as it relates to our community of faith. From my understanding, the topic was tabled until it was relevant. Because I just came out to the church this summer, it is on the horizon to discuss the topic again. Everyone has been very loving and the Holy Spirit has been very evident to me. My sexual orientation is an added layer to my experience as a single.

I have a deep longing for intimacy and for a life-long, consistent, committed, stable companionship that community alone cannot fill for me. I know I'm not the only single person that feels this way. I have spent many years now digging deep into my soul, talking to God, analyzing, and asking myself if I am called to celibacy. Every time I have done this, the answer continually and consistently comes back as a strong, resounding NO! My theological understanding, life experience, and encounter with Holy Spirit have led me to conclude that same sex relationships are not sinful. I know this poses a problem for some Christians. It's something we at Hope still have to discern through together. Living with this longing unfulfilled is very challenging for me and can impact my emotional state. Life goes on and I find ways to cope, but it's a sensitive area of my life that can feel overlooked at times. Again, I know I'm not the only single person that feels this way.

My experience is definitely not the experience of all singles. Some of us do have a need for support in this longing. Others of us detest pity and take pride in being

single. I believe all humans long to be understood. I am left with more questions than answers. What is the God given value of marriage, family, and singleness? Is it possible some people are called to marriage? How do we guard against the trap of idolizing marriage or family? How do we guard against the temptation of singles and married people segregating? How do we make sure we evaluate maturity by things like service, sacrifice, and connectivity, instead of giving people more value because they are married? How do we create paths for those that do feel called to celibacy and support those that don't? How do we guard against treating singles as second class citizens as is common in our society? How do we avoid overlooking or minimizing the difficulty of unfulfilled longing to be married (and have a family) for some singles?

I don't ask these questions of Hope Fellowship as if we are not doing these, but rather of all of us living American society and particularly those in Christian community. I think our communities can care for singles by recognizing the diversity of their experience, seeking to understand us, guarding against minimization or overlooking the challenge for some, but not assuming that being single is difficult for everyone. Ultimately, our goal is to reflect Christ. God in His great creativity has provided a diversity of valid ways to do this. May God give us the eyes to see the various and beautiful differences He created in a society that likes to box people in, and may He teach us how to genuinely love across those differences.



Hope Fellowship contributes to the Texas Mennonite Relief Sale

Letter from the editor:

There is such a rich array of perspectives for this Winter 2014 newsletter on the theme of singleness in community: from Edith, single again in later life after being widowed, to the men and women facing the challenges of singleness in their 20s, 30s, and 40s. Their stories have been moving to me as I recall the years of my own singleness and am reminded that while Christian community can be a life-giving place of encouragement for singles, it can also disregard the great gifts an unmarried person can give to the church. From Karen and Megan, we learn some good ways that Third Way has supported and included the singles among their number. But I also appreciate the reminder that individuals in the church, in their eagerness to strengthen marriage and families, can make an idol out of these relationships while at the same time further isolating singles who have much to give and teach.

I am glad to share the voices of so many perspectives. Diamante, Chico, and Sage mention the challenges that our LGBT sisters and brothers face in Christian community. I hope that, even though the SMC communities are not united in their perspective about homosexuality and the church (and indeed some of our communities are currently struggling through discernment on this very topic), we can take Tim Otto's advice in his book *Oriented to Faith*, and listen to these voices, hearing one another in love and compassion.

—Christiana N. Peterson

Shalom Connections

Shalom Connections seeks to glorify God and provide a means of fellowship and inspiration among sisters and brothers of the member churches of Shalom Mission Communities and the wider network of intentional Christian Communities. *Shalom Connections* is published quarterly in Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter. Subscriptions are free. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the official position of *Shalom Connections*, Shalom Mission Communities, or its member churches.

Postmaster: Send address changes to the Publishing Office address, below.

Editor / Publisher Christiana N Peterson

Contributing Artists:

Rudy Arnold (masthead and SMC logo)
Photographs by various SMC community members

Contributions/Permissions/Reprints/

Subscription/Address changes:

Contact Publishing/Editorial office, below:

Publishing/Editorial Office:

9295 1925 E St
Tiskilwa, IL 61368
cnpeterson@fastmail.fm
www.shalommissioncommunities.org

Shalom Mission Communities:

Reba Place Fellowship
737 Reba Place B
Evanston, IL 60202
rebfellowship@gmail.com
www.rebaplacefellowship.org
(847) 328-6066 (voice) (847) 328-8431 (fax)

Plow Creek Fellowship

19183 Plow Creek, Unit 2
Tiskilwa, IL 61638
pcmcl@plowcreek.org
www.plowcreek.org
(815) 646-6600 (voice) (815) 646-4672 (fax)

Hope Fellowship

1700 Morrow Ave.
Waco, TX 76707
(254) 754-5942 (voice)
www.hopefellowshipwaco.com

Church of the Sojourners

866 Potero Ave.
San Francisco, CA 94110
(415) 824-8931 voice and fax
<http://churchofthesojourners.org>
info@churchofthesojourners.org

Third Way

1246 Charles Ave
Saint Paul, MN 55104
<http://www.thirdwaychurch.org/>
jenmccoy.thirdway@gmail.com

Hope Fellowship News

by Michelle Porter

Our annual theme at Hope Fellowship for 2014 has been “Crossing into Samaria”. Our pastoral team, Joe and Nancy Gatlin and Fernando Arroyo, sent us a letter at the beginning of the year explaining the theme. I am including the verse and part of the letter that they sent:

“But he had to go through Samaria.” John 4:4

We'll look at the story of the Samaritan woman and Jesus in Luke 4. We expect that in this year of “Crossing into Samaria” we will hear from the Holy Spirit through our prayers and our life together in relationships, koinonia groups, clusters, teaching times, and meetings where God is telling us we have to go.

We expect that individually and collectively we will be led to cross borders within Hope Fellowship and outside as well, to move into situations that feel uncomfortable, to build unlikely relationships, to listen more, to learn to hear and speak the languages of others, and as always to bear witness to the love of God that we know through Jesus Christ.

As I reflect on this letter and the year at Hope Fellowship, these words of expectation proved to be true. We crossed borders physically, mentally, spiritually, and emotionally, and we hope that we have borne witness to the love of God that we know through Christ. As the year concludes, we turn our attention to Advent and the generosity of God in our teaching times.

As I reflect on the past few months of 2014, God's generosity is obvious even amongst the suffering and challenges.

Illness continues to be present amongst us as Medardo Coronado had to have the toes and part of one of his feet amputated, and Alan Caruthers continues to

undergo cancer treatment. We are thankful for the generosity of the HF community who have provided meals, prayers, and time with the families.

Nancy Gatlin officially finished teaching preschool for the Waco public schools last year, and we celebrated with her and some



Gabriela Gatlin and Alfredo Colman at their marriage ceremony

of her colleagues with a Love of Learning brunch. We are blessed as a church and a city to benefit from her passion for education and the generous way she uses her gift amongst us.

Clare Bridgewater is the second HF youth who will complete a coming-of-age project. She will work with Karen Alleman and Ruth Boardman Alexander to create mosaic tiles that will go on the steps of the meeting house. To accomplish this, she is fundraising and selling handmade tile coasters and ornaments. We are grateful for the generosity of God in providing us with so many children and youth in the past few years.

Nathan and Karen Alleman organized and motivated us to participate in the Texas Mennonite Relief Sale. They encouraged each koinonia group to make something to sell at the event that took place in November in Houston. The youth group made mounds of granola, and other groups made cookies, baked goods, candies, and many other wonderful delicacies. We are thankful that they remind us of our larger connection to Mennonites around the world.

God's love and generous spirit was evident as we celebrated with Gabriela Gatlin and Alfredo Colman at their marriage ceremony on November 22nd. Alfredo's family from Paraguay was able to be here for the celebration, as were many other family and friends, including some of our SMC friends.



Church of the Sojourners: Laura, Sage, and Katie assume human sculpture poses as part of Ben Fisk's goodbye tribute



Church of the Sojourners: Birthday Boy Nate Playing Bubble Soccer

II Corinthians 9: 13-15 comes to mind as we are reminded:

Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

A Light and joyful burden:
A conversation between Chico Fajardo-Heflin and Sage Woodruff about singleness and celibacy

Tatiana and I met Sage while visiting Jubilee partners. Where most young, post-college kids come to Jubilee for a few months, do some volunteering, and move on, Sage was different. “I was pretty antsy after leaving Jubilee when my volunteer terms were up,” she says. “I wanted to go out and do something good, but wasn’t sure of what. I had heard that it was common in Karen culture for single adults to live with families, so I asked a Karen family I had grown close with at Jubilee if I could live with them for a few weeks. We had our three year anniversary this past August.”

Sage, now 27, spends her days sharing life with Bi Kan No and Naw Dee Poe’s family in Comer, Georgia, the small back-country town in which Jubilee is located. In recent years, dozens of Karen and Karenne families have been moving into this sleepy, Bible-belt town. “Almost overnight,” Sage says, “Comer’s population has grown to near 10% Karen and Karenne.” Sage immerses herself in Karen culture, working as a translator in local schools, and helping nurture the emerging Karen and Karenne village sprouting up right there.

Sage’s journey is a powerful one of relearning the definition of family and of choosing to cast her lot with an overlooked refugee community in America. But what makes her story relevant for this issue of “Shalom Connections” is that being single has allowed Sage to be welcomed into the intimacy of Bi Kan No and Naw Dee Poe’s family life in a way that being a part of her own marriage and family would not have allowed.

Sage is making very unusual and important decisions regarding her singleness. In a church culture that often confuses biological allegiance for kingdom allegiance, her story matters. Sage may be a reluctant prophet, but she has a voice that resounds true and clear.

Chico Fajardo-Heflin: *Most of the singles I know lament their singleness and are still waiting for marriage. Could you talk a little bit about your singleness and how you’ve ended up making decisions that embrace this way of life?*

Sage Woodrooff: I first began being drawn to the power of celibacy at a pretty early age. I was reading stuff by Elisabeth Elliot and Amy Carmichael. Those

women and their feisty, passionate spirits made me skeptical about passion, zeal, and love finding their only proper home in a spouse and biological children. Listening to stories of people who’ve done something quite against the grain is extremely powerful. It changes things when we hear those stories. It gives us the idea that perhaps we could do it too, and even be happy in it.

I wonder sometimes if I could ever find the courage to make a public commitment to a life of singleness in service of the church and world. I know I could. But I haven’t done that. What I have has basically fallen to me by the curious workings of the Spirit and they’ve led me to live as a single woman with a family. I imagine that if I stay in Comer and attend to the work and life that I see God offering around me, I probably won’t get married. So while I haven’t made a vow in the strict sense of the word, I am trying to give thanks for and live into what my life has come to be.



Mark Stahnke, Jim Foxvog, and Paul Munn of Plow Creek work on the outdoor lift at the corner house



Stephen and Alden of Lotus House dressed as bad guys for a ninja birthday party

CFH: You mentioned that you haven't made a "public commitment" of single celibacy, but you know you could. What do you think is stopping you?

SW: The easiest answer is that I didn't grow up in such a tradition. But when I really think about it, an honest answer is to say that it's scary. Even as we talk about it right now, my stomach hurts [laughter]. I mean, it's a huge decision just like marriage is. Mostly, I have conversations with Christians that push me the other direction. People have said, "You shouldn't put limits on the Spirit. You should always be open to marriage." But I never hear the advice the other way around, folks discouraging me from marriage in order to keep me open to singleness. But why not? I think probably the more we have conversations like these the more possible it'd be for people like me to seriously consider doing something like making a public vow of celibacy the way one does with marriage. We just don't have a culture like that in the Church.

CFH: A lot of Christians say they're willing to go wherever God leads them, but when push comes to shove, the fact is, people are not choosing singleness. What has given you the strength to make such a counter-cultural decision?

SW: Living here in Comer has helped a lot, actually. Comer's a small town, just over a thousand people. And it's in the country, in the South. Whenever I daydream about leaving this place, this people, it's usually to do things like go to school or attend seminary. I've realized that I daydream about those specific situations in part because they would put me in a position to meet men. Staying put in Comer keeps my prospects scarce. It forces me to be in a position where I'd have to expend a significant amount of time and energy and pursue some tangential paths in order to meet men with a similar vision for life and discipleship. I'm not interested in doing that.

CFH: If you think marriage is a good and holy thing—and you've told me before that you believe it is—why not pursue it?

SW: In Robert Cole's biography of Dorothy Day, he says of her something like that she knew she was on a journey toward a

destination and that she didn't want to waste time getting sidetracked on a bunch of roads that weren't the point. That makes sense to me. That we can waste the short time each of us has by going after the many good things not willed for us by God.

I believe strongly in marriage and sometimes long for it myself. It is an extremely powerful witness and sacrament in the world. But I'm coming to a point in my life where I want to give myself to just a few things. Life is short and I've already spent a good deal of time trying to seek out every good thing. I don't want to do that anymore; I want to train myself to focus on one good thing. It seems right now that God has given me these people, this family, this life. It's a good thing. It doesn't make sense to me to leave this good thing just to seek another good thing.

CFH: I love the way you put that, that we can waste our time going after "the many good things not willed for us by God." That's a really powerful, provocative statement.

SW: There is a religious community whose rule of life I have. They say, "If your celibacy is to be a light burden, it must be entire. Be brave and sing His praises." I think I'm finding truth in that. When I run off here or there, in wishing for another life, and never plant my feet in these homes, in this town, and this church, my singleness becomes empty and burdensome rather than joyful and light.

CFH: I don't think this discussion will be meaningful to people if we don't talk about the 'burdens' of singleness. What, for you, have been some of the challenges of inhabiting this vocation?

SW: Yeah, well though I am finding great joy in this particular way of life, there are days of intense loneliness that make me question the sincerity and purpose of my task and joy. There are days of real sadness about not having a particular other to share it with.

Dorothy Day talked about Peter Maurin being lonely. She said he was lonely for God. And I think that's true of all of us. Plenty of people are lonely in marriage. Plenty of people are lonely outside of it. There will come that time for all of us as spouses die and we find ourselves alone. And some people will set their hearts to open up to that loneliness as a gift and an invitation to intimate prayer.

CFH: I think one of the strongest arguments against requiring LGBT Christians to adopt celibacy as their only mode of life is the fact that the Church has done a terrible job of creating viable, life-affirming spaces in the Church for single people. Lots of single Christians—gay and straight—feel like second or even third-class citizens in the Church. They feel dismissed and, like you said, alone. What are some ways the Church can support those who are single in their midst?

The news from Lotus House

by Daniel Gray

It seems as though the transitions through fall and winter have brought us back into a routine, where life seems just a little more ordinary. We continue to support each other as we navigate challenging situations with academic studies and work environments where we often feel

men. It was a great opportunity to connect with Hope, learn more about their rhythm of life and increase the bonds between our two communities.

In October, a majority of the house traveled to Chicago for the Nurturing Communities Project. This annual event always serves as an encouragement to our

The neighbor we thought we would purchase from has decided to hold off on selling her house, so at this point, we are continuing to wait for God's direction and the right opportunity.

Many of our conversations this fall have been consumed by the ongoing issues around Ferguson, poverty, and policing in our communities. We have been sorting through these issues by attending protests and various community forums, writing about these issues on our blog, and through many conversations with friends and family. We hope that we can continue to seek better understanding and work towards reconciliation.

In January, we will be taking our annual retreat to affirm where we have been over the last year and continue to cast our vision for the future, both personally and communally in our callings. We will be returning to a Benedictine monastery in the area for this retreat.



Lotus house gathers for Nurturing Communities Project in Chicago

that we are inadequate or unable to fully meet the needs of others. As a community that seeks to share all things in common, we have shared a lot of the common cold and sickness this fall. Such aspects of community can be disheartening, and yet there has always been someone well-enough to help carry on the daily needs of the house.

In September, Daniel had the opportunity to visit with Hope Fellowship, sharing in their inaugural "rite-of-passage" weekend for one of their young

community members as we connect and share stories with others from around the country.

Our Friday night dinners have continued to be an important gathering for people in the area who come for fellowship and friendship. It seems as though we have seen an increase in the number of new faces, and we hope that our house continues to provide a healthy place for people to dialogue as they navigate issues of vocation and relationships.

Our house-hunting has been put on hold for the time being.



Thirza and Candace with her dogs at her ranch

Reba Place Fellowship News

by Sally Schreiner Youngquist



Josh McCallister & son and Tim Doran set a high bar for stylish hats at RPF.

Reba Place Fellowship hosted the Nurturing Communities Project gathering for about about 60 adults and 20 kids from outside of RPF October 10-13. We got to unpack the theme "Growing communities of wisdom," with participants as diverse as plain neo-Amish folk from rural KY, charismatic ministry to the homeless folks from Springfield, IL, young adults from households in Vancouver, to representatives from the 400-member Jesus People USA in Uptown Chicago. Participants enjoyed the Saturday tour of JPUSA, discussion of their life, a fine supper in their newly renovated "Wilson Abby" space, and a lack of talent show to follow. Tatiana and Chico Fajardo-Heflin came in from Ford Heights, IL to take charge of the kitchen crew, feeding us bountifully and well.

We hosted a Visitation Team here Oct. 31-Nov. 2 composed of Tim Otto (COS), Joe Gatlin (HF) and Anne Stewart (RPC) for a 3-year check-up prior to our having a community leader election process next year. Tim Otto stayed on to give us input on the LGBTQ Dialogue process we have engaged for close to three years. We felt

blessed to have friends like these to speak encouraging words about the life they see being shared among us as well as words of challenge for how to keep community real and inclusive of all who need it.

We are experiencing the frailty of our bodies in various stages of the aging process. Barb Grimsley has recovered from a nasty fall around Easter time, with cracked ribs, a broken upper arm, and punctured lung. Joanne Janzen is well along in her recovery from busting her kneecap and getting knee surgery after being knocked off her bicycle by a car. Julius Belser is dealing with a diagnosis of prostate cancer by taking hormone therapy. We have been praying for recovery of these and other sisters and brothers for the fullness of healing God wants to bring, beginning with a moving prayer time with our Visitation Team as they gave their closing report.

Orwin and Sally Youngquist were glad to staff a prayer retreat at Emmanuel Lodge Oct. 25 which drew together a crowd of mostly singles for shared worship, quiet personal reflection, fellowship and

communion. The Janzens' postponed 50th wedding anniversary (from Sept. 4 to Nov. 14) gave David and Joanne time to put together a life review slideshow and narrative which blessed us all with rich reflections about their exciting lives of Kansas roots, college romance, overseas service, child-rearing in intentional community, fruitfulness in ministry, forbearance with one another's strengths and weaknesses and more. After a mammoth potluck dinner, we closed this celebration by eating ice cream David regretted not being served at their wedding 50 years ago.

This fall we are blessed to be welcoming in newcomers of young and older ages who want to engage with us as new practicing members (even after taking a pause on offering an apprentice program.) They include Natalie Potts from Thirdway, Keith Baumgardner, Robin Benedict, Carl Sherrod, and Paula Zijp, a grad student from the Netherlands researching intentional Christian community here for the fall. Single dad Drew Tessler became a novice, joining Susie Kauffman in that level of commitment. Households at 723 Seward, the Greenhouse and the Patch have been experiencing a lot of transition as young adult participants have moved in and out. RPF rents these houses for intentional Christian living, but most residents do not have a formal connection to RPF. We enjoy interacting with some of these residents at the Monday night Cana potluck and seminar, which also serves as the venue for a course being taught by David Janzen and Monica Laytham on intentional Christian community to five North Park University students this fall.

And finally, the proposal to buy a house in Little Rock, Arkansas to help the McCallisters plant a new Christian community was passed unanimously Nov. 11, after much discussion and discernment. A house has been purchased and the McCallisters are working on plans for necessary renovations and moving. We will heartily miss the McCallisters, but are enthusiastic about their plans to take seeds of the Kingdom of God and plant them in new soil.

Love far exceeding
by Karna Larson and
Megan Greulich



The other day I (Megan) was reading a pretty brilliant article about the creation story in Genesis. It was dry and wordy and overly academic, which means that I was completely loving it. Until I came across his statement that the primary and most intimate human relationship is the marital one between a man and a woman. Ouch. I felt that instant and familiar pang known as “the reminder that I’m single and I don’t want to be” wave of sadness. I’m 31 and single but I definitely do not, and have not ever, felt that I’m called to be so. And Karna is in the same boat.

At the same time, neither of us are alone. And we are certainly far from lonely. If I were to push back a bit on that author’s perspective, I’d simply say that our culture doesn’t have much understanding for deep and intimate, yet non-sexual and non-marital relationships. But this is

my reality and Karna’s reality, and it is the reality that many of us experience in intentional

“don’t care what anyone thinks of us” kind of laughing.

In high school, Karna welcomed me into her youth group. And I became a Christian. We started talking about important things—how God wanted us to design our lives, what it meant to be a friend, how to reconcile God’s goodness with the really crappy things going on all around us. We still laughed a lot. And sang together, although we had progressed to singing *Les Miserables* medleys. But somewhere in those years I realized that Karna got me—really got me. She faithfully supported and encouraged me through both hard and happy times, and proved herself to be that rare kind of friend who truly wanted the best for me.

We went off to college together, and then lived in the “big city” post-college together. And in those years, she became the primary person I shared my life with. We processed break ups together, celebrated successes in our new careers, walked through Karna buying a house, and cried together over my mother’s cancer. It has been with Karna that I’ve realized that life is messy—that we are messes—and it has been with Karna that I’m finally starting to understand that we are forgiven and redeemable. And now, three years after we found and joined Third Way, I can say that we have both discovered that same kind of deep, intimate friendship within our community. It’s totally rare, and the older I get, the more I understand to treasure it and thank God daily for it.

Christian community. It was also King David’s reality. As he lamented the death of his dear friend Jonathan, he said of him, “Your friendship was a miracle-wonder, love far exceeding anything I’ve known—or ever hope to know” (2 Samuel 1:26).

Karna and I met in 7th grade social studies class. We quickly formed that special middle school friendship, bonding while singing “My Heart Will Go On” in choir and then practicing in the car together while my mother drove us around to find the latest beanie babies. We felt grown up together going to high school football games and then showing up for a movie at the bargain theater in a group of 30. We drank our weight in Ruby Red Squirt, and I roped Karna into helping me collect photos and articles for my Hanson scrapbook. We laughed a lot—the giddy, slightly crazy,

continued from previous page...

Here are a few ways that we, as singles, are incredibly thankful for our Third Way community:

- *We've been welcomed and valued.* When we read things about "singleness and the church"—how singles are often undervalued and ignored, we can't relate. Because this has never been our experience with our Third Way family. Our community has chosen to see us as simply "Megan and Karna," not "single women" or any other incomplete label. Our marital status is only a small part of how we are viewed.
- *We have important work to do.* We don't feel like our lives are on hold until we're married. We have meaningful work to do for the kingdom of God, with people who have chosen us and whom we have chosen. And practically speaking, our community gives us the opportunity to increase our influence beyond what we could do as single individuals, because we hold a common vision and find ways to share resources and work together for those purposes.
- *We have some stability.* One of the challenges of being single in our culture is the temporary nature of it. We don't have many models for how single people establish lasting roots, because the primary way people live together is the family unit. But as we get older and are desiring to build a home for ourselves, it's been a gift to know that there is some commitment from people to be in each others' lives long term. Even if we don't physically share living space, we know there are settled community members within blocks of us who are invested in our neighborhood and are in it for the long haul.
- *We are able to know, love, and mentor kids.* Caring for the little ones in our community, celebrating their birthdays, and sharing in their struggles has been a deep joy for both of us. It's also been a great surprise to see that the ways we invest in these kids is a gift to their parents. It's a reminder that all things complicated like raising children are better when we do it together.
- *We have opportunities to see marriage up close and realistically.* In times of feeling more discontent with our singleness, it can be painful to be so close to the marriages and families of our community because it is a reminder of what we don't have. But at the same time, seeing both the joys and challenges of marriage and family life is a great gift. It helps us keep this desire in its place—we can't over-romanticize marriage or find ourselves thinking that if we had it, everything difficult about our lives would melt away. And the fact that our community members have welcomed us into their family lives has also been a helpful discernment tool for both of us—when we see the difficulties of marriage but we still long for it, we can more readily trust that this is something we want for the right reasons.
- *We have opportunities to practice empathy.* It's been a healthy thing for both of us to be reminded that struggling with singleness is just one of so many unmet desires that people wrestle with. Walking through community members' pain over infertility, addictions, unfulfilling jobs, and more, is a privilege and an exercise in holding onto hope for one another.

The reality is that neither of us are in control of when, if ever, our marital status changes. But what we are learning is that choosing to live in community—choosing deep and intimate friendship now as singles—is a powerful and subversive way to refuse to put our lives on hold. And it's a joy! We're totally grateful for this gift from the Lord.

SW: It's true that LGBTs are rather homeless in a Church that is asking them to renounce the very relationship it espouses as the most important. If I am not willing to consider singleness as a vocation in order to follow Jesus where it seems he has led me, I cannot ask the same of an LGBT sister or brother. And if married people in the Church are not willing to rearrange typical family structures to include singles in their lives, they cannot ask people to be single.

I think the American church has a lot to learn from the Karen church in regards to family. People might be surprised by that because Karen can seem so focused on biological family in word. If I ever asked them about my singleness outrightly they'd probably say, "What the heck are you talking about? Hurry up and get married!" But never mind what they say, look at what they do! The Karen family I live with has done a great deal of rearranging for me and have, in many ways, affirmed my singleness. Without this family, without the children in my life, I'm sure I could be single, but I might not be happy about it. Friendship allows me to be in this station with a great amount of joy.

CFH: *It's interesting because we've talked before about how your particular way of life with the Karen is possible because you are single. So in some ways I hear you saying being single allows you to live with the Karen and living with the Karen allows you to be single.*

SW: Yes, well said [laughter].

CFH: *If you could end our time together with some kind of word of encouragement or advice for the single Christians among us who really do struggle with knowing what to do with their singleness, what would you say to them?*

SW: Well, first I'd say that good and true celibacy cannot happen without prayer and the Church. Singleness is pointless at best and selfish or miserable at worst when it is not born of and bound to the life of God and God's people.

Secondly, I'd say that it is not easy. I have plenty of times when I struggle to see how I am to be part of this neighborhood, of this town, this church. It takes a longer vision of things to trust that God will make good of the things we entrust to him. There are no quick fixes. All good things in life need time to bear fruit. It helps me to know the facts of a challenging thing and to be able to look it squarely in the face. This will take time and the discipline of trust.

But when we are willing to walk with God to places in which marriage does not seem a clear option, God does, I say it again, God will surround us with more family than we could dare have imagined. The barren woman's house is full of children. The single woman's house is full of families.

Young people, listen to the Lord. Do not be afraid! You have to walk ahead into what cannot be seen, into what cannot sometimes even be imagined. But if you believe God to be calling you there, put aside fear. We can be slaves to fear or children of the Most High God. Put your hope in God. There is deep power at hand when we blindly bet our lives on the provision of God.

Reflections on Singleness in Community

by David Hovde

I believe everyone wants to be loved, and know the joy of special relationships of intimacy. That is why some of us join intentional Christian communities. It is why many people get married. I believe it is even why many people watch television. Watching television can be a way for people to identify with others when personal relationships seem out of reach or unsatisfying. Some of us try to earn intimate relationships by working hard to please others. Some people give up hope of having intimate relationships. It seems to me we all desire intimate relationships.

People have different desires for intimacy depending on their life stages and life experiences. Young children desire close relationships with their parents, as well as with other family members and friends. As children mature into adults, sexual desire has a more prominent role in directing their search for intimate relationships. If people experienced a lot of love from family and friends when they were children, they may assume that they will continue to have loving relationships with others in the future, and not feel a desperate desire for closer relationships. However, if people did not receive much love from family and friends growing up, they will likely question whether loving relationships will be available for them in their future. They may search for love in desperate ways.

As a child, I had close relationships with my parents, with other relatives, and with peers. When I was thirteen my family moved to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia to work with the Mennonite mission group there. After moving there, I felt like the world had turned upside down and I could not count on anything anymore. I was made fun of a lot at the first school I attended, and stood out whenever I was in public. I became very self-conscious. I was not able to make friends. What was I supposed to do with my desire friendship, not to mention my sexual attractions? I quickly developed a fantasy life.



Hangin' out at the Oct. 25 Emmanuel Lodge prayer retreat were Orwin Youngquist, David Hovde, Heather Clark, Keith Baumgardner, Megan Herring, Natalie Potts, Vicki Caleb and Gus Roddy.

My imagination was the only place where I could be close to women I was attracted to.

In college back in the U. S., I was able to make friends again. But I was not able to develop close friendships with women. My first few years I spent much time watching television and movies, and listening to music that focused on sex outside of committed relationships. After awhile, I realized this mindset hindered me from developing close, respectful relationships with women. I also realized I needed help to break free from the media that promoted this mindset – particularly from the kind of music I was addicted to. I prayed to God for help, and God provided help through my brother introducing me to Christian heavy metal music, concerts, and music festivals. I felt this new music had a positive rather than corrupting influence on me.

Later, I had the experience of falling in love with a woman at school I barely knew. I wanted a relationship with her so strongly, and was terrified that nothing would come of it. I felt physically sick. After talking with her more, I realized she was not the person I thought/ hoped she was. A short time later, I fell in love with another classmate. I felt I knew her well enough that I expressed interest in a “special friendship” with her. She was not interested. I was devastated. I felt like there was no reason to keep living. Over the years, this pattern has repeated itself. Whenever I expressed interest in a special relationship with a woman, and learned she was not interested, I felt deeply disappointed.

After college, I lived with my parents for a time in a town I was not familiar with. I became very depressed. After falling in love those two times in college, my main goal was to get married. Nothing much else interested me. When I visited Reba Place to discern whether to move into Christian community, it was because I couldn’t think of anything better to do.

However, at Reba Place I received some blessings through Christian community that renewed my hope for life, and continue to sustain me today. Here I can share my experiences of life with others, including my struggles, and be listened to and accepted. I can live in a household with others, sharing in common work and common meals. I can be part of a small group where we support each other in whatever is going on in our lives. I can serve in the community, including working as a caregiver for a housemate who has muscular dystrophy. I have developed long lasting friendships, new skills/ habits, and have done things I never thought I would do (such as helping start a L’Arche community in Chicago, being a part of Christian Peacemaker Teams in the Kurdish Region of Iraq, and being part of the Reba Place Fellowship leadership team).

One of the most important gifts I have received in Christian community has been the gift of openness/ confession. Talking to close friends about my inner life, my struggles, and my sin, is a way for me to know God’s friendship, compassion and forgiveness. Sometimes I do not have what it takes to be in touch with God’s presence. I feel tempted to return to my

fantasy life to try to escape the challenges of conflict or loneliness. Reaching out to close friends at these times can help me become aware again of God’s presence with me.

Another important gift I have received in Christian community is the gift of listening to the Holy Spirit. Sometimes others do not have what it takes to relate to me with God’s love, compassion and understanding. At these times I am learning to be still and listen to the Holy Spirit communicate to me the love that others are not able to.

When I sometimes return to addictive fantasizing to escape life’s problems, I can despair that I am not the person I want to be. I want to grow in awareness of God’s grace.

Sometimes my life in Christian intentional community feels full and satisfying. Much of my past loneliness seems to be healed. Other times I long for more intimate relationships. I believe this is part of being human. Though we are different - some married, some single, some in Christian community, some not – we all desire intimate relationships with others.

By God’s grace, may we deepen our relationships with each other, and grow in awareness of the love of God in Christ. I take comfort in Jesus’ prayer in John 17:26: “I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”



*Margaret Gale and Sarah Foss of Plow Creek
prepare food for the Sunday meal*

Shalom Connections
9295 1925 E St
Tiskilwa, IL 61368

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

The Shalom Mission Communities are an informal network with no revenue beyond the dues of member communities. We are glad to make this newsletter available to anyone who wants to read it. You may read the newsletter (including back issues) and sign up for email notifications at www.shalommissioncommunities.org.

If you or your community are receiving this publication and are not an official part of SMC, we would ask you to consider giving a \$12 annual contribution to cover the costs of publishing the newsletter.

Please send donations to:

SMC c/o Reba Place Fellowship
P.O. Box 6575 Evanston, IL 60202

If you would like to stop receiving a physical copy of the newsletter, please email Christiana at cnpeterson@fastmail.fm with your name and address so we can take you off our list.

Thank you for your interest in Christian intentional community and your encouragement of Shalom Mission Communities.