



SHALOM CONNECTIONS

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Spring 2016: Spiritual Practices that Shape Us

A Spiritual Greenhouse

by Tim Otto

Here at Sojourners we try to inspire each other to spiritual growth by creating a spiritual greenhouse. Rather than straining to fix each other and ordering each other to “Bear fruit!” or “Flower!” we’ve learned the truth that, “The best thing I can do for you is to give myself completely to Jesus.” We also try to create the conditions for spiritual growth by using the water, sun, and fertilizer of the spiritual disciplines. Here are three of our favorites:

Sabbath

When we had more energy than sense in our early life together, we acted as if busyness were next to godliness. We worked full time social-work jobs, participated in all the community activities, and hung out with our emergency housing guests in any spare moment. In the midst of all that, we took a retreat together and realized that our life was not sustainable. We made the commitment to have a three hour Sabbath each



Zoe and Jenny Lead Epiphany

Sunday morning. We decided that it would mean not talking to each other, refraining from work, and giving ourselves to a spiritually refreshing activity such as reading Scripture or going to the beach (extra points for reading Scripture at the beach!).

At the time, It seemed like a reach. How would we carve out three whole hours? And how would we fill all that alone-with-yourself, silent time? Over the years however, we’ve come to

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cherish Sabbath time in our weekly rhythm. We've learned the truth of theologian Abraham Heschel's comment that Sabbath is a "palace in time." We've learned that we don't take Sabbath in order to do better at work. We work so that we can have Sabbath—our "make out with God" time, our "my trust is not in my productivity but in God" time, our "I'm going to breathe and remember the beauty and wonder of existence" time. Sabbath is when we open our arms to all the love God has to give and let God's love lasers stun us back into gratitude, wonder, and belovedness.

Meals

Our former pastor, John Alexander, used to say "our most important meeting is dinner." At Sojourners we try to make "life together" real by sharing space, money, and time. Outsiders find sharing money (we have a way of pooling money) and sharing space (most of us live together in four big houses) curious and challenging disciplines. But from the inside, the hardest thing to do is share time. We're busy. Even with good intentions, it is hard to connect.

One way we combat that is we eat together as households three nights a week (and as an entire community two nights a week). Yes, it is a sweet eating arrangement. Cook a meal one night a week and get four meals cooked for you! But more importantly it is a time to check in and exchange stories about the day. It

is a time to rejoice and lament with one another. As idealists, we can spout beautiful language about "loving each other self-sacrificially with the love of Christ." But day to day, liking each other can be the challenge. Dinner is a place that—at our best—we ask each other questions and answer generously and vulnerably as ways of liking each other.

Affirmation

We have the practice of telling each other, once a week during our worship services, how we've seen God at work in one another. We say

things like, "Thank you for your work with the kids. I see you growing in patience with them. I believe God is loving them through you." Sometimes our affirmations feel like petty "thank you's." Sometimes they feel like blatant flattery with a subtext (please watch the kids more!). But when we do them well, we're looking for how God is at work in others and naming it.

Living with others is hard. We notice the sins and shortcomings in others because they affect us. It requires intentionality to see how the Holy Spirit is at work: transforming and redeeming. If we lose sight of God's work among us, we're tempted by despair and depression. But, by naming how God is at work, we remember that God is good. God is present with us. We have the privilege of cooperating with God's work in the world.

All Three in Worship

By God's grace, worship has been a consistent source of encouragement for us at Sojourners. Our worship combines all three of these disciplines: we come to worship as part of our Sabbath day, we balance a plate of food on our laps and eat together, we speak the ways God has been at work in each other. As these disciplines converge, we realize that they are not a burden: they are making us into joyful, mature disciples.

Plow Creek News

by Christiana Peterson

When our monthly Wednesday meetings are shorter, we consider it a blessing because that means we are successfully working our way through the tasks before us.

We are having new conversations amongst the folks who are interested in joining the common purse. We are hoping that these folks can work together to transform the financial sharing into something that challenges all of us, builds trust, and helps us live together in a new way.

There are many things to be thankful for around here. After another sickness that landed him in the hospital, Rich Foss has been stable for several weeks.

Our Saturday work projects have been fruitful. Sunday school rooms are painted, farm and bike sheds are cleaned out, firewood is chopped and sorted, and guest spaces are beautified.

We've been grateful to be able to set aside one Saturday a month as an outreach service project. We were able to help an elderly woman in town by clearing away the remains of her barn that had burned in a fire. This service project not only helped her but

caused a small stir in town as folks driving by wondered who was helping her and why.

We are adding an Elder Care Team to the community to help care for the needs of the older folks among us.

Jim and Meg Foxvog's son Sam returned to the property and was able to find a job in a local landscaping/gardening business.

We are filled with the anticipation of the new around here: Natalie Potts and Allen DeLaurell's wedding, Camille and Dan Walker's baby (due in mid-April), and planning for the farm and bakery season (see the internship descriptions for both on page 14).

On Easter Sunday, several of our new folks will join Plow Creek Mennonite Church. We haven't had any new members for about 6 years so we are planning a joyful celebration to welcome them.

Please continue to keep our older folks in your prayers as they struggle with low energy and health issues. Please continue to pray for all of us as we work to refashion the traditional things of community and welcome the new.

We know that the winter weather is good for the crops but we are looking to the sun and growth that Spring will bring.



Rachel Stella leads communion during Sunday morning worship

Reba Place Fellowship News

by Susie Kauffman



Participants in RPF's most recent January 30 prayer retreat at Emmanuel Lodge included (front, L to R) Megan Hering, Penny & David Lukens, Heather Clark; (2nd row) Jim Fitz, Barb Grimsley, Becky Gallivan and Orwin Youngquist

We continue to bump along here at Reba, with a change or two, here and there. Read on, pray with us for guidance, and join us in giving thanks for our blessings!

We celebrated the covenant memberships of Drew Tessler and Nieta Jones at our January 19 members' meeting. After we sang "I have decided to follow Jesus," Drew read Hosea 2: 14-23 for its mention of God's promises and covenant with us. Various members of his small group told his story: that he grew up Jewish and was named Samuel Drew ben Israel, that he found the Lord at Living Water Community Church, how he is a caring father and gives wonderful bear hugs, and how he and Vera Stoehr have a special

friendship as Jewish Christians.

Drew shared about several situations and events that led him eventually to RPF and repeated several times that he does not believe in coincidences but in Jesus. He explained that the tallit (prayer shawl) he was wearing was a gift from Nieta at his LWCC baptism years ago, "and here we are now."

Nieta and Ronn Frantz led us in "Oh, my Lord Lord Lord," a song from a scene in the movie "Glory" that shows Civil war soldiers making peace with each other before they go forth to die in battle. Likewise, Nieta shared, when we join RPF, we take up our cross with Jesus and die to ourselves. Revelation 3:5-8 (ending in "See, I have placed before you an

open door that no one can shut") and John 16: 33 ("I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!") were read at Nieta's request. We sang a song Nieta learned in the 8th grade with one line "He opens doors I cannot see." Bob Lembke and Ronn shared that Nieta is a hard worker, shares her decisions with her small group and is an encouragement. She has found the pearl without price and latched onto it, allowing Jesus to lead her to LWCC and then to RPF, and knows how to responsibly manage resources despite having never been wealthy. Nieta shared that she met Jesus after looking at churches, synagogues and Buddha, then traded her switchblade for a Bible. She liked the way some of us interacted with each other and the neighborhood. She wants now to experience more extensive dying to herself (and possibly teach RPFers to twist hair).

Elsewhere along the membership continuum, Tim Fryett (a graduate student in documentary filmmaking at Northwestern University) has chosen to begin as a practicing member in addition to Helen Hudgens, who has been involved with RPF off and on. A housing shuffle is under discernment now that two senior couples have announced that they will downsize into smaller quarters. Word has is that the Senior Lunch Bunch presentation on downsizing (led by Vogts, Lukenses and Howes who've gained some wisdom on the topic) was one of the most popular to date.



Folks from all of the communities enjoy fellowship at the SMC coordinator's meeting at Lotus House in St Louis

Two Reba-related households have experienced struggle with persons to whom they extended hospitality; it has been suggested that we all use careful discretion in making housemate choices.

The Clearing household continues with ups and downs: Hilda Carper took a fall that resulted in a frozen shoulder. With physical therapy and some outside help, the shoulder is slowly loosening up and Hilda is regaining strength. Gus Roddy had a seizure/fainting spell that ended a four-day juice fast. He was hospitalized for a day but is now back on his feet again. Two downs, two ups - they broke even!

Several people have brainstormed proposals for a new intern system at RPF. Currently taking shape is the idea that interns with skills/interest in elder care, property maintenance, or sales and marketing would be sought. Interns would be hosted and mentored by various RPF members. Stay tuned to see how the ideas shape up.

Rachel Bigelow and others from the Faith, Hope and Love House of Prayer in Columbus, Ohio (some of whom are living communally) visited at the end of November. Late December brought Emily Potter (graduate student in Kentucky), her sister Abby, and friend Tim. Jane Sprague, former Reba member, came in early January along with daughter Nancy, who is part of the Chemin Neuf community in Winnepeg, Manitoba. In early February Jeremy Smith, his wife Abby, and friend Laura Hendrickson came from Lincoln University in Lincoln, IL. They hope to move to Boston next year to start a Christian community. Chico, Tatiana, and their housemates, siblings Kaneisha and Jacoby, visited Reba for a mid-February weekend.

Our Cana lenten seminars will be led by Allan Howe, who will share about Ignatian spirituality. Sound good? Drop by for a visit. See you when we see you.

Hope Fellowship News



The Jan. mid-winter youth retreat with Joel, Ruth, Evan, Clare and Emmi

by Michelle Porter

Hello from Hope Fellowship. Our focus and theme for this year is “For the City, for the Nations” based on Jeremiah 29:7 about seeking the *Shalom* of the city where we are in exile.

This series of teachings and Lent will conclude with our annual Easter Retreat at Three Mountain Retreat, which is always one of the highlights for us as a church each year.

The year has started well with lots of activities and discernment processes and transitions happening.

In January, the youth attended a mid-winter youth retreat. Local Waco churches come together to have workshops and to allow youth from different Christian churches to spend time together and see how other teens are living out their faith.

Our February All-Church Worship focused on service in

Hope Fellowship. We heard testimonies of how people had experienced service from someone in Hope Fellowship, such as Ruth Boardman-Alexander’s care for Laine Scales after her hip replacement. Ruth organized a meal sign-up for Laine and spent a lot of time with Laine following her surgery.

The youth shared that they enjoy the monthly Saturday gatherings with people from HF that they do not always get to see. In a joint project with HF Mission committee and they recently helped pack backpacks for immigrants recently released from detention centers. For more information, you can read about the project sponsored by the Interfaith Welcome Coalition at: <http://texasiwc.org/get-involved/backpacks/>

The members continue the discernment process for the pastoral transition of Joe and Nancy Gatlin, which looks to be

completed in the spring of 2016. We are currently in the listening phase of the discernment process and are using various venues to have conversations about what we are hearing from God. The Council has provided some great questions for us to pray about and discuss with others, such as:

- What call is God putting on me for service to the body?
- Is God asking me to accept the call of a brother or sister to the pastoral team that I may not first imagine as an option?

- What has the Spirit been telling you thus far that can inform the nomination and selection process?

As we continue this process, we ask for your prayers that we will hear God’s desire for us as a church with regards to who will pastor us and how we can pastor each other well.

In April, we will celebrate Analí Gatlin and Joel Loooper with a wedding shower before their May 28th wedding.

It has been more than four years since our last membership reaffirmation, and the pastors have asked us to use the time during Lent to focus on our calling as members and examine ourselves and talk with others about our commitment and calling. We will have a breakfast on Saturday, April 2nd to reaffirm our commitment to the Lord and specifically to the fellowship of Hope Fellowship.

During this season of Lent and Easter, I pray that we all feel the peace and love of Christ.

Reba's Spiritual Practices

by Sally Schreiner Youngquist

When I became community leader of Reba Place Fellowship in 2009, I called together a Spiritual Practices Committee to explore what common practices we could promote among the members of RPF. This didn't prove to be easy because we are all very different people with individual practices well established. We have tried a number of things, but our most successful idea has been to sponsor quiet prayer retreat day three-four times per year, offered both nearby in Evanston and at Emmanuel Lodge, our retreat house in Trevor, Wisconsin. We recognize that the intense life of our community in the city keeps people busy. Spending time with the Lord in silence is good for us, but not all of us find the schedule flexibility, health or motivation to break away from our home and work routines. Consequently, the number of folks who come away on these retreats is usually 12 or less, but over time, more than half of us have chosen to participate one or more times in these day-long times apart.

The format runs on Saturday from 9 a.m. – 4 p.m., starting with a corporate time of sharing why each of us has come, what we hope for, reading the next day's four Lectionary scriptures aloud together, singing and praying before we go off apart in silence. Reflection questions are offered to accompany the scriptures, journaling is encouraged, art materials are made available, and folks are welcome to take walks (or even naps) as they listen to what their body needs. We gather together for lunch at 12, are welcome but not mandated to share insights from our mornings,

then go back into retreat mode from 1-3 p.m. We gather again at 3 to share discoveries from our times of listening, then close in worship, communion, and sending. Evanston participants can do the local retreat for a whole day or half day, depending on family demands. Those at Emmanuel Lodge are welcome to stay on into the weekend to take more unprogrammed recreation time there.

I look forward to these times, even when I have responsibilities to lead or cook. The Lord always shows up. I am inspired by the beauty I am able to observe when I take the time to still myself and enjoy it. The scriptures always speak so richly when I take the time to savor them slowly and digest what they are communicating to me. Often I emerge with a piece of artwork (usually a collage) that attempts to make visual what a scripture is communicating to me. These I carry home as reminders of the Lord's life-giving word. I also enjoy being with

other community members in this mode, where we are nurturing and honoring each one's walk with the Lord.

Closely tied to the practice of prayer retreat days is our communal practice of stewarding a bit of "wildness" at our Emmanuel Lodge retreat house grounds. Susie Kauffman, a recent covenant member and soil scientist, has helped direct us in eradicating invasive species to make more room for the local plants to take root and flourish. Because we have hacked away and burned a LOT of buckthorn, we are now seeing willow, dogwood and sumac coming up at the Point. Wild mint, various sedges, blue vervain, trout lily, touch-me-not, marsh milkweed, and carrion flower are making a comeback.

We also share the Point with beavers and muskrats who continue to make underground holes which threaten to wear this little peninsula down. Ironically, our work has actually served to encourage the



Orwin Youngquist poses by the big winter beaver lodge sharing the Point with RPF at Camp Lake

The News from Lotus House

by Daniel Gray

In the midst of routine has come many exciting changes for the Lotus House community. The winter, though cold at times, has brought many guests that have provided warmth and encouragement. Sydney and Stella Warren, from the Bruderhof, spent about two months living in the '66 house and engaging in the life of our community, while also interacting with numerous individuals and faith communities across St. Louis. They were a constant presence and fixture in our community, helping us put down a new 3rd floor in the '66 house and countless other small projects across the houses. We thrived on many tasty meals and desserts prepared by their hands. Hosting the SMC Coordinator's meeting seemed very simple and painless, due to their presence and hospitality. We were sad to say goodbye to them at the end of January, but remain grateful for the continuing development of our relationship with their community and the ways they have impacted our lives.

Last fall, a young man named Trevon re-emerged in our lives. About six years ago, Trevon was a 13 year old who we worked with through the church's tutoring program. When his mom lost her housing, Trevon came to live with us in a relationship that felt challenged in so

many ways. He stayed with us for about 6 months, before moving on. Once or twice a year he would drop by the house and Candace would catch up with him. Last fall, he returned "home." Trevon never finished high school and has struggled to stay out of gang activity. When he returned to us, he was already working to get his life back together, applying to get into St. Louis's Job Corp program. Trevon moved back into the house and enlisted Candace's help in getting him into the program. In January, Trevon was accepted into the program. He is doing incredible things, but his continued participation in the program is questionable due to some past drug issues, which is weighing heavily on our hearts and prayers.

January was an exciting month for our community due to hosting the SMC Coordinators meeting. Due to the smaller size of our community, we have not been able to host gatherings until now. For several communities, this was their first time to visit the Lotus House. We were thrilled to welcome our fellow SMC'ers, and the gathering was an incredible encouragement to our community as well. We also look forward to additional visitors from our sister communities in the future.

We closed the month with our annual retreat to reflect on the year and our future. We also spent some time reading and discussing David Janzen's chapter on the art of wisdom-seeking conversation.

There are many individual transitions happening right now. Daniel left his job of seven years in housing/mental health services after accepting an administrative position in a local medical school's intellectual/developmental disability research center. Stephen recently became engaged to a South Carolina belle named Emily (wedding May 21). He and Emily will likely spend the summer in Germany if his language study application is approved, and then they will settle in St. Louis, but not as part of the house community. James is also applying to a similar study program in Germany. We continue to pray with Alden that his teaching options will expand, as he still has no guarantees that he can remain at SLU.

For the Basses and Daniel, who have been seeking a new church home, no decisions have been made yet, but both are feeling a little more sense of direction in where they may end up. At this point, we are also still waiting on God to send us new community members, as we know that to sustain two houses, we will need new members.



Trevon and the other children of Lotus House

Sojourners News

by Lee Kuiper

Change is in the air. If you have allergies, you'll know it. The Cherry blossoms have come, exploding into pink tufts of abundant elegance on the trees of San Francisco before, finally, falling to the ground. Occasionally, the wind swirls the petals together into alcoves, lifting them off the sidewalk as miniature tornados of ephemerality- resurrections of their beauty- and carries them on their way. Like us all, they're eventually trampled or swept up to be discarded.

Life, in its fleeting beauty, is always bringing us change. And change continues to catapult through our lives here in The Mission District of San Francisco. Debbie, Dawn, and Claire participated in a conversation (with several neighboring churches) on gentrification in our city, held in our neighborhood which continues to be a hotbed of tumultuousness and serenity. Money is shifting culture.



Families are being displaced unfairly. With such rapid change happening (most noticeably, in our neighborhood) it is hard to know exactly how to feel or what to do. But we do know it is important to set aside time and space to intentionally talk about what is going on, both within our church and with the greater community outside. We

continue to pray for guidance: Good Lord, show us the way.

Last month we hosted an event called *Locked in Solidarity*, along with Christian Community Development Association in order to provide a space and time to hear/talk about issues of racial injustice like mass incarceration and systemic racism that are tearing up lives in this country. It is painstakingly evident that change is needed. Again, we wonder how and what to do. But we know listening to our brothers and sisters who are suffering is of utmost importance. It is often the first step towards change. And so we filled the worship space to hear Watani Stiner share his powerful personal story of spending 26 years incarcerated (and 20 years in exile) for a crime he did not commit. We also watched Michelle Alexander (www.tinyurl.com/jcv5anh) and Bryan Stevenson (www.tinyurl.com/hqzq9ky) give poignant talks on the issues of system injustices rooted on racism.



Sojourner "Locked in Solidarity" Event with Watani Stiner; Epiphany Smiles

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Sojourner Ash Wednesday Service

Along the same lines of injustice and change, we continue to be very active in our neighborhood as advocates for peace and justice regarding violence (especially police violence carried out against marginalized voices in our neighborhood like Alex Nieto and Amilcar Perez Lopez). We are participating in monthly prayer walks (Mission Nightwalks) and intermittent memorials, marches, and protests — we hope and pray for change.

Having held discussions and discernment meetings as a church about change within our worship service, we have added a time of reflection after the sermon as an extended way to share how God is moving through engagement with His word. We have also brought about change by taking up the liturgical act of corporate Confession within our service as a means to humble ourselves before our Creator. Currently, we are participating in slow conversations within our church on leadership and hearing our leaders' (former and present) stories as a way to love and walk with each other.

Dale, Nate, Tim and Lee went up to Portland, Oregon to attend the Northwest Ekklesia Project Meeting with many of our

brothers and sisters in the faith like those from Church of the Servant King. Bob Ekblad, author and co-founder of the Tierra Nueva community led the discussions on the Gospel as it relates to prophecy and bringing change to our world.

More locally, Dale and Debbie Gish have been leading a monthly CANA marriage support group and recently helped host, with Ted and Nancy Wood from Chemin Neuf, a one-day mini retreat which was both nurturing and encouraging to the thirteen married couples from six different local congregations who attended. This summer they are

coordinating a week-long CANA marriage retreat (kids welcomed) from June 27 to July 3 at the Quaker Center in the beautiful Santa Cruz mountains. Interested in attending? Contact Debbie at debgish@churchofthesojourners.org for details.

And finally, Tim, Dale and Lee are working towards many changes with our website in tandem with preparations for accepting 2016-2017 apprenticeship applications. Check out the new site when you get a chance and tell your friends and family who might be interested in our apprenticeship program! Blessings!

CANA: A Retreat for Couples

Monday, June 27 to Sunday, July 3, 2016
Quaker Center, Ben Lomand, California
Contact Debbie Gish 415-710-7055
debgish@churchofthesojourners.org

or

Saturday, July 9 to Friday, July 15, 2016
St. Charles Retreat Center, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada
Contact Nancy Wood 204-855-2260
chnancywood@hotmail.com

Bring your family and go deeper with your spouse and with God at this refreshing and renewing six-day marriage retreat, one to be held in the beautiful Santa Cruz mountains of Northern California and the other on the banks of the Assiniboine River in Winnipeg. CANA is a mission of the Chemin Neuf, an ecumenical Catholic community that grew out of a prayer group in Lyon, France in 1973. It now has over 2,000 members in 30 countries in Europe, Africa, Asia, the Americas, and the Middle East. The Chemin Neuf community has a passion for unity of all kinds, especially unity among Christians, and finds its strength and vision in the spirituality of St. Ignatius and the Catholic Charismatic movement.

God of the Mundane

by Christiana Peterson, from *Plow Creek*

The contemplatives often write that God is revealed in the mundane, that in my laundry, my dishes, my baby's diapers, and in the liturgical, repetitive tasks of my day there are opportunities to find the God who incarnated small and humble. But there are mornings when just getting out of bed to perform those daily duties seems too much to bear.

Instead of seeking God in the minutiae of my life, I would much prefer to have a more powerful sense of God. When my hands are elbow-deep in the dregs of rinse water, I would rather have a vision of God in the way of Teresa of Avila, who saw the soul as a castle.

Can't my soul be a fairy castle, please?

Alas, my days are not filled with turrets or moats but with the repetitive mundane: the same bowls and plates that I washed yesterday that will be used and washed again. Musician Sara Groves sings it as, "setting up the pins for knocking them down."

Thankfully, my story is not new or unique. My tasks and my responses to them are as old as dishes to eat food upon, as clothes to wash, as dirty baby bottoms to be wiped. I'm glad to read that Kathleen Norris's reaction in her book *The Quotidian Mysteries* is not far from my own. "When confronting a sinkful of dirty dishes," she remembers the words of Kierkegaard: "repetition is reality, and it is seriousness of life . . . repetition is the daily bread which satisfies with benediction."

I read this again; is Kierkegaard really telling me that when I wake in the morning and see the same tasks before me as yesterday, I should feel satisfied instead of despairing? When I am tired and my house and I are both groaning from the clutter, I wonder how to do this.

Norris has a suggestion: worship.

Just as our human attempts at worship draw us into a deeper relationship with God, incorporating prayer into daily tasks brings God and the supernatural into our ritual. From the pastoral poetry of the Psalms and the lists of Leviticus, to the delicate creation of the world, Norris says this "ludicrous attention to detail . . . might be revisioned as the very love of God."

Prayer is essential but there is also this: Norris says that in these tasks, "God is inviting me to play." If I struggle to feel satisfaction in these tasks, finding play in them seems near impossible.

Norris points out something that I have also found to be true: that young children not only love the same activities that we loathe, like dishes and kitchen play, but they thrive on repetition in many types of circumstances.

Who has not heard a child ask to "read it again" after a beloved book? Whose child hasn't delighted in telling the same knock-knock joke that makes a parent groan?

Why is it different for me, as an adult? Is it because my kitchen and laundry tasks are duty, not play?

Maybe God is revealed, not in the breaking through of our daily minutiae but, rather, in us when we begin to play more like our children. G.K. Chesterton says that "grown-up people are not strong enough to exult in monotony," the monotony that make children grow and thrive. Maybe children are the key to our experience of God. Maybe we have outgrown the Father, the baby son, the Holy Ghost. Maybe Chesterton is right, that God "has the eternal appetite of infancy . . . and our Father is younger than we."

How can I learn to play? I think that praying during these tasks is important. And being more present with my children can be a reminder of the things I've forgotten as a stuffy adult. But sometimes I think that my writing is itself crucial to benediction. As much as I might wish it, God will probably not appear as an apparition out of a basket of laundry. But maybe God's appearance will happen later as I write, or within the words I pray as I perform my tasks. Maybe I don't always have to see God at every moment. But as I gaze back on my day while typing these words, gleaning meaning, searching for the right ways to describe the feel of the soapy water on my fingers, reminding myself of the need to watch my children and meditate on the Psalms, I think I've approached both prayer and play. And perhaps I am sustained for another day's dawning, living, and sunset.

*Used with permission. Originally published on January 5, 2016 at The Mudroom blog: <http://mudroomblog.com/god-of-the-mundane/>



Christiana's daughter finds play during her mom's mundane tasks

Daily Prayer at the Lotus House

by Alden Bass

Understanding ourselves to be “new monastics,” we began the Lotus House with the intention of praying together every day. Our covenant said: “Following the ancient tradition of the Church, we will come together as a community twice daily at an appointed time for prayer and thanksgiving.” Ancient monks prayed more frequently of course – seven times a day – but like the Benedictines we wanted prayer to be the organizing principle of our schedule.

It took several years for our aspiration to become a reality. Prayer was infrequent at first. We kept at it, however, and after three or four years (it takes a while!) it became a regular habit. Now the prayer bell rings every day at 7am and 9pm, and we gather around the kitchen table or in the living room and pray together. Our prayers are based on the Family Devotions in the *Book of Common Prayer*. Though they vary from season to season, our devotions always include a psalm, a scripture reading, prayers of praise and intercession, the Lord’s Prayer, and a hymn or canticle.

Because our daily prayers are rooted in the Christian year, our daily prayers also situate us within a larger annual rhythm which moves through the story of Jesus from Advent to Easter. As the Christians seasons change, our prayers reflect different themes:

hope and expectation in Advent, joy in Christmas and Epiphany, penance in Lent, and celebration in Easter. In this way, communal prayer gives structure not only to our daily rhythms, but to our whole year.

Daily communal prayer has many practical benefits. It gets us together in the same room twice a day. It provides an opportunity to check in with each other and to be accountable. It gives structure to other communal rhythms such as meals and service times. Beyond these practical concerns, however, prayer lies at the heart of our mission of discipleship formation. Becoming a disciple is not a matter of performing certain duties, or

even feeling a certain way toward other people. Discipleship is a process of growth in which we move from our own culture into the alternative culture of the kingdom of God. Prayer is the language of God’s kingdom, a language of dependence, submission, and thanksgiving, and like any foreign language, it can be learned only through practice and repetition. By daily forming our mouths around the speech of the ancient psalms, the words of scripture, and the prayers and hymns of generations past, we learn to inhabit together the world where God’s will is done on earth as it is in heaven – the world for which God has created us all.



Lotus House folks take a Retreat day

A letter from Third Way

Dear Michelle Porter (and all the wonderful SMC folks),

Ever since Third Way Church formed, we have been intentional about sustaining a strong community life. This was initially fostered through a model of radical Christian intentional community and living in close proximity. As our community developed, we slowly moved away from that initial vision and have become more of a community-oriented, neighborhood church. While we still foster community through our House Churches and still have many folks living in proximity, we no longer have community houses nor an intensified daily/weekly rhythm of life together.

Furthermore, Third Way has had some difficulty sustaining the relationships within the different networks/organizations of which we are a part. We have come to believe that we need to focus on one or two of these networks in order for our participation in them to be more fruitful and more mutually beneficial.

Due to our transition away from intentional community and our inability to sustain our various network involvements, Third Way went through a long discernment process to determine if it makes sense for us to be a part of SMC. While it made complete sense for us to be a part of SMC in our earlier years, we have come to the conclusion that our community—which no longer lives out the distinct convictions and practices of SMC—is not practically and relationally functioning in alignment with the vision of SMC. Therefore, in January, our covenant members made the difficult decision to change our membership status to “Friends of SMC.” While we mourn this decision to end our formal membership, we are encouraged by the fact that we are not saying, “Goodbye.” We are not putting an end to our friendships within SMC. We want to sustain the relationships that have grown over the years, and remain as kingdom partners in God’s mission in this world.

We are so thankful for all the ways SMC has supported and sustained our community from our inception to the place we are today. We have

received abundant wisdom from the many SMC members who have decades of Christian community experience. We have enjoyed getting to know each community through the Family Reunions, Coordinator Meetings, Nurturing Communities gatherings, community visitations, Shalom Connections, and the delightful visits from SMC folks passing through the Twin Cities. All these points of contact have sharpened us and helped form the current community ethos within Third Way.

Thank you again for all the ways you have befriended us, poured into our community, and shared your lives with us. We love and appreciate you all. Please don’t hesitate to visit when you’re in our neck of the woods.

If you have any questions or concerns about our decision, please don’t hesitate to contact us.

Grace and peace to you all,
Third Way Church

A Response from SMC:

Dear Third Way,

Thank you so much for your heartfelt letter. We appreciate the relationships that we have built with Third Way through our SMC connection. In your time as a member of SMC, your presence among us has been valuable and we have enjoyed fellowshiping with you and learning from you.

With its current focus on being a community-oriented, neighborhood church, we understand your desire to strengthen networks that feel more mutually beneficial. While we will miss your official participation in SMC, we look forward to continuing our friendships and connections as you continue as “Friends of SMC”.

As this is a new status in SMC, we hope that it allows for you and us to continue learning from one another and provide opportunities to seek God’s Kingdom together. We offer you our prayers for God’s grace and peace as you continue to strive to live faithfully to God’s call as a church and as individuals.

—Michelle Porter on behalf of SMC Communities

Plow Creek Farm Internship

Plow Creek Farm hopes to make the world a tiny bit better by growing food, and we need some help. We are seeking three enthusiastic interns who want to work hard and laugh a lot to join us for the 2016 growing season.

Interns will work with all aspects of crop production including planting, weeding, harvesting, washing, processing and storing. Interns will learn to manage a farmers' market stand. Interns will also help with our u-pick berry operation. We have a lot of fun working, but interns should be prepared to perform tasks that are physically strenuous and sometimes repetitive.

The internship runs from the beginning of May through September or October. Interns will work around 45 hours per week. In addition to our full season interns, we are also interested in a June-only intern to help during the busiest time of year.

Compensation includes \$650/month, on site housing with use of a kitchen and high speed internet, hopefully a prepared lunch 4 days/week, and fruit and vegetables produced on the farm.

For more information go to:

<http://www.plowcreek.org/farm/jobs.htm>



Above: The SMC coordinator get together at Lotus House

Below: The children of Plow Creek are excited for the interns in the coming season

Plow Creek Fellowship/Bakery Internship

This summer, 2016, we're offering a full time internship, with 20 to 32 hrs. a week helping in our bakery, and the remainder of the time assisting with non nursing elder care and child care (We have a half dozen lively, delightful young children among us).

Our major marketing is during the Farmer's Market season, from May through September, providing products for 6 different markets a week. All of our products are made from scratch, with no use of either chemicals or preservatives. If you enjoy baking, have an interest in exploring life in a small intentional Christian community, and would like to have some first hand experience in working in, and possibly learning to manage a small bakery, we'd like to hear from you. An enjoyment of baking is more important to us than the amount of experience you have had.

Housing, food from Plow Creek farm and bakery, and a stipend of \$650 a month will be provided. For more information, please contact Louise Stahnke at stahnke@plowcreek.org. Check out our website at www.plowcreekbakery.com and www.plowcreekfellowship.com.



continued from page 7 (Sally's reflection)...

beavers to fell trees. This has motivated us to put fencing around trees we'd like to keep. But we like it that they feel our land is wild enough to make a safe home for them. Orwin and I take great delight in catching glimpses of a beaver swimming by the Point and slapping its prominent tail, or seeing a muskrat swim across our Camp Lake cove with a piece of water lily in its mouth. When the lake is covered with ice, we can see where muskrats have built winter houses out of dried cat-tail leaves. In the snow we see footprints of the raccoon who lives under our deck and sometimes makes early morning appearances. In the spring we wait to hear the distinct cry of the pair of Sandhill cranes who come in from migration and hang around Camp Lake. The last two falls I have spotted a bald eagle perched on a tree near our property. Once a painted turtle walked up the hill from the lake, dug a hole and laid its eggs right near where I sat at the picnic table. I'm sure I'm speaking for many others at RPF in saying I have cultivated "eyes to see" these marvels as I have learned to inhabit this space in a watchful and appreciative way.

One final RPF communal practice to share is our Lenten custom of choosing a cause for which to save money, perhaps by fasting or eating a very cheap and simple meal once/week. Causes have ranged from buying apple trees to plant in Ford Heights to helping the Church of the Brethren devastated by the violence of Boko Haram in Nigeria. This year we will be putting our Lenten collection towards World Relief Chicago as they seek to resettle some 350 refugees in our area from Burma, Iraq, Jordan, Syria, Congo and elsewhere. Covenant member Lisa Selph works there and gives us updates about the challenge of offering services like ESL classes when our new governor has held the state budget hostage for funding such social services. We want to say in a tangible way with our money that God welcomes these refugees and so do we.

Since RPF members attend two different churches, it's good to have some spiritual practices that unify us yet do not deter us from full participation in Reba Place Church and Living Water Community Church.

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.

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