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Fall 2016: Leadership Transitions

The Story of Reba Place Fellowship in Five Chapters

by David Janzen

Born in 1957, Reba Place Fellowship has become one of the longest-standing urban Christian intentional communities in the U.S., made up of singles, and married people with families. Its longevity has much to do, I believe, with the flexibility of its leadership structures over the years, even while remaining faithful to its calling to be “a community of love and discipleship, and by nurturing other such communities as God gives us grace.” The old timers among us might say, it’s not exactly the same community, but rather, five different communities they’ve been part of since the beginning. So, I hope to tell those five stories somewhat in outline form for brevity’s sake, while offering a few reflections on catalytic events, organizational adjustments, continuity of the original vision -- all bathed in the undeniable grace of God.

1) An Anabaptist Urban Intentional Community: 1957 to 1970.

In 1957 Goshen Seminary asked a renegade professor, John Miller, to take a leave of absence because he was stirring up too much controversy by insisting that Mennonites should return to their communal calling as illustrated in the early chapters of the book of Acts. So, with his family and a few radical disciples, they began such a communal church in a large household at 727 Reba Place in the racially mixed neighborhood of South Evanston.



David and Salomé, first generation leaders in the relationship between SMC and Valle Nuevo, reflect on all that has transpired in the almost 25 years since they first met.

Mennonites were familiar with rural communal groups like the Amish and the Hutterites, but to do something like this in an urban setting (more like the Early Church) was a new thing that drew considerable attention and discussion.

John Miller insisted that the group operate by consensus, but the others acknowledged that he was a father figure who functioned as “the first among equals.” When new people wanted to join the group it became apparent that some kind of catechesis was needed, so John wrote a pamphlet called “The Way of Love,” which has been a core

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gifts and exuberant worship that soon was followed by a flood of seekers, many of them drawn to Reba's emerging healing ministry. Within a few years the Fellowship grew from twenty-five to 160 members. To cope with the many needs, large ministering households became the norm, households where a dozen to twenty people lived under one roof for a daily life shared around a common table, with intense spiritual formation and much pastoral counseling.

During this time, under the advice of Graham Pulkingham, Reba repaired its relationship with the Mennonite church and joined the denomination. In order to nurture other Anabaptist communities also growing up under the Charismatic Renewal, the Shalom Association of

Communities was formed. Reba began to buy some larger apartment buildings "on the block" and fix them up, creating in-house employment and an affordable housing business.

It was a "hot-house" season of life with rapid spiritual growth for many, but it made demands on young leaders that sometimes exceeded their actual levels of maturity. According to the ethos of the Charismatic Renewal, the way to cope with immature members was to exercise strong authority and to teach submission. Toward the end of the 70's a litany of complaints mounted along with some sincere apologies on the part of the leaders who acknowledged an "overdose of authority." This led to a "time-out" from business as usual to make room for a season of review.

3) "The Review" and Development of the Congregational Option: The 80's.

A year of open review sessions resulted in dismantling most of the ministering households and the development of a "congregational option." It turned out that many had joined the communal life, not from a sense of calling, but because it was the only way to belong. An organizational distinction was made between Reba Place Church and Reba Place Fellowship, with many opting for the more loosely structured congregational life. The same elders were reaffirmed to serve both the church and fellowship, lending stability in a time of many transitions.

A more decentralized life grouped the Fellowship into two clusters and the congregation into one cluster. In this new season, other ministries emerged.

The Underground Railroad gave support to a wide-ranging network of support for Central American refugees, with a

document for the community ever since. It lifted up essential practices of a) living in close proximity, b) sharing goods and basic life decisions, c) making a priority of reconciled relationships according to Matt 18, and d) practicing the non-violent way of love as taught by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

The community grew as new persons from around the country came to try out and join this new (yet old) way of following Jesus. They bought and fixed up a few more houses in the neighborhood to accommodate growth from the five initial adult members to twenty-five. Yet they remained one circle of consensus decision-making united by an extended family life of many potlucks, workdays, and Sermon-on-the-Mount seminars. Some of the early members, however, felt called to raise their families in a rural setting so they planted a sister community, Plow Creek Fellowship, two hours west of Chicago near Tiskilwa IL. In 1970 John Miller was offered a teaching position at Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario, and with community discernment, the Miller family was sent to continue building a similar pattern of communal church where they landed.

2) Charismatic Renewal: The 70's.

John Miller's departure called forth a new generation of three younger leaders, Virgil Vogt, John Lehman, and Julius Belser, who began to function as a team of young "elders." They were soon intrigued by the Holy-Spirit-empowered ministry of Graham Pulkingham at the Church of the Redeemer in Houston. The gifts of the Holy Spirit were active in the Early Church of Acts, so this seemed to be a missing piece for those enamored by the life of the Early Church. Graham Pulkingham's visit to Reba released a "Pentecost" of

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The News from Lotus House



Luis Pinto de Sa, the newest member of Lotus

by Daniel Grey

This summer the Lotus House was blessed with a special guest named Jacoby. Chico and Tatiana asked the community in the spring to consider providing an internship to a 16 year old from their neighborhood whose family they have grown close to in hopes of mentoring and expanding his experience of the world. Unsure of what to expect but with plenty of space, the community accepted Jacoby into its rhythms for two months. Though soft-spoken, Jacoby quickly won over hearts with his intimate knowledge of basketball and the proper methods of play. Many great memories were shared over ice cream and bowls of Cinnamon Toast Crunch, Jacoby's favorite breakfast food (and lunch and dinner food).

While here, Jacoby worked with the Harambee crew tuckpointing a house in north city. Harambee was a successful partnership with another urban ministry in St. Louis that North City Church; they were able to raise enough money to fund a second project site. In addition to coordinating Harambee, Candace stayed very busy coordinating 3 summer interns and 5 weeks of visiting volunteer youth groups who provided additional programming and activities to the kids in the neighborhood. As a way of hospitality and an opportunity to expose these visiting youth groups to a different way of life, the community hosted each group for cookies in order to share with them about life in the Lotus House.

The summer also had a number of hospitality opportunities including former community members Jordan and Alexis (along with their family), new SLU students moving to town, and helping Stephen and Emily resettle in St. Louis. The Lawsons have found work and housing close to SLU, which means that they should continue to be regulars at community events.

Alden secured a contract to teach at SLU again for the upcoming academic year, but we are still in prayer that he will secure a long-term option.

The community discerned with two potential community members during the summer. One of those determined that it was not the right time for them to join community. The second of those has officially joined the community:

Luís Pinto de Sá is a PhD student in Philosophy at Saint Louis University, where he thinks about the nature and value of knowledge and understanding, religious and otherwise. He was born and raised in Lisbon, Portugal. While still in college there, he discovered himself to be a sinner in need of grace, and he embraced Roman Catholicism. Luís came to the U.S. in 2008 and entered the Roman Catholic Seminary in Providence, RI, intending to minister to the significant Portuguese immigrant community in New England. He pursued further Seminary studies in Boston, where he became increasingly convinced that the Lord was not calling him to the ministerial priesthood but rather to pursue and deepen the philosophical foundations of his faith as a layman.

The years spent in Seminary left in him with a taste for Christian community life, with its daily rhythms of communal prayer and song, work and rest. He came to believe that it is not good for Man to be alone, that the sharing of our lives in community is both the antidote to the great solitude of which Dorothy Day spoke and a privileged means for growth and sanctification. And so in August he joined the Lotus house, where the lack of air conditioning induces nostalgia for his sunny, hot homeland, and the daily praying and singing reminds him of what attracted him to Seminary in the first place. He hopes to convert the house to the joys of espresso coffee and Lisbon custard tarts, a pastry created and perfected by cloistered nuns in the old country -- a culinary treat summing up in itself the genius of Portuguese Catholicism.

Sojourners News

by Zoe Mullery

Suscipe

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,
my memory,
my understanding,
and my entire will,
all I have and call my own.

You have given all to me.

To you, Lord, I return it.

Everything is yours;

do with it what you will.

Give me only your love and your grace,
that is enough for me.

— Ignatius of Loyola

I'm beginning our Sojo News this month with *Suscipe*, a prayer written by Ignatius of Loyola and shared with us at our recent all-church retreat by our guest, spiritual director Bill Zuelke. I was not familiar with the Latin word *suscipe*. I learned it is the second-person imperative of the Latin *suscipio*, and it means:



Covenant retreat smiles

take thou up, support thou, raise thou; accept thou, receive thou (esp. to acknowledge a child as one's own); begin thou. It seemed like a nice way to open into the news of this wee little Kingdom village.

Our time with Bill was significant. Dale has been mentored by him in spiritual direction training (which he recently completed) and brought him to our retreat to talk about Ignatian discernment. Bill spoke compellingly of attending to the movement of the Spirit within us, and the consolations and desolations which are ways of approaching the question *where is the movement coming from and where is it leading?* We were ministered to not only by Bill's words and wisdom, but also by his big laugh, his generous spirit, and his very present presence. The words of truth he spoke were affirmed and infused by his energetic love of human beings and his joy. We welcomed our three new apprentices that same weekend, and Bill's teaching felt like a blessing upon our church as we receive people willing to share a year of their lives with us, and as we continue to struggle forward in living into what it means to be faithful in this particular time and place, with these particular people.

In the spirit of *suscipe*, we offer to God all the blessings, struggles, and gifts of the past months. Here are a few of them, in no particular order:

- Our new apprentices arrived: Melinda, Jon, and Hannah, who all enthusiastically participated in the Sojo Olympics at the retreat (which included paper-airplane javelin and custom-made tissue-paper team uniforms--have you ever seen Nate in a tissue-paper diaper? You may have). The following week, each gave a 2-hour "timeline" or autobiography, and it was, as always, moving to hear the enormous multiplicity of ways God works.
- Dale and Debbie hosted the wildly popular week-long Cana marriage retreat with special guest Father Christophe from France's Chemin Neuf community. The Gishes also continue hosting monthly Cana gatherings which have grown from just a few couples to currently involving 13 couples.
- Many guests came through this summer, including an InnerChange family from Cambodia and Jacques Ellul's grandson.

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Candles for Sojourners Covenanting ceremony (picture by Jenny Prosa)

- Judy Alexander was home for parts of the summer, sharing her encouraging news of the ways God is active at Christ College and in particular in her creative writing students.
 - We spoke our struggles, prayers, joys, and commitments to one another at our annual Covenant Retreat.
 - With so few kids in our little church these days, rather than having a full Kids' Week, this year we had a Kids' Day followed by a Sunday when the kids led worship. Our kids range widely in age: 3, 7, 8, 12, 14 (and 16 when Rubén and Mateo are around), which makes group activity and teaching an interesting challenge. The Parables of the Lost Sheep, Coin, and Son were our texts, which involved much searching and finding. Gigi and Rebecca gave the Sunday sermon, with Claire's help, sharing stories and moments of their own seeking and finding God's presence, and being found.
 - Supporters of the nonprofit Rebuild South Sudan (rebuildsouthsudan.org) abound at Sojourners, and a fundraising marathon and 5k run raised over \$7000 with marathoner Lee and 5Kers Nate, Dawn, Katie, and Katie's mom Judy.
 - Dawn continues to connect us with the ongoing movement against police brutality and on behalf of families who have lost loved ones in police shootings. In addition to prayer walks, there has been a weekly vigil at the police station as the DA is still deciding whether to press charges against the officers who shot Guatemalan immigrant Amilcar Perez Lopez. During our Celebration of Yahweh's Kingship on July 4, we created a sidewalk mural memorial in the spot where he was killed.
 - After a year in Costa Rica with his dad, Dawn's son Rubén returns to us in September.
 - Tim takes a mini-sabbatical in October which will include some time visiting with folks at Englewood, and he continues to have the opportunity to speak occasionally to groups interested in his book *Oriented to Faith* and the challenge it articulates of engaging the conflict of disagreement on faith issues while maintaining loving unity.
 - Jenny P, it turns out, is an amazing photographer, and a new camera is inspiring much photo creativity. An artist in our midst! See one of her photos above.
 - Zoe and Gigi survived a hurricane in Belize, huddled in a small apartment with their entire extended family. They also got to visit beloved former Sojourner Louise Harris in her cozy home there, who also survived just fine.
 - Pets! Katie's new outdoor one-eyed cat, Wednesday (and Zoe and Jenny P's new crayfish Jean Valjean) bring certain kinds of petly joy.
- And with this bouquet of bullet points, we come to the *suscipe* refrain: *Everything is yours; do with it what you will.*

Plow Creek News

by *Christiana Peterson*

Greetings from Plow Creek where the tomatoes are ripe, the farmers are weary, and the children are in school.

Currently, Sarah Foss is enjoying caring for her grandchildren in Florida for a vacation, the Stahnkes are leaving for a week in Montana, and the Gales have a nurse who comes to check in on David periodically throughout the week.

Leadership teams are striving to enact healthy changes, communicate with the larger group, and face the challenges of vision and possible leadership transitions. Allen Howe and Sally Youngquist are slowly transitioning out of their roles on our interim leadership team. We are so grateful for the countless hours they've volunteered to support us in creating healthier structures, vision, and leadership.

The playground by the meadow continues to be beautified, thanks to the organizational efforts of Dan Walker.



Dave Bell, O, and Neva help out on the farm

The Adams are moving forward in the court system as adoption of O and J becomes a very strong possibility.

I (Christiana Peterson) have signed a contract with Herald Press to write a book about the Christian Mystics and intentional community. If you want to find out more visit christiananpeterson.com.

We are so thankful for those among us like Angela Adams, Dan Walker, Sarah Foss, Matt Adams, and Allan DeLaurell who work off the property or work from home. Often their efforts are unseen and under-appreciated when so much energy is focused on farm life and community business.

We've said goodbye to summer interns David Hersch and James Kang, who will return to JPUSA and Reba, respectively, while Natalie Nyberg and Kris Hiew (pictured left) will be leaving in the coming weeks as the farm season winds down. We've been blessed by the various gifts they've contributed to our community, farm, and bakery.

During our worship teaching times, we are going through the book *You are what you love* by James K. A. Smith. As we continue to make changes in our ways of relating to one another, we hope these discussions will help us discern ways in which our own habits and practices (as individuals, families, singles, and a community) can guide us toward loving God and others more faithfully.



Reba Place Fellowship News

by Susan Kauffman

Greetings from Chicago, where the humidity has been more of a factor than the heat. Fortunately, the “soupy” weather has been periodically interrupted by cooler drier days.

The Youngquists are now mostly settled in at Monroe Street in Evanston, hosting guests in the basement guest rooms, and beginning to offer morning prayer on Friday & Monday mornings. The Lukens are coming down to the finish line in preparing for their move from Cana in September, and Drew Tessler and his girls will be moving downstairs from the Doran-Moriartys whose girls stair-step in age with Drew’s. As Cana empties, two young families are contemplating starting a new household there.

Our very problematic Monroe tenant moved out on July 21, according to the terms of settlement she had signed with us. Shortly afterward, there was a meaningful cleansing service/house blessing to give the Dor-Mor’s a fresh start and to prepare the way for Drew and company.

Vicki Caleb came home this week after successful hip replacement surgery last week. Pray for her full recovery. Joanne Janzen continues chemo treatments about every 3 weeks to decrease the likelihood of uterine cancer returning. Pray that this will be successful. Orwin Youngquist is “trying on” his recent diagnosis of Parkinson’s Disease and asks for prayer for medical decisions. The Janzens’ recently homeless friend Eric is moving out; the Janzens’

daughter Natasha and her family from Germany will be guests at Reba for a month while Joanne takes a break from chemo treatments in order to enjoy her family.

At our full member meetings, and possibly elsewhere in the future, we have begun talking about mental health issues. Two members shared deeply about their struggles with depression and we are being encouraged to share those issues with each other.

After a 3-year break we are starting up a modest internship program again, with our first intern starting this month. His name is John Betten from the Denton, TX Catholic Worker, and he attended the SMC Reunion in TX. He has blessed us with his skilled work on housing maintenance and openness to providing some back up support at the Clearing. The Frantzes and Nieta in Rogers Park have welcomed him into their house now that their daughter Tikva and her husband Claude have ended their visit from Congo where they live and work. Ask John about where he lived previous to coming to Chicago... Word also has it that James Kang, who has spent the summer in the bakery and the farm at Plow Creek, will be joining us as a Furniture Sales employee, working at Plain and Simple. He will begin practicing membership with RPF.

Reba Place continued: We’ve enjoyed contact with larger networks through offering a workshop at the recent Ekklesia Project Gathering here in the northern suburbs. We’ve had visits this week from a Bethany Seminary "Explore Your Call" group of high school students and a group from nearby Trinity Evangelical Seminary. Several of the “professor/

science types” among us enjoyed visits with two science professors from Calvin College who are considering how to do “community research.”

Our 8-member Valle Nuevo delegation have brought back good reports from their visit and showed David Janzen's historical overview slideshow at Reba Place Church and Reba Place Fellowship meetings this past week. We praise God for this relationship and all the good developments which have happened along the way. Many of us are enjoying our weekly CSA boxes of Plow Creek fruits and vegetables delivered to us weekly in both Rogers Park and Evanston.

Allan Howe is rejoicing this week at the new wooden playground structure erected on the outside play lot of Reba Early Learning Center, thanks to a fund-raising campaign pulling in \$30,000 in honor of RELC's 50-year anniversary. This is the longest-running neighborhood ministry in which RPF members and their children have been involved. Living Water Community Church has now finished its 3-week VBS program, offered to neighborhood children and sandwiched between two block parties. The summer has flown by!

Upcoming events include the September 3 wedding of former practicing member Rachel Daley and the September 5 work day at Camp Lake - and if you’d like to participate in a faux controlled burn, come join us at Camp Lake on October 29 and extend your outdoor season as long as possible.

Leadership in Valle Nuevo

by Dawn Noelle Beutler

Leadership in Valle Nuevo is in transition. As we all wait for the final kinks to be worked out in the land legalization process, the governing board of the Valle Nuevo community readies itself for transition, making room for new leaders to take on the responsibilities of the challenges ahead.

Please pray for Valle Nuevo as young and old seek to find common ground moving forward.



The SMC delegation to Valle Nuevo hosted a grant proposal writing workshop in which “The Knot” was used as an ice-breaker activity and a point of reflection on the complexities of solving problems together in our communities.

Some of the young people of Valle Nuevo who are taking on leadership roles in their community.



Morena and Dawn are both educators seeking to form and inspire the next generation of leaders in our communities.

Hope Fellowship News

by Michelle Porter

Hope Fellowship has had the summer of weddings! We celebrated with Analí Gatlin and Joel Looper at their wedding on May 28th, Emily Hunt and Carlos Hinojosa at the July 30th nuptials, and a pounding shower to celebrate with Gaby and David Becerril on August 26th after their wedding in Mexico. For those who are unfamiliar with this tradition, guests bring a pound of household items to help a new couple stock their home with goods, such as a pound of rice, or a pound of flour.

Our summer schedule looked a little different on Sundays as we spent 30 minutes in cluster worship each week and then joined together for a project of intergenerational service in our neighborhood. Our theme for the summer was Worship Beyond Our Gathering, and Fernando describes our worship as such:

“As we heard during All-Church this past week, with the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus challenges us in such a simple way that we complicate and sometimes overlook the main message: ‘Go and do likewise.’ What a simple and powerful story!

Simple but not easy. Mother Teresa reminded us the power of tiny steps of faithfulness and action when she said, ‘Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love.’”

Our weekly activities included helping prepare the Good Neighbor House for new settlers by working on construction inside and lawn beautification outside (For more info about the settlement house visit: <http://goodneighborwaco.org/>), stocking local Little Free Libraries, chalking the sidewalk with prayers, proclaiming peace with yard signs, remembering the lynching of Jesse Washington in Waco 100 years ago, creating art to act for peace,

and making notecards for residents of a local elderly facility.

We are so grateful that Sarah and Lucas Land, James and Suzanne White, and Laura Caruthers are once again leading Kids’ Club for the 2016-2017 school year. Their group has almost doubled in size, and they had their kick-off meeting Wednesday, August 24th. The theme for the year is Building Bridges using curriculum from MennoMedia.

The youth had an amazing end of summer bash that included hide and seek in the dark and a photo scavenger hunt. We are up to an astounding 10 youth participating in youth activities. Hannah White and Sammy Caruthers have started sixth grade and will join the youth for some of their fun events this year. The Bridgewater are hosting an eleventh grade exchange student from Japan named Mari for the school year. And Gerson Matías Ryan is living in Waco for the school year and currently staying with Michelle, Matt, Jeremiah, and Evelyn Porter.

Luis, Gwendolyn, Paloma, and Gerson were part of HF for years and re-

settled in Oaxaca, Mexico a few years ago. Gerson and his family discerned that living with Hope Fellowship families would be a good opportunity and we are excited to have him with us.

The annual women’s retreat will be at a near-by retreat center with a theme of Taking Time to Re-set.

Our pastoral discernment process continues as we listen to hear who God is calling to serve as Joe and Nancy leave this role. Our June Members’ Meeting was a time of members’ naming their slate of candidates that they felt God calling, and the Council used this input to discern a slate of two new pastors to be added to Fernando Arroyo. At our August meeting we hoped to reach consensus, but there was unrest with a couple of members, and we did not call for a vote that evening feeling like rushing it would not allow for listening well to each other and to God. The process continues, and we are so grateful for the time, energy, prayer, and discernment our Council continues to give.

We wish you God’s peace and blessings as fall approaches.



From Hope Fellowship’s August 20th back to school fun night

From the Ground Up: Greetings from Little Rock

by Josh McCallister



Long before we packed our boxes to move from Chicago to Little Rock, we heard that starting a community begins with a seed rather than a set of blueprints. As we digested those words, we committed our way unto the Lord and held out open hands. Many people who came asking to hear our strategy for "building" a community went away empty.

Another statement we heard from the wise folks at Reba Place Fellowship is that it takes about eighteen months to feel like you've settled into a place — we have now lived in Little Rock for about twenty.

Here we present some of the growth spurts we see from the summer.

Before the summer started we had a friend from our small group ask to move into our little back-house apartment. She lived there for three months before deciding to buy a home in the neighborhood. And did you catch that we are hosting small group again? Yes, it's true. Candace and I have led small groups in our home for most of the fourteen years we have been married.

Another fellow from our group has decided he would like to join us in the community project, so he's readying his things to move into the recently available back-house. Zach attends New Millennium Church with us, and has previously lived in community in Atlanta at *The Open Door*. We are eager to create some rhythms of shared meals, prayer, and Sabbath.

Two weeks ago, I started my second year of teaching art to elementary kids. Little Rock has been going through some hard times in the school systems, and I'm seeing it from the inside. About the same time we moved to town, the state department of education took over the school district. The local school board no longer has power, and people who do not live in the city have a lot of influence over our 25,000 students and 3,500 employees.

Corporations are interested in converting the public school system into privatized charter schools. Of course the shift to private and charter schools is due in part to white flight.

Zach (mentioned above) is being sponsored, in part by our church, to begin production on a film about the school-to-prison pipeline here in Arkansas. If you are not familiar, there are correlations being made about the use of security and police in schools, zero tolerance policies, and suspension practices predicting future prison time for kids. As you may have guessed this disproportionately affects black and brown kids, poor kids, kids in the foster system, and LGBTQ youth.

We have identified the education system here in Little Rock as an area of woundedness and injustice. Both my job as a teacher and having our own children enrolled in a public school is putting us in deep connection with these children. We believe it is important to live where our ministry takes place. I am very pleased to have such meaningful work.

In other news from the summer:

- We visited Chicago (Reba) and Kentucky early this summer - stopping by Lotus House
- My sister and her family visited us driving from San Antonio
- I borrow a lawn mower from my neighbor Gabe while mine is broken
- Joetta from across the street brought us a melon

Please come see us if you pass through Arkansas!



The McCallister's small group having potluck after discussion

The Earliest Christian Book on Leadership

by Alden Bass of Lotus House

If you go to the bookstore and look for classic works on leadership from antiquity, you'll probably find Sun Tzu and Machiavelli, but not Gregory the Great. Yet Pope Gregory's sixth-century work *Pastoral Rule* was the most influential leadership manual in western culture for nearly 1,000 years. Throughout the Middle Ages, it was the most translated manuscript after the Bible. Unlike other management gurus, Gregory believed the defining characteristic of a leader to be not talent or vision or expertise, but humility. It was Gregory who first called the pope *servus servorum Dei* – servant of the servants of God. Only one who understood authority in terms of service can truly be a great leader.

Gregory was a reluctant pope. Legend has it that he hid for six months, Jonah-style, in order to avoid being elected. Yet he was particularly gifted for the job. He grew up near Rome in a wealthy aristocratic family and entered a life of public service after his education. In his mid-30s he experienced a conversion which led him to give his goods to the poor and establish an intentional community on his family's estate. The community was devoted to prayer, though Gregory had a life-long reputation of working for social justice; he reputedly bankrupted the Roman church with his charitable giving. After a decade or so of the contemplative life, he was dragged back into public service, this time as the leader of the western church.

Gregory was reluctant to assume the office of bishop because of the great responsibility entailed. "Let not many of you be masters," he often quoted, "because you will receive the greater judgment." He understood leadership not as an office or duty, but as a spiritual discipline. Leadership is among the most demanding disciplines in fact, the "art of arts," because humans are "the most changeable and diverse of all beings" (2.16). He begins his treatise, which was written just a year after he took office, with a long section on who should be leader and who shouldn't. Basically, no one worthy of the position should really want it. Few truly crave

the responsibility, they really want the power and honor of the position. Humility defers to the most qualified individual; only when no one is better for the job should one assume the role of leader. The humble person alone is qualified, "for one can by no means learn humility in a high place who has not ceased to be proud while occupying a low one" (1.9). Moreover, leadership cannot be taken lightly because, according to Gregory, its discipline is personally transformative. Leadership is not simply a role or an office, it is an act of self-giving on behalf of others; any and all resources, including personal wealth, are at the disposal of the community.

Still, since some are called by God and the community into positions of leadership, Gregory offers some sage wisdom which remains relevant and psychologically insightful today. For instance, leaders should lead by example (2.3). They should know when to be silent and listen to the people (2.4). (The third section of the *Rule* contains a list of different personality types, demonstrating that Gregory was himself a careful student of the human psyche – it makes fascinating reading.) Leaders should be a "near neighbor to everyone in sympathy" (2.5). They should not lose their "inward sense of truth" and overlook wrongdoing out of convenience (2.6). The leader should also not fail to care for him or herself in the midst of caring for others (2.7). They should understand how commonly vices pass themselves off as virtues (2.9).

In thinking about leadership within our churches and communities, and even within the nation, it's helpful to consider the wisdom received from those who have gone before. Gregory's *Rule* was written for pastors, but it applies to any Christian leader. Alfred the Great, the Anglo-Saxon king, had the work translated into English and given to all the secular leaders of England in the ninth-century. There's no better place to start than Gregory's time-tested *Pastoral Rule*.

If you'd like to check the book out for yourself, I recommend this edition: Gregory the Great, *The Book of Pastoral Rule*, trans. G. E. Demacopolous (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2007).



The community sends Kyle and Jean, long-time friends of the community, with a blessing before their move.

An interview with Rich Foss of Plow Creek about leadership transitions.
by Christiana Peterson

Christiana Peterson: Can you talk about some of your experiences with leadership over the years?

Rich Foss: When I become an elder, I was the next generation from the founders. Because I was one of the youngest people in the community at the time—I was 29 when I became an elder—I experienced being a young leader. I often thought I should be called “The Younger” instead of “Elder.” It was a good experience because I felt like I was accepted by the older generation as a leader and they gave me a lot of respect.

It wasn’t that they always agreed with me but they felt free to give their opposing opinions and we never got divided over it.

One of the verses that was helpful for me—when encountering one of the older members who disagreed with leaders all the time—was when Paul tells Timothy to treat older men like they are your father. So during this time, I remember thinking, “If I were in a leadership position and my father was part of the community, how would I treat him?” I would never speak to my father authoritatively. So, I presented things as proposals and let people freely disagree with them.

Sometimes things that I proposed didn’t fly, but many

times they did. And eventually, I developed enough trust with this older man who disagreed with me, that he was able to say “Go ahead, even though I don’t agree with you.”

Because I tried not to approach people authoritatively, I was able to introduce some new ideas from the very beginning— like moving away from an elaborate system of decision-making to trusting one another with finances—and it was a challenge for people to listen to but they eventually affirmed it and it worked for a number of years.

Now that I’m retired (after 30-some years), I can reflect back that I had so much to learn. I made lots of mistakes and one of the ways the Lord teaches us is through our mistakes. He was very faithful in teaching me and the community was faithful in forgiving me when I tried things that didn’t work.

As I reflect back, I am also keenly aware that if the community is to survive, we need to have a next generation of leaders. As this next generation transitions and I see the difficulty, I see it as my role to pray that Lord will give the younger generation the strength and grace needed to lead. Because I know not everyone is welcoming. Our human instincts are to resist change. But based on my own experiences and my deep trust in the Lord, I just know He can do it, that He can raise the next generation of leaders and teach them all they need to do and know in order to lead.

CP: How can we glorify God during these transitions? Are there practices, prayers, or habits we can follow so that we can best love others during transitions?



Continued next page...

RF: One of the spiritual practices I used was meditation on Scripture every day from three different books of the Bible: a Psalm everyday, a verse in the Old Testament and one in the New. You need to have the firm footing of Scripture when you're leading and the reason I advocate going through the whole bible is because inevitably Christians pick and choose. But all you need is in there. What surprised me over and over again is how the Lord would teach me what I needed to know through these daily meditations.

You always have to think new thoughts. Part of leading is thinking new thoughts.

And we all think based on our experiences growing up and the leaders that we've known and seen. And we instinctively use those for our lead. Many times that is good but inevitably you confront situations that are way beyond what you've experienced. Or the way people you've learned from handled it in the past turns out to not be helpful and when you try it, it blows up in your face.

Recently, I thought about when I was 17, just having been hospitalized after becoming sick. A pastor came to visit me and he read to me from 2 Corinthians 1, the passage where Paul says I've gone through these troubles so that I can comfort other people. The pastor told me that maybe I had gone through these troubles to comfort others. At the time, that wasn't comforting. I wanted to say "no thanks."

But just this week, I decided to look up that verse again in the KJV. In the 1st verse, Paul refers to God as the "God of all comfort." After I went through this disabling situation at a young age, it took about ten years for me to be comforted, but I have comforted many people because I know what it's like to end up in deep pain through no choice of your own. One of the things I've learned to do in life is to mourn.

CP: Are you saying that there is something in all of this about using your pain as a leader?

RF: The experiences in our life that we want to reject, the Lord can use those in the same way he used mine and the same way he did with Jesus.

CP: So, as in parenting and marriage, leadership can expose our weaknesses and transform those things?

RF: Yes, yes.

CP: What are the biggest blessings and the most difficult things you've encountered during your time in leadership?

RF: I remember some leader early on quoted a verse about being faithful to your generation—I don't remember if that was from Paul's letters—but I knew two things were clear:

One, that I was called to Plow Creek and two, that I was at peace that I had been called to leadership. Those things were so helpful because if it was an act of God calling me then surely He was going to provide what I needed to fulfill His call. And He has.

One of the things I've reflected on is that it's an honor to clean up messes. As a young leader, I probably would've never said, "Oh, I would love to spend a lot of my ministry cleaning up messes." But now, I'm really grateful that part of the Lord's choosing me was to clean up messes.

And at this stage of life where I have laid down leadership, I am filled with gratitude for having been given the honor of serving the Lord and his people in this way. I was with people in their most painful and joyous moments of life over and over again. But it was really clear that the work was for *my* generation. So now that it has ended, I'm content to pray for and bless the next generation whom God will call to be faithful to their generation.



Transition

by Joe Gatlin of Hope Fellowship

Twenty-three years ago in April, the Branch Davidian compound outside of Waco went up in flames and took the lives of 80 people. Half a year later as some of us perceived that the profound spiritual and social cracks were growing in our Christian community, Reconcilers Fellowship, we realized we soon no longer would be able to quip we had gone from being Waco’s other cult to Waco’s only cult.

Sure enough, just a few months later, Reconcilers figuratively flamed out. The combination of our grandiose expectations of Christian community, our stubborn resistance to leadership, our harsh judgment of each other, and our very pedestrian failure to lay down our lives for each other was terminal. Fortunately no lives were lost.

A few months later our communal household which was still intact sat in our living room and visited with Virgil Vogt from Reba Place. Our larger body had flown to the wind. We zeroed in on the existential question: *Who were we in the body of Christ?*

Would we go join a church together or different churches? Or would we once again invite neighbors to join us for worship and claim to be the gathered body of Christ?

Virgil shared two very memorable, very countercultural thoughts. One, the Holy Spirit loves to start new things. Two, he had always dreamed of being part of something very foundational — a church that was the simple gathering of the brothers and sisters as they came to worship and walk the path of discipleship together. Virgil’s counsel warmed our hearts and after prayer we decided to accept it as a prophetic word.

About a year into the life of Hope Fellowship Nancy and I were named as pastors. We agreed upon these three commitments. One, to always attempt to point the fellowship in the way of Jesus. Two, to always try to build more leadership in the fellowship. And three, to not take any salary for our work since all of the sisters and brothers were to be involved in ministry.

These commitments have been difficult, at times. The way of Jesus is often narrow and obscured and can be seen as irrelevant and ineffective. Culturally and societally many expectations are put on “pastors,” which we felt were not rightfully ours. For a number of years we had to work hard at diminishing the role of the pastoral team and insist that others pick up some of these responsibilities. These efforts resulted in the formation of additional leadership bodies for the fellowship. God always provided in the midst of these challenges.

God has been extraordinarily faithful. Three years ago during our SMC visitation Nancy and I shared with our co-



Analí Gatlin and Joel Looper of Hope Fellowship at their wedding on May 28th

pastor, Fernando, and the visitation team, that we felt the time was right, after almost 20 years, for us to step off of the team. Hope Fellowship had an abundance of younger leadership who were very committed to the Lord and to the vision of the Fellowship, and others could help take on the pastoral responsibilities.

Fernando and the visitation team agreed. The membership agreed when we presented the proposal to them. We settled on a timeframe of three years for the transition. The desire of the Lord in this seems so clear to us that we have no fear or trepidation about the welfare of the fellowship or a personal loss of role.

The discernment process for the transition has not been easy for the fellowship, but we are confident the Lord will again provide. Nancy and I look forward to seeing how we will best be able to serve the brothers and sisters of Hope Fellowship as we go forward.

(Continued from page 2)

South Texas team, host groups and transportation links leading to asylum in Canada and, later, the United States. Racial reconciliation became a more deliberate mission of RPF. The congregation continued to grow while the Fellowship shrank from 160 to about 70 members. The Shalom Association of Communities dissolved.

4) Outward Ministries Expand While Core Membership Dwindles Further: The 90's.

During this chapter of community life the same three elders continue to serve in both Church and Fellowship, but most of the community's attention went to building up the congregation with a variety of new ministries. The Fellowship launched a Ten Thousand Villages store selling third-world craft items that did very well on busy Main Street in Evanston. But as volunteers from other churches became involved, the store's corporation was reorganized to stand on its own feet. Reba Place Development Corporation was organized to take advantage of government funds to buy run-down apartment buildings in our neighborhood and preserve them for long-term affordable housing. A colony of Fellowship folks moved two miles south and launched a new congregation in the Roger's Park neighborhood of Chicago, providing the nucleus of "Living Water Community Church" which became a thriving multi-ethnic congregation with many recent immigrants. Meanwhile, the two clusters of Reba Place Fellowship dwindled from 70 to 38 members. New persons were not joining the Fellowship as those who remained, of course, grew older. In this dispirited season of Fellowship life a visitation led by Richard and Judy Hays prophesied that Reba, like Abraham and Sarah, would become pregnant in its old age.

5) Mission to Youth and a New Leadership Pattern: The 2000's.

With some tears, Reba Place Fellowship dissolved the two clusters, each with their own traditions, and returned to one circle of membership. One of the younger members, Greg Clark, was elected to a three-year term as Fellowship leader and was asked to constitute a new leadership team – a pattern that has continued to this day, allowing for a variety of leadership gifts to serve, and giving strategic attention to empowering women and young people. Many tasks were delegated to new teams to provide a variety of needed services so that everyone in the Fellowship could grow in leadership experience. The Fellowship rebuilt connections with a few other communities and the Shalom Mission Communities network emerged.

The first new leadership team developed a brief mission statement which was affirmed by the body and even set to music so everyone could easily remember its focus on discipleship, love, and support for new communities. The Reba "onion" distinguished three membership layers – practicing members, novices, and covenant membership. The community recognized the need to draw together, to meet more often and to rebuild the core life that had been neglected. An intern program begun by a Reba teen and her mentor invited and oriented a new crop of seekers each year, many of whom have stayed around. Greg Clark, philosophy professor at North Park University, began a fall class on "Christian Intentional Community" which brought a large van-load of young people to our Monday night gathering with its potluck, sharing groups, and seminar. Some of these folks have become part of our wider spiritual family and have launched community households of their own.

Membership has grown slowly from thirty-eight to forty-eight as younger friends of the Fellowship and practicing members have typically taken a longer time to make commitments of marriage, family, and community. They constitute a wider circle of Fellowship friends who come and go and grow at millennial's pace. Still, the 2000's have constituted a season of growth and vitality in Reba Place Fellowship with both an aging core of veterans and a ring of new growth that promises vitality for years to come.

Shalom Connections

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