



# SHALOM CONNECTIONS

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## Summer 2016: Politics, wisdom, and community

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### Conventional Wisdom for Society: The Art of Politics between Friends and Enemies

by David Janzen

*A Visit to Grace and Main in Danville, VA  
September, 2015*

“Grace and Main” is not the community’s geographical address, but rather a theological intersection connecting God’s grace and Main Street. Josh Hearne welcomed me with a quickly improvised lunch of burritos, showed me their back and front-yard garden, and then we set out on a tour of the six community houses in Danville, VA. We also saw how Danville is an economically depressed city with a huge abandoned textile mill that once employed thousands, but now is turning into piles of bricks. Danville still struggles with high unemployment and homelessness.

The community, Josh told me, had its beginning about six years ago when a few seminarians and their friends undertook a Bible study that asked “What would happen if we took seriously Jesus’ call to build a common life with the poor, the handicapped, and the homeless persons that God loves first, searching together for an authentic life of discipleship.” Now, many dramas later, these Grace and Main households have arrived at something like a common pattern of a core family living with other friends that God has been

gathering into a community of discipleship, prayer, guerilla gardening, job creation, and mutual support.

After the tour we stopped off at Averette College where Josh let me sit in on a class he is teaching as an adjunct professor, “Introduction to the New Testament;” this session was on the Gospel of Mark. A few of the students appeared to be trudging through the semester hoping to just complete their requirements and move on. But some of them were alert to the fact that this teacher guy was actually living the radical life of the Jesus whom they were studying in class. Their motto might have been, “Let those with ears to hear, listen” and then talk about what they are discovering with the teacher after class.

For dinner Charlie Strauss took me out to a fine Italian restaurant where he proceeded to tell me about his career as a lawyer and then a judge. Now in his retirement he has found meaning in reading Dorothy Day, Jean Vanier, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, and other more obscure writers like David Janzen. God is reviving his spiritual life through friendship with the folks at Grace and Main where, with a little help from his professional friends, Charlie finds ways to sponsor some of their projects. He seemed dazed and amazed at how God has been turning his life upside-down in a fresh-Gospel kind of way and giving him a new set of friends from “across the tracks” he never could have

*Continued next page...*

met without the help of Grace and Main.

That evening we joined up with the Grace and Main crowd in a Bible study and liturgy of earnest prayers for everyone in the room and everyone they cared about. After the Bible study Charlie went home while the rest of us moved on to the kitchen for hot chocolate and a time of hanging out that filled all the chairs and spaces. There a heavily scarred fellow missing a few teeth told his life story and recalled how years ago, it was Judge Charlie Strauss who had sentenced him to prison. He observed, "We've both had to change a whole lot to become friends in Jesus, but that's what's happened. Ain't God amazing?"

I could not help but think that this loving bunch of misfits (by every conventional social standard) is just what heaven is going to be like. We might as well get used to it.

— — —

The human race has suffered repeated escalating spirals of violence where feuds break out that find no natural end. The rule of law is a great improvement over this primal condition because it limits retaliation to some principle of equity like "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." But Jesus "fulfills the law" by teaching his followers to love not just neighbors but everyone, even enemies, and to work for reconciliation that puts an end to the wish for retaliation – something force and law can never do.

Jesus characterized conventional social wisdom with the folk saying, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." (Matt. 5:43) Living in occupied territory under a corrupt political and religious system, Jesus, like the general populace, had no illusions that justice would be done if one appealed to the authorities. To relatively powerless and oppressed followers, he urged a range of creative non-violent practices and principles for keeping their conflicts within the relational zone rather than escalating them and triggering violent repression. The story of Grace and Main gives us some clues about how Jesus is working today to make friends out of enemies and to navigate the peace-making

possibilities within an unstable conventional system of threats and counter threats.

The big question before us then is not the one theologian Reinhold Niebuhr pursued which is "How does the Kingdom of God fit into the "real world" of conventional wisdom?" Rather, our question would be, "Of what use is conventional wisdom to the body of Christ in this age when the world is passing away -- but not quickly enough?"

**How to make friends with unrighteous mammon?** Jesus serves up an amazing, juicy parable in which we might ponder how to strategically work with conventional wisdom as disciples of Jesus. I'm warning you, this weird story will not fit in most pious Sunday school me-and-Jesus conversations. Here Jesus is training us how to think way outside the box with his radical eye-twinkling, sly-smiling kingdom perspective. Hang on.

*Then Jesus said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought against him that this man was squandering his property. So he summoned him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give me an accounting of your management, because you cannot be my manager any longer.' Then the manager said to himself, 'What will I do now that my master is taking the position away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. I have decided what to do so that when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into*

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# Sojourners News



*Celebrating Edith's 70th birthday*

*by Dawn Noelle Smith*

## **Sojo Political News**

*(relating to the total complex of relations between people)*

Some of our spring happenings have included:

- the 70th birthday decade celebration for Edith Bernard including brunch, a gardening party, and a “silent” showing of *Calendar Girls* (audience members were asked to be silent, and to voice their enthusiasm with signs or gestures only)
- leading a Night Walk in the Mission centered around the idea of practicing resurrection by visiting places of death
- finishing up our study of Acts
- hosting a number of student groups interested in learning

about intentional community, particularly over the Holy Week time period

- watching, waiting, standing, mourning, marching, and praying as the intersection of gentrification and police brutality have come to a head with two more deaths and the resignation of the police chief in our city.

Sojo summer is off to an early start as district school’s let out before Memorial Day weekend.

We kicked off our summer activities as volunteer game booth attendants at Tenderloin Community School’s Family Fun Day on May 21. Additional comings, goings, and events

already underway and still to come in this Summer of 2016:

- weddings in Waco and Portland
- backpacking trips
- Kids’ Day on June 25 (instead of our usual Kids’ Week)
- fundraising for Rebuild South Sudan via the San Francisco Marathon/Half-Marathon/5K run
- dancing and mariachi performances in the Carnaval parade
- participation in the Ekklesia gathering
- preparing our space to receive new apprentices
- continued conversations regarding leadership structure
- Covenanted and All Church retreats in the Santa Cruz mountains in July and August



*Above photo: Prayer Walk - Grieving Police Involved Shootings in our Neighborhood*

*Below photo: Sending Megan Moore to JPUSA for the Summer*



## A letter to the IRS from Ruth Anne Friesen

April 2, 2016

Department of the Treasury  
Internal Revenue Service Center  
P.O. Box 802501  
Cincinnati, OH 45280-2501

Greetings to Whom It May Concern:

It is April once again and time to pay Federal Income Tax. Please find my 1040 Individual Income Tax Return enclosed, along with other attachments.

As a disciple of Jesus Christ, I want to pay my tax money due to a Christian peace organization rather than to the Federal Government where so much of it is used for war. Contributing to peacemaking rather than to violence, terrorism, and war is what I want to choose at all times. I cannot deny my deepest convictions to practice peace and renounce all forms of violence. As a Christian I believe that it is morally, ethically, and spiritually wrong to kill! I believe that use of violence, force, and abuse in every form is wrong. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 – 7 clearly calls Christians to love enemies and do good to those who seem ready to harm. Therefore, as a Christian I am giving my income tax money for peacemaking rather than for war and defense purposes. From various organizations I understand that over half of Federal tax money is used for defense and war effort. Throughout my whole life I have believed that war is wrong and that Jesus was serious when he taught us not to kill.

I want to share with you some of my life story and why I am a convinced pacifist. My Uncle Harvey taught it to me from when I was young as we had discussions about faith in Jesus, what He said, and how we put it into practice. I was present with my big brother August 28, 1963 in Washington D.C. when Martin Luther King's voice rang out over the Washington Monument his dream of justice for all. We stood a few feet from the side of the podium and witnessed the power of his oratory. Peace with justice is a significant moral force and important to live in practice.

I was present in the Rio Grande Valley from 1983 to 1992 as Central American refugees were fleeing the horror and trauma of death squad violence and forced recruitment. I participated in the Overground Railroad to help real asylum seekers access the opportunity of visas to Canada. These asylum applicants needed their traumas healed or transformed. Trauma not healed or transformed is passed on.

I lived in a remote country village in Guatemala for four years, working with the local indigenous Methodist Church, and learned what violence and trauma were like for the poor trapped between Army and guerrilla tensions and violence. They needed peace with justice and an end to violence; they needed to live peace and freedom in practice.

I lived almost six years in the Argentine Chaco, working with the indigenous as Bible translation happened.

So I learned to know several Tobas and their families very personally and heard from them about their hopes and dreams as justice was sought for their land ownership, for education, and for basic necessities. Clearly peace and justice are needed, very connected, and need to be lived in practice. One does not exist without the other.

Now I am an ordained Mennonite pastor doing chaplain work in a very diverse Chicago Catholic hospital. I respect and honor the wide diversity I find in both patients and staff. It is a privilege to serve people from different races and socio-economic backgrounds and to plant the seeds of God's immeasurable love in the process. So "I am convinced that nothing can separate us from God's love" (Romans 8:38)... not even death!

I want you to understand that I am not against paying taxes, but I am called to peacemaking. I believe that Christians do not know vengeance but rather are children of peace with hearts overflowing with peace, mouths speaking peace, and spirits walking in the way of peace. Jesus' love and mercy is lived out as Christians participate in actively clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, comforting the sorrowful, sheltering the destitute, aiding and consoling the sad, seeking those who are lost, binding up the wounded, and healing the sick. Many of these tasks are daily needed at the diverse Chicago hospital where I presently work as a chaplain.

I am making the decision, consistent with my deepest convictions and calling to peacemaking, to mail my tax payment of \$548.00 as a money order to Eastern Mennonite University, Center for Justice and Peacebuilding, STAR program (Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resilience). The whole point is that I very much want to pay for peace rather than for war! I am committed to following Jesus' way of peace!

I am hopeful that you can understand my deep convictions about the importance of practicing the example of love that Jesus taught and lived. It seems very clear that as an ordained pastor in the Mennonite Church U.S.A. and as a Board Certified Chaplain, I need to believe what I read of Jesus' example in the Gospels, teach what I believe as opportunity unfolds, and practice what I teach about the Good News of Peace. How important the Good News of Peace for those searching for hope and renewal as health crises hit. Please consider carefully my request for an alternate use for Federal taxes so that my deepest beliefs and calling are honored and trauma can be transformed rather than passed on and on! I believe that Jesus' Way of peacemaking can be supported with our dollars rather than violence and vengeance.

THANK YOU KINDLY for listening to my sincere request to be recognized as a disciple of Jesus Christ who is called to peacemaking!

Blessings,  
Ruth Anne Friesen

# Plow Creek News

We are approaching the newness of summer at the farm. Our kids are out of school, the farm is a bustling hub of activity, and guests and interns bring new energy and life.

**In farm and bakery news:** the farm is enjoying having David from JPUSA, Natalie Nyberg, and Kris Hiew as interns. The farm is also experimenting with a licensed egg operation to sell to CSA members and locals. The bakery has an intern for the first time in several years, James from RPF.

**In community news:** headed up by Dan and Camille Walker, the playground in front of the common building is being renovated. Our discussions about re-starting the common purse continue and we are grateful for the 16 months that Sally Youngquist and Allan Howe have spent helping PCF with its new vision. We are sad but hopeful for the future now that they will be ending their official time with us.

**In family news:** Camille and Dan Walker welcomed their son, Killian Fox, into the world and into his big brother's arms in April. He is healthy and thriving and looks like his mother.

We were so happy to celebrate the wedding of Natalie Potts (now DeLaurell) and Allen DeLaurell in May. Their wedding, a joyous celebration, was a blending not only of biological families but of communities, with representatives from at least four SMC communities.



**Prayer requests:** The Adams family could use prayers as they continue through the often painful journey of getting cleared for starting the process of adoption.

Margaret and David Gale could use prayers as she cares for him at home. Rich Foss has been in the hospital a few times in the last months but is currently stable and at home. Mark and Louise Stahnke need energy for the busy bakery season.



*Above: Matthew Peterson prepares communion for worship; Above right: Natalie's friends celebrate her upcoming nuptials. Right: The newlyweds, Allen and Natalie*

## Finding unity in the Political Drama

by Lee Kuiper

It may go without saying that Conservative Christians call themselves Christians. So too do Liberal Christians call themselves Christians. Both groups (and all those in between) follow the interpretation of Christ illuminated to them through scripture, through their church, through the wisdom of other believers and the Holy Spirit. They arrive at different stances on some issues -often political issues- but they are still followers of Christ. There is a unity here. But individuals on both sides are baffled and appalled that someone could stand behind [Trump] [Clinton] (take your pick) and still consider themselves Christians.

Our temptation is to fall into incredulity. I have heard many a friend say, "I would have never guessed that so many Americans, not to mention Christians, would get behind someone so brash and unkind as Donald Trump. I'm disturbed by the fact that his followers (even Christians) relish in that sort of meanness. How can a demagogue like Trump build a platform on hate and fear (banning Muslims, making Mexico build a wall, misogyny, bullying, reintroducing torture, mass deportations, etc.) and attract followers of Jesus, the prince of peace?"

My friends are not wrong to struggle with frustration and confusion, nor to ask that question. It can feel baffling. But the fact that we are baffled means we have empathetic work to do. I can understand how non-Christians might be prone to hate the opposing candidate and their supporters but how can we, as people who follow the most avid purveyor of empathy, fail to at least try to see things from another's point of view and try to love them?

Our political system is broken; it's broken because *we* are broken. People who are normally politically indifferent have no choice but to get sucked in and feel strongly about the polarizing nature of the current situation. As the sides are polarizing, Christians are closing themselves off to hearing other people's perspectives. They are giving up the commitment to hear the other person's side of the story; they are giving up the opportunity to empathize. I'm not saying that all sides are always equal or there is never a perspective that is genuinely "more Christian" or "less Christian," but how and why did a sincere person arrive at the perspective he or she holds?

As soon as we, citizens of the USA, start judging other citizens for the fact that they have arrived at different political stances, we are opening ourselves up to a dangerous enemy. Too often, dark spiritual forces come into our hearts and sow seeds of disbelief and distrust that grow into hate. And that is one of the things tearing us apart as a church in this country. Evil has found not only a foothold, but a stranglehold in our lives.

The insidiousness of this whole broken system is that it is not only alive and well in the church but that it is perpetrated by the church. How can we both use our religious beliefs as the

foundation for our political stances while simultaneously abandoning the core elements of that religion (*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind; and Love your neighbor as yourself*) and, thus, fail to love those who have different political views? We must wrestle with this.

As humans, it is scary how easily we can reduce any person to their worst qualities —to subtract their humanness. I wonder how many of us subtract the humanness out of Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton and reduce them to their worst traits? I know I am guilty of this.

I think that, currently, what we have here is a failure to empathize. We need to drop judgements, open ourselves up to civil and spirit-filled conversations so that we can see people beyond their worst character traits and re-learn how to empathize and love them as Christ does. Zoe Mullery pointed out to me that, "In the American political economy if I think you are wrong it's almost akin to thinking you shouldn't exist." This is the opposite of empathy: instead of trying to imagine why you believe something, I simply wish you ceased to exist. This is what we need to fight against. As Christians we can show a positive way forward. If I disagree with you, instead of wishing you didn't exist, I should seek you out for dialogue. Doing so, together, we stretch our empathic imaginations.

My friend Nate Pequette said to me, "I want to understand how someone has come to think as they do but I also want to hold onto the truth. At what point do we sacrifice truth for unity? And vice versa?"

I didn't have an immediate answer for him. Yes, we need to stand up for truth but we also need to continue to stay humble, knowing that we don't have all the answers. We do know we need to learn from our brothers and sisters. After many months of continuing to think about this, I still wrestle with the idea of truth and/or unity. I don't think I'll come to an answer anytime soon but, currently, with American politics, I feel the fight for truth too often decimates the fight for unity. So I seek to remind us of unity, to remind us our hope lies in a kingdom, or rather, our hope lies in one king. I seek to remind us that we cannot go on believing that our political views outweigh our shared identity of faith in the true candidate who can save us.

Also, if we wish to not open ourselves up to hate, perhaps we need to talk with each other about other stories as well. I, for one, am sick of hearing about the latest political drama as it unfolds. Perhaps we need to share stories about another savior who we elect daily with our actions. As Christians, He is the candidate we can all agree on.

Finally, as Christians who just so happen to live in the United States of America, our primary identity does not lie in our political views but in our faith in someone who taught us to love one another. Our unity in our faith and our shared covenant to love one another is far more important than "Making American Great Again" or "Making America Whole Again."

# Reba Place Fellowship News

by Susan Kauffman

We at Reba have had many moving experiences this quarter. It all began with the Doran-Moriarty's moving back home from a house-sitting gig down the block. Then Becky, Joseph and Solomon Gallivan moved into a new apartment to make way for Virgil and Joan Vogt to move into their old one. Now that Vogts have vacated 726 Reba (next to the Clearing), Sally and Orwin Youngquist will be moving there on June 11. David and Penny Lukens are not far behind in preparing for their September move out of Cana House (NOT into Youngquists' place), and discussion is underway about the potential of using Cana again in its historical role as community meeting place. Game

of Musical Apartments, anyone? Come join us: we guarantee you'll be moved!

Our annual retreat in April was equally moving, though not nearly as physically taxing. We began with a "show and tell" activity in which each of us brought a small object that signified what we bring to the Fellowship. It was feared that the kids would be afraid to share, but once they heard their voices amplified they kept finding new things to say. The display tray was filled with quite a variety of items. In keeping with the theme "Handing on the Legacy," a major part of our time was spent in sharing, see-sawing between oldest and youngest members and working our way to the middle. Seniors shared RPF legacies they were most concerned about passing on to present and

future generations; the "youngsters" shared what they appreciated about the legacy they've gained from RPF and its senior members.

A review of the sharings revealed that not only legacies but responsibilities need to be handed down. The watchword these days is "Duck when you see Sally coming," lest one be drafted onto another committee. It is appropriate, though, that we youngsters are getting our taste of the time and attention required for keeping this place running. May we be as committed and faithful as the elders have been.

Continuing in the vein of sharing, that has also been the theme at the Cana potlucks. Several community members and friends have shared about how God brought them to Reba and how God has blessed them here. These are good



*Intergenerational gardening gets into full swing now at the raised beds in front of the Reba Services office, ably led by Kate Marshak*

opportunities for exposure for neighbors who may be considering community membership. And, because it is important to occasionally review our stance on peacemaking, we'll hear from several members at our regular meeting on June 21 regarding how they became convinced that Jesus as peacemaker is a central part of Christian faith. In the Visitors' Section, former Reba Intern Tim Shenk and his family visited mid March. They are part of the Christian community Camden House in Camden, NJ. Joe and Nancy Gatlin also visited mid March. An Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary student, Ross Ringenberg, visited March 28 to interview people at the Clearing about a project he was doing on intentional communities. New Testament Scholar, Michael Gorman, visited Reba April 3 and interviewed some Reba people regarding something he is writing. Susan Schaller, who met David Janzen when he visited her community in North Carolina, visited Reba mid May.



Etienna Mertal from Friends University in Wichita, KS visited May 11. She wrote her final paper on Reba Place Fellowship for a class in which they studied Christian communities.

There has been some interest in our intern program.

We're praying for an infusion of "new blood" to pitch in and help where needed.

Now that Chicago has finally decided it's Spring, gardening is underway in both Evanston and Rogers Park. Evanston produce not claimed by the gardeners themselves is taken to the Manna Garage, where surplus food is distributed to community members and neighbors. And on the topic of food, several of us, by the time this issue comes out, will be eating and enjoying healthy and nutritious food from our Plow Creek CSA boxes. We are happy to have this source of food nearby. Come for dinner!



*Top right photo: RPF practicing members Jim Fitz, Shawna Hart, Helen Hudgens, Tim Fryett & novice Robin Benedict gather for quarterly potluck supper*

*Above: Chico & Tatiana share at an RPF Cana seminar about their life in Ford Heights*

# Hope Fellowship News

by Michelle Porter

Since our last update, there have been many fun and meaningful events in the life of Hope Fellowship that allowed us to focus on our yearly theme of “For the City, for the Nations” and seeking the Shalom of the city where we are in exile.

The men had their yearly retreat at Three Mountain Retreat April 22-24. Their theme was their lives as a house, and they built a Little Free Library as a symbolic example of their metaphysical and spiritual lives. As usual, the weekend involved competitive activities, gourmet cooking, and a campfire.

We began a rite-of-passage process with our youth two years ago as a way to welcome our youth into the adulthood of our body and to encourage them to seek Jesus, baptism, and discipleship for themselves. After completing a project, the youth participate in a weekend activity with the same-gender adults of the church.

Clare Bridgewater completed a mosaic project on the front steps of the meeting house last fall, and the culminating weekend activity occurred May 5-May 8. While the details of the event are kept secret from the youth, the general idea is to challenge and encourage the youth to join the adults in their walks of discipleship. Saturday evening was a church-wide picnic celebration at Three Mountain Retreat where we affirmed and encouraged Clare.

The next weekend, a group of more than twenty Hope Fellowship super-travelers attended Allan DeLaurel and Natalie Potts’ wedding at Plow Creek. Multiple

people have labeled it the best and most fun wedding they have ever been to. I guess Analí Gatlin and Joel Looper have a lot to live up to in their upcoming nuptials on May 28<sup>th</sup>!

And “speaking” of weddings, we are joyful to celebrate the engagement of Carlos Hinojosa and Emily Hunt and their fast approaching wedding date of July 30<sup>th</sup>.

On Sunday, May 15<sup>th</sup>, Waco commemorated the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the lynching of Jesse Washington, a young black man convicted of a violent crime but was unjustly murdered by a mob. The service included an acknowledgement of descendants of Washington who were in attendance, moving songs and prayers, and an apology from Waco’s current mayor for the atrocities of the

past. As a church body, we plan to continue to engage the conversation about race in our community and how we perpetuate it and what we can do to love others as Christ loves us.

Our pastoral discernment process continues as we listen to hear who God is calling to serve as Joe and Nancy leave this role. We started with six members who were recommended and discerned that they would continue in the process, and are currently still discerning with five of the six.

We had a church-wide cleaning day Saturday, May 21<sup>st</sup>, and many of us helped clean, plant, paint, and prune. We are thankful for our meeting house in the neighborhood that God has given us to seek the Shalom where we are in exile.



*Clare's rite of passage picnic: Clare (left); Karen Alleman (middle) helped with the mosaic project; Jessica Robinson (right) is Clare's mentor.*

## Toward a More Local Understanding of Politics

by Daniel Gray

I feel that the intersection of politics and Christian life is one of fascination that we all love to explore, and yet it is often a conversation that feels endless, unresolved, and full of tension. Most of us in the Lotus House have had a shorter history of involvement with the political system, and yet having been through several national election cycles, have already experienced a range of emotions and attitudes towards the American political system. While the outcomes and actual policy decisions are important, many discussions in our community center around fascination with the process -- with a year-and-a-half long American political process, it is tempting to become consumed by a system that seems to focus more on process than outcome.

We recognize that as Christians, we are interacting with an institution that takes on a life of its own, a power that de-personalizing the needs of the people that constitute its existence. We live in an ever-diversifying society, and yet we live in increasingly homogeneous settings, where we are often surrounded by like-minded people and have

little experience in conversations and working through diverse sets of experiences and beliefs. Bill Bishop's book *The Big Sort* provides a fascinating account of this shortcoming. As a country, the lack of diversity in our neighborhoods breeds an ugly political system that focuses on winners and losers, and one in which rarely anything is actually accomplished, except through significant social upheaval, despite the billions of dollars spent every four years.

While members of the Lotus House have not necessarily shunned engagement within the national system, we strongly believe that politics are local, and are reflected more through our actions and relationships that voting preferences. This is an important aspect of why we live where we do. For us, the pro-life/abortion debate is about a relationship with the 15-year old girl in our tutoring program who lacked adequate support systems and became pregnant through poor choices. The social welfare debate is about the man we've known for years who scrapes by working odd jobs and our remembering to "leave enough grain behind in the field" to ensure there's always an odd job available to contribute to his economic opportunity. It involves regular, sometimes awkward, conversations with our neighbors, who have a completely different set of experiences and social history than our

own. We recognize that national elections involving 300 million people rarely change much, but we can change our own perspective through understanding, having new eyes, and living out the change we wish to see.

As a child, I grew up on the story of *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo. My parents were the Thénardiens in a church musical rendition. The Broadway soundtrack was one of the first CD's I owned, and to this day, I could probably put on an impromptu performance of every song. Understanding politics continued...

A few years ago, I read a blog posting (*Experimental Theology*) from a former professor that drew out the following political theme: Javert and Enjolras, without direct interaction, reflect opposite ends of the political spectrum. Javert, a police inspector, believes in law and order and in a God aligned with the state. For Enjolras, an idealistic university student and revolutionary, God is the violent revolutionary aligned with the poor. Between these two poles, Jean Valjean, a criminal, weaves a story of grace and redemption. Fantine, a poor single-mother who has no economic opportunity left but prostitution, is his political ideology. Valjean is mayor and owner of the factory where Fantine is fired. Valjean recognizes his own guilt in a corrupt system that lead to Fantine's death and commits to raising Fantine's daughter Cosette.

Our society is prone to abstract thinking and a faith in a system that can often exhibit the demonic. Obsession with this system often placates our ability to engage with people and the real politics of everyday life. Like Jean Valjean, who received mercy through two candlesticks, our politics should be one of personal relationships and the shared acts of mercy and grace with those we find outside our normative standing in the system.



Hope Fellowship folks enjoy a game of Badminton

# The News from Lotus House

by Daniel Gray



*Above: The bride and groom, Emily and Stephen, at the reception.*

*Below right: The chickens get a new house that should withstand the elements (and a more accessible laying box).*

It's official! Stephen and Emily are married. Though the wedding was in South Carolina, James was able to make the road trip to represent the community. By the time you read this, the Lawsons will have already been in Germany for several weeks, where Stephen will be enhancing his German language studies. They plan to return to St. Louis in August, for Stephen to finish his doctoral work. We hope that Emily will find a job quickly (as a teacher), as they will have many adjustments over the coming months. In early May, we said goodbye to Stephen with a Lotus House bachelor party that included BBQ, frofl (frisbee golf), and mini golf.

Beyond the big news, life this spring has been one of routine and adjustments. We've had a number of visitors through the spring who we've shown hospitality to, including prospective SLU students and out-of-town guests who needed lodging for a funeral. With the second house in full swing, it has been a joy to have the additional space to accommodate these guests.

Unfortunately Tre was not able to remain in Job Corps. But he has maintained contact with us, and is currently working at a restaurant, so we are excited and pray that God will continue to open doors and opportunities for him. He has also expressed interest in working towards getting his GED.

The Basses have had a busy spring with kid concerts and performances (these kids are seriously famous!). Alden is still in limbo with getting a renewed contract to teach at SLU, though their family has settled into a church home, placing membership at McKnight Crossings Church of Christ, the congregation where the first members of the community met. Daniel has not made a commitment yet, but is leaning in this direction as well.

There continues to be a lot of hope and excitement at North City Church. Candace has worked tirelessly with the youth programs (tutoring/mentoring) and planning summer activities. The Church is partnering with Harambee, a training program that teaches kids how to tuck point houses (repairing mortar in between bricks). We had a dinner in May that raised \$23,000, getting the program very close to its financial goal. Candace has been busy coordinating the interns (who recently arrived and are living in the church rectory), and summer youth groups for the church's summer program. One of the benefits of our stepping away from the church on Sundays has been our ability to network and connect more outside resources back into supporting the church and it's ministry to the surrounding neighborhood.

Recently, we have had several people express interest in the community. We are entering formal discernment with one person, and we pray that God will continue to open doors to members that will promote life and stability.



*David Janzen, continued from page 2...*

*their homes.' So summoning his master's debtors one by one, he asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' He answered, 'A hundred jugs of olive oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.' Then he asked another, "And how much do you owe?" He replied, 'A hundred containers of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill and make it eighty.' And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light.*

*And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone they may welcome you into the eternal homes." (Luke 16:1-9)*

Anyone who reads this parable for the first time will scratch her head and ask, "What on earth does it mean?" What can we possibly learn from a dishonest manager who is generous with what does not belong to him, and from a rich man who admires the shrewdness of the scoundrel who is squandering his own fortune? And if you listen to what Jesus says it means, you will scratch your head once more and ask, "Really?"

Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth." (Luke 16:10-13)

This parable tells of a dishonest property manager whose relationship with the estate owner is rapidly sliding downhill from a type 2 situation to type 3. He has no hope of salvaging his job, but he manages, at the last minute, to use the owner's wealth to turn his creditors into type 1 friends. (I wish I'd asked Judge Charlie Strauss to interpret this parable for me!)

Jesus follows up his telling of the parable with his own commentary. Note how, through the mouth of the offended yet amazed estate owner, Jesus commends the shrewdness of practitioners of conventional wisdom as superior to those of the children of light, and yet he commends that shrewdness toward a different end -- not the accumulation of mammon but the accumulation of friends for the kingdom. Followers of Jesus have been creative in countless ways to illustrate what the wisdom of Jesus looks like in the world of conventional wisdom -- Christian peacemaker teams, reconciliation commissions, pursuing unlikely friendships, welcoming the stranger. These techniques actually work, not always, and not by "cause and effect," but by the same force field of the spirit as Jesus' death and resurrection, in which no coercion is involved, only spiritual awakening and voluntary commitment.

There is no way here to briefly summarize all the insights the way of Jesus brings to our analysis of conventional wisdom and its uses for the kingdom of God. The rest of the book will be about that too. Instead I will share a conversation reflecting with Matt Bailey from Grace and Main Community.

Matt called me to talk about some decisions they were facing. He explained how they have several households of families and singles, including some who have experienced homelessness and others suffering various physical and mental disabilities. Each house has a common purse to share the expenses of food, lodging, utilities, and maintenance, and between the households there is a common sharing fund. They have been eager to follow Jesus' teaching, "do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth." But soon they will face major expenses like redoing a roof. How should they handle that?

From our experience at Reba in developing affordable housing over several decades, I suggested that they create a community budget that sets aside money each year toward a reserve fund for major building-system replacements. This would involve a schedule for the likely life-span of systems like roofing, tuck pointing, furnace replacement, window upgrades, etc. The web would have useful spreadsheets on how to budget and track replacement costs. "Isn't this laying up treasures for yourselves on earth?" Matt asked. I observed, "Up to a point, I think, we can learn from conventional wisdom. Paying for a roof is like paying for household supplies, only the time scale is a little different -- instead of lasting only months, they last years. A replacement reserve is not the same as accumulating wealth by making a profit off renters and long-term guests. Your vision is to provide affordable housing in a sustainable way that will allow you do good year after year -- and to still die poor like a good follower of Jesus."

How shall we use dishonest wealth and conventional wisdom without it using us? Jesus doesn't give us a rule that can be literally applied in every situation -- there is no wisdom in that. Rather, he's given us some imaginative stories and the wisdom of the cross in his own life to chew on in our own wisdom-seeking conversations.

So, thinking ahead to that day when the economy collapses, we've already got our "insurance policy" in place. On that day when we become destitute, our friends will welcome us as we have welcomed them. And beyond that, we can trust that those whom we have blessed on this earth will also be there with Jesus "to welcome [us] into the eternal homes." There is hope for the shrewd steward, for Judge Charlie Strauss, for you and me, because our hard-knocks friends will be there with Jesus to welcome us home. Meanwhile, with Jesus the way to heaven always brings a measure of heaven to earth.

*A chapter excerpt from David Janzen's book-in-progress on wisdom.*

**Becoming a New Creation**  
A Book Review of *Called to Community*  
by Nate Pequette

"Faith desires to incorporate all things so that a 'new creation' can come to be...Christian faith of itself produces an impulse to bind believers in communion and by way of that communion to draw all spheres of life into God's new creation." Gerhard Lohfink

Community is a holy space; through its structures and the communion of believers, community becomes God's new creation in the world. In this holy space people as individuals can also be transformed into a new creation, and together be part of the transformation of the neighborhood around them. Those of us who have lived in community know that while there is joy, celebration, and deep friendship in this space, becoming this new creation also means there are disagreements, pain, and struggle. Sometimes it's hard to keep going. We get tired and weary. Like so many of us, I have needed voices of encouragement and challenge to remind me what we are about and to get me back on the good road of community.

One of those voices came to me in the new book, *Called to Community* (Plough Publishing House). It is a 52-chapter treasury of wisdom, encouragement, and challenge compiled by Charles E. Moore. Intended to be read in one year and discussed with those in your community, this collection includes writing selections from Eberhard Arnold, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Joan Chittister, Richard J. Foster, Thomas Merton, Henri Nouwen, John M. Perkins, and Jean Vanier, plus many more. These are people who have spent their lives not only thinking about community, but living it out. They are voices to be trusted.

This book is not a romantic view of community. It's hard truths hit the core of one's soul. Stanley Hauerwas writes in the forward, "I suspect these reflections will make many readers question their assumption that they are called to community. The stark reality of these essays makes clear that when we are dealing with people we must be ready to confront one another with truths about ourselves that we seldom want to acknowledge."

Every essay both encouraged and challenged me. Instead of leaving me to wish others would read this because they need to hear it, the writers always seemed like they were writing directly to me. A theme throughout was to embrace the ones that I disagree with or who are different than me. I wanted to slam the book shut and run, just like I often want to do with conflict. I found myself again and again realizing my own need for transformation so that I can love God, my brother and sisters, and the world in a deeper, fuller way. As I read, I received a renewed vision for our life together.

I highly recommend this collection for all of us. May we all continue to be transformed into the creations that God intended.

**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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Jesse Washington Litany

A litany that members of Hope Fellowship wrote and read to commemorate the anniversary of his lynching.

May 15, 2016

100<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemoration

Written by Hope Fellowship

**Leader: We acknowledge that we are still too often silent and complicit to unspeakable acts of violence in our world. Especially violence that exists in the structures of our society.**

**Reconocemos que estamos todavía demasiado a menudo silenciosa y cómplice a los actos indescriptibles de la violencia en nuestro mundo. Especialmente la violencia que existe en las estructuras de nuestra sociedad.**

People: God help us to find our voice and use it to tear down injustice and build new structures that are good and righteous.

Dios nos ayude a encontrar nuestra voz y usarla para derribar la injusticia y construir nuevas estructuras que son buenos y justos.

**Leader: We confess that we try and justify the continuing racism around us by saying that "it's not as bad as it used to be", and "and things are so much better now."**

**Confesamos que tratamos de justificar el racismo continua alrededor de nosotros diciendo que "no es tan malo como lo que solía ser", y "y las cosas están mucho mejor ahora."**

People: Please forgive us for not seeing the injustice, prejudice, and racism that we engage in and that is around us. Christ help us reconcile with our brothers and sisters and to love as you love.

**Por favor, perdona por no ver la injusticia, los prejuicios y el racismo el que estamos involucrados y lo que nos rodea. Cristo nos ayudan a conciliar con nuestros hermanos y hermanas y que amamos como a ti.**

**Leader: We confess the sin of participating in the mob mentality and actions or succumbing to apathy.**

**Confesamos el pecado de participar en la mentalidad y las acciones de la mafia o de sucumbir a la apatía.**

People: God give us courage and wisdom to stand against hate, overcome fear, and be driven by radical love.

Dios nos da el valor y la sabiduría para estar en contra de odio, vencer el miedo, y ser impulsado por el amor radical.



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**ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED**



Billy Lawson takes a “nap” at the airport en route from Waco to Illinois for the Potts-DeLaurell wedding