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January 2020: *Su Perfecta Justicia/His Perfect Justice*

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## Going Forward, Crossing the Chasm

By Nancy Gatlin

Most of us have heard the story of the beginnings of SMC's relationship with Valle Nuevo back in 1992. *Compañeros* retells that beginning and how the relationship has evolved over the past 28 years. We recognize the unlikeliness of this relationship and at the same time the surprising gift it has been for us in SMC as well as those in Valle Nuevo. Truly, God has blessed us and given us all an opportunity to know God more fully through this friendship.

Our relationship is a collection of many stories woven together over time. They have brought meaning, purpose and direction to our friendship and faith. We continue to seek to understand the ways God would like to see this united story continue into the future, becoming part of God's larger narrative of forgiveness, redemption, reconciliation and peace.

In 2007, I received a call from David Janzen about the need to have someone help with delegations from the States and communication with those in El Salvador. Yvonne Dilling would be coming back to the States to care for her parents and would no longer be in El Salvador to help pull the delegations together. Our family had traveled to Valle Nuevo on two prior occasions and were introduced by Yvonne to folks in Valle Nuevo.



Although I found this need daunting, I had already been hooked by Valle Nuevo's story through written reports from previous delegations and our own couple of family visits. With much support from Yvonne and David, I began the task of organizing the 2007 delegation. I found myself calling on both of them often, to asking about this detail or that and having Yvonne explain parts of VN's history or a nuance of the FLMN's platform. My sense was that this was a very special relationship, and I wanted not to do anything that would offend or in any way damage the friendship. I never imagined the ways I'd be

*Continued, Next Page...*

(Continued from Page 1)

stretched, shaped and formed by this new part of God’s family that I was getting to know.

In 2008, Dawn Noelle Smith joined the annual delegation. It was easy to see that she too was deeply impacted by the experience and might be willing to co-lead with me in future delegations. I have been very grateful for God’s provision in Dawn and her collaboration in planning and co-leading since 2009, including leading in two delegations on her own as I was unable to do so.

As our relationship has thickened with more mutual experiences, visits to the States, better accessibility to means of communication and joint projects we have accomplished with local partners, our relationship has become much more than the annual delegations. Once again, God’s provision in partners, connections and networking have been clear evidence of the gift that this relationship is far beyond any strategizing we could have done.

Now looking into the future, I am mindful that though my friendships with so many in Valle Nuevo will continue, I physically won’t be able to lead the delegations for many more years.

Some of us have started praying and asking God to show us who will be the one or ones to step into this role in this new season of our relationship. My goal would be to walk alongside someone or ones for a couple of years, introducing folks to our different partners in El Salvador as well as the elders and younger leaders in Valle Nuevo. My hope would be that we would have folks in place within 5 years from now.

So, I invite you to join us in prayer for this future need, listening to the promptings of the Spirit in your own life as well. Knowing that our transnational communion is a gift from God, I’m confident that God will provide.

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith...*

Hebrews 12:1,2a



The Valle Nuevo community crossed the Lempa River (above) into Honduras on March 18, 1981 as they fled from Salvadoran government death squads.

January 2020—Table of Contents

<b>Going Forward, Crossing the Chasm.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>A Word from Dawn.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Christmas at Jubilee.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>News from Sojourners.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>News from Reba.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Hope Fellowship News.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>News from Jubilee.....</b>	<b>11</b>

# 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 Missions 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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I'd like to take a few lines of space here to thank my SMC family and friends for the opportunity to edit the *Shalom Connections* newsletter in 2019. I am reminded in this moment of the words of David Janzen upon submitting an article to me for editing: "The courage of Jesus be with you as you try to put the pieces together." It has been a joy and an honor to apply that courage in putting together a piece of that connection between our communities for a short time. I am also deeply grateful for the opportunity that SMC has afforded me over these past 12 years to build on our relationship between communities and on a personal level with our brothers and sisters in El Salvador. I appreciate your prayers as I look expectantly toward what God has in store for the future.

Dawn



Photo by Abby Nafziger.

## Christmas at Jubilee

By Rebecca Kelly

At Jubilee, our Christmas encompasses both a time of festivity and a time of quiet stillness.

During the season of Advent, we gather in the K-house each evening. A leader reads scripture, we sing a few Advent or Christmas songs, and then the lights go off. We sit in the dark in expectant, prayerful silence. After a few minutes, the leader breaks the silence, and we join in the first verse of "Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus." A child lights the advent candle and moves Mary and Joseph one star closer to Bethlehem. A final prayer closes the time, the lights come on, and we all sit down to dinner together.

As children participating in this tradition with 11 other Jubilee kids, it was the lighting of the candle and moving of the figurines that we all liked best. It was a chance we had only twice each season and looked forward to with great excitement. Now as an adult, it is the silence and waiting

that I look forward to with excitement. Darkness and silence may typically be more often associated with Good Friday and Tenebrae services rather than Christmas, but to pause nightly in such a state reminds and prepares us for the birth of the Son of God. As we wait and are still, we remember whose birth we are celebrating, its great significance, and the hope that awaits mankind. And as the candle is lit, we are struck by the powerful image of light shining in the darkness and a darkness that is unable to overcome it.

In addition to this daily practice, we also take time to enjoy one another's company as we gather in the K-house for an afternoon of Advent crafts. This time of festivity brings the community together with activities for every age. We share treats and warm drinks while decorating the Christmas tree, write cards to friends in prison, work on a quilt, string popcorn, or make candles. Neighbors stop by, teens in our High School Hangout group try out their hands at sewing, and



*Yvonne and Sochenda making hot pretzels—Yummy!*

together we laugh and create, reveling in the joy Jesus brings into this world.

A newer Christmas tradition Jubilee folks enjoy is Karen Christmas. In the heart of a lonesome Georgia pine forest, several hundred Karen gather one Saturday before Christmas. Some are from the surrounding counties and some journey from as far away as Indiana (the Indiana crew also contributed a deer they picked up along the way). One gets a mere glimpse of this event's origin years ago in the homeland of Karen State, Burma. There is a morning worship service followed by a feast, traditional dances, and competitive games. They go beyond the typical speed-oriented relay races to include: racing, peeling, and eating a boiled egg, threading a needle, and running with a large bowl balanced on one's head. And of course, there are prizes. First place wins a jug of laundry detergent, second a plastic fruit bowl, and →→→



*High School Hangout creates Christmas cards for friends of Jubilee Partners who are in prison.*

third gets a bag of candy. To win cash, the even more athletically inclined can compete in a volleyball tournament, climb a 20 ft greased pole, or try out the high jump. Events culminate in an evening worship service where the youth often perform a variety of skits and reenactments of the Christmas story. Not only is it a day of celebration and the extraordinary (to the non-Karen attendees, that is). It's also a time to marvel at all God has done and is doing among this people group.

While the weeks leading up to Christmas are often quite full,

the 25<sup>th</sup> is typically a quieter time. The volunteer term has ended, we take a break from shared meals, and long-term community members are often away visiting relatives or enjoying the return of their children from respective jobs or schools. To those visiting or at a Jubilee Christmas for the first time, the quiet and stillness of the place can seem strange compared to its usual bustle. But for the remaining partners and novices, it is a time of rest. A time to play games in the evenings, bake cookies and sweet breads, finish long overdue projects, and visit around the wood stove.

As we celebrate the birth of Jesus, we experience many of his gifts and practices. We enjoy the true fellowship of disciples from all walks of life and cultures made into a new family through Christ. We remember and reach out to those who are outcast or lonely. We sit in stillness, silence, and darkness to spend time with God where we receive his mercy and love all while praising and thanking him for the great gift of his son.



*Jubilee Members often visit around the wood stove at Christmas. Above, the K-House in a much busier season (during our SMC reunion in September).*

## News from Sojourners

By Melinda Melone

In September at Sojourners, life began to settle into our school-year routine. Since all of our households contain students or teachers or both, back to school season holds both transitions and a return to familiar routines. At the end of September Renata and Melinda attended the SMC Camp Meeting, Melinda's first. We enjoyed the time with new and old friends and compañeros.

In October several of us traveled, either to see friends and family or to visit and support other communities, particularly those in Portland and Eugene, Oregon.

November brought our Thanksgiving Together. (We alternate years of celebrating together and traveling to celebrate with other friends and family.) Many relatives and friends came to visit and share our dinner and other activities. One activity was the viewing and discussion of documentaries, one about Alzheimer's, (*Alive Inside*) and one on the Doctrine of Discovery, (a video about the ongoing project of decolonizing by Mennonite churches.) Outdoor activities on Friday included a hike and a

“seed bombing” trip, where we planted seeds in vacant lots and sidewalk tree beds, in the hope of seeing flowers come spring. Friday night was a game night; Saturday morning was a bread baking workshop; Saturday afternoon was a photography workshop, and Saturday evening was our leftover feast and hymn sing.

On the first Sunday in December gratitude merged with Advent, and this Advent we experimented with using visual art as a sort of *Lectio Divina*. Each week worship leaders chose a piece or two of visual art to project during worship, and gave us time to reflect on it by creating our own art in response. Later in December we teamed up with First Mennonite Church to go Christmas caroling in the neighborhood, including stops at an AIDS hospice, a nonprofit Christmas tree lot, and the overhang at Safeway, where we sang while we waited out a sudden rainstorm.

January brought our annual Epiphany celebration and gift exchange, and included a “journey with gifts” to collect parts of our lunch together from various parts of the neighborhood. We ended up



*Sojourners Kids Help Bake Bread*

with chow mein, bratwurst sandwiches, pizza, pupusas, and other treats representing the universality of Epiphany and the many nations and cultures of our neighbors.

Throughout the fall and winter, we have also been pursuing a slow (but not TOO slow) conversation about sexuality, for both LGB and straight folks. We've been listening to each other's stories of how we developed our sexual ethics, and looking at how we feel and what we believe about issues such as same-gender marriage and the Biblical texts referred to as “clobber passages.” We will be continuing this conversation for some months to come with the hope of coming to a shared set of understandings and commitments.

## News from Reba

By David Hovde

Winter descended upon us here in October, with temperatures in the teens and snow right around Halloween. Then it became fall, but along with snow, cold and damp, there have been some spring-like days—yes, in both

December and January.

We at RPF seem to be in a similar holding pattern. These days our focus continues to be on elder care and on younger members moving into leadership roles as the elders step back. We've realized that we're waiting on and listening for the Spirit to lead us into a New Thing - or not a New

Thing. Who knows? Only the Spirit knows - but we trust we'll be let in on the Spirit's plans as we become able to carry them out.

Small groups are in the process of reorganizing with at least one long-standing group dissolving and making way for newly-formed groups. Pray with us as the Spirit weaves us together into new patterns.

At our November meeting (and afterwards for some), practicing members Courney Coates, Cassidy Hart, Tim Fryett and Helen Hudgens stepped back from those commitments, variously expressing gratitude for their time in the group, a continued feeling of kinship, and the possibility of re-commitment once other commitments have lessened. Matthew and Sandy Walter have realized they're functioning more like practicing members, so they have stepped back into that role after some months as novices. Jim Fitz and Rebecca Larsen both feel comfortable in their practicing member roles and will stay in them. James Kang has committed to novice membership: "Both my feet are in now." Barb Grimsley and Kelly Foster have given us a heads-up for a



*James Kang is heading up the organization of the Patch II at 723 Seward, a new "rental house household."*

*Continued, on page 10...*



Valle Nuevo's elders in the summer of 2018. Photo by Jason Eberhardt-Phillips.

This spring Hábitat para La Humanidad El Salvador will be partnering with SMC to offer a series of classes to develop the next generation of communities leaders in Valle Nuevo.



A mural on the road leading into toward the school and the church in Valle Nuevo. Notice the orange hair on Uncle Sam. Photo by Jason Eberhardt-Phillips.

(Continued from Page 7)

March wedding, and Kelly is choosing to be a practicing member.

Elder health continues as a theme. Vicki Caleb was hospitalized with cellulitis and Jeanne Howe with kidney stones. Both are home now, minus their symptoms, and we're grateful. Virgil Vogt can be seen out walking in the afternoons with various RPF and RPC (church) members, ever committed to staying strong.

723 Seward, home to the Howes and their assortment of associ-

ates for many years, is undergoing a major refurbishment in order to shelter another "rental house household." James Kang is heading up the organization of this Patch II group, and members are set to move in as I write this report. Just before Thanksgiving, members of RPF, RPC and other rental households gathered for a major leaf-raking day, which also served as a sneak-peak open house. The place is looking mighty spiffy!

Many of us enjoyed our Mid-December potluck followed by Christmas carol and hymn singing. As we stride on into the New

Year, we trust in God's continued healing and guidance in our personal and corporate lives.

□



*Adam Vaughn and Gus Roddy lead worship during the SMC Coordinators' gathering at Reba over MLK weekend.*

## Hope Fellowship News

By Natalie Delaurell

It's been a full season for the Hope Fellowship family. We leaned into Advent with special Advent worship, a rip-roaring Las Posadas celebration (with homemade tamales and buñuelos from Cristina Isabel!), and a glowing Christmas Eve service put together by Barbara Bridgewater.

Now, on the other side of Advent, we sent some friends (Ruth Boardman-Alexander, Bethany Smith, and Philip Bridgewater) to Bolivia to visit the Land Family as they serve out their MCC term in Santa Cruz.

The men look forward to their annual retreat in February.

Our meetinghouse is getting a few updates, including new windows on the second floor!

Barb Bridgewater was diagnosed with Rheumatoid Arthritis and is working through what that means for her life.



*Anali Looper and Ilse Duarte build a puzzle together over Christmas break.*

Our membership meetings have continued to focus on the Third Way discussion around same-sex relationships.

The Grupo de Apoyo y Esperanza (hope and support group) has continued to meet in the homes of the women who participate. Christina Dominguez has shared that she's experiencing a lot of joy from those meetings.

Kelly and Billy Lawson took turns getting ACL surgery this past fall.

Fernando Arroyo took an opportunity for a local job in Waco, eliminating his lengthy commute to the Austin area.

In her work at American Gateways, Analí Looper recently began representing 400 undocumented men in a detention center south of Waco.



*Hope Fellowship members celebrate Meg Wallace's birthday.*

January 2020

## Love for Lent

Don't just give up sugar for Lent!

As we head into the 2020 political season, Lent is a natural time to lament the current political evils and remember Jesus' call to enact God's political entity—the kingdom. Tim Otto at the Church of the Sojourners has written a daily Lenten devotional that works through the kingdom constitution: the Sermon on the Mount. Each day contains a passage from the Sermon on the Mount, a meditation on it, and a practical way to live it.

Rather than just giving something up, take up the Sermon on the Mount ethic of love for Lent.

[https://  
churchofthe-  
sojourners.org/  
loveforlent/](https://churchofthesojourners.org/loveforlent/)

“Seed Bombing”  
at Sojourners



By Steve Bjork

We are gearing up for a month of all-community sabbatical in February. As we continue to wait on the Lord for directions in community work, we also hope to focus on goals like changing leadership structure and writing a community covenant. David Janzen and Sally Youngquist will spend a week with us. We are blessed that they continue to walk with us, especially by providing pastoral support during this time of transition. We are also thankful to Reba Place for sharing David and Sally's time with us. During the sabbatical we also look forward to several fun outings together. For Jubilee's 40th anniversary last year a generous donor designated his gift to be used "for celebration."

Four families are currently in times of discernment or transition. Partner Chris Haynes is studying at a local college as he and his wife Rangsey Chheng prepare to move away from Jubilee. Long-term volunteer Gladys Romero will move to a Catholic Worker house and seek employment in Birmingham, AL. Russ, Christina, and Moo La Paw Dyck have returned from their yearlong sabbatical in Canada, which was deeply affected by Russ's father's heart attack in May (currently, we are thankful that he is doing well!). They are discerning about recommitting to Jubilee as Partners or returning to Manitoba. Finally, novices Nathanael and Rebecca Kelly are discerning about a move to Indiana. Thank you for holding these brothers and sisters in prayer.

Several younger volunteers have



(Top) Produce from the garden on the altar for our Thanksgiving service.



(Bottom) Amos Frese and Felix Bjork help out during October's sweet potato harvest.

become novices in the last six months. Brenda Ordoñez spent the summer working with her sisters in South Georgia before returning to begin the novitiate. Sage and Samuel Frese (who spent eight months at Reba about three years ago) and Matt and Elizabeth Hussey (who recently spent a month at the Woodcrest Bruderhof) have increased the total number of novices to eight.

Jubilee is also growing through new lives. Both Matt and Elizabeth Hussey & Nathanael and

Rebecca Kelly are expecting babies this spring at the end of February and March, respectively. This will bring the total number of kids in the community to twelve! The children bring much joy and positive energy to our daily lives together. We remember that some folks enjoyed visiting our goats during the September reunion, and we are happy to report that several new kid goats have joined us as well.

*“It is not that God’s help and presence must still be proved in our life; rather God’s presence and help have been demonstrated for us in the life of Jesus Christ. It is in fact more important for us to know what God did to Israel, in God’s son Jesus Christ, than to discover what God intends for us today. The fact that Jesus Christ died is more important than the fact that I will die...I find salvation not in my life story, but only in the story of Jesus Christ. Only those who allow themselves to be found in Jesus Christ—in the incarnation, cross, and resurrection—are with God and God with them...What we call our life, our troubles, and our guilt is by no means the whole of reality; our life, our need, our guilt, and our deliverance are there in the Scriptures. Because it pleased God to act for us there, it is only there that we will be helped. Only in the Holy Scriptures do we get to know our own story. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the God and Father of Jesus Christ and our God.”*

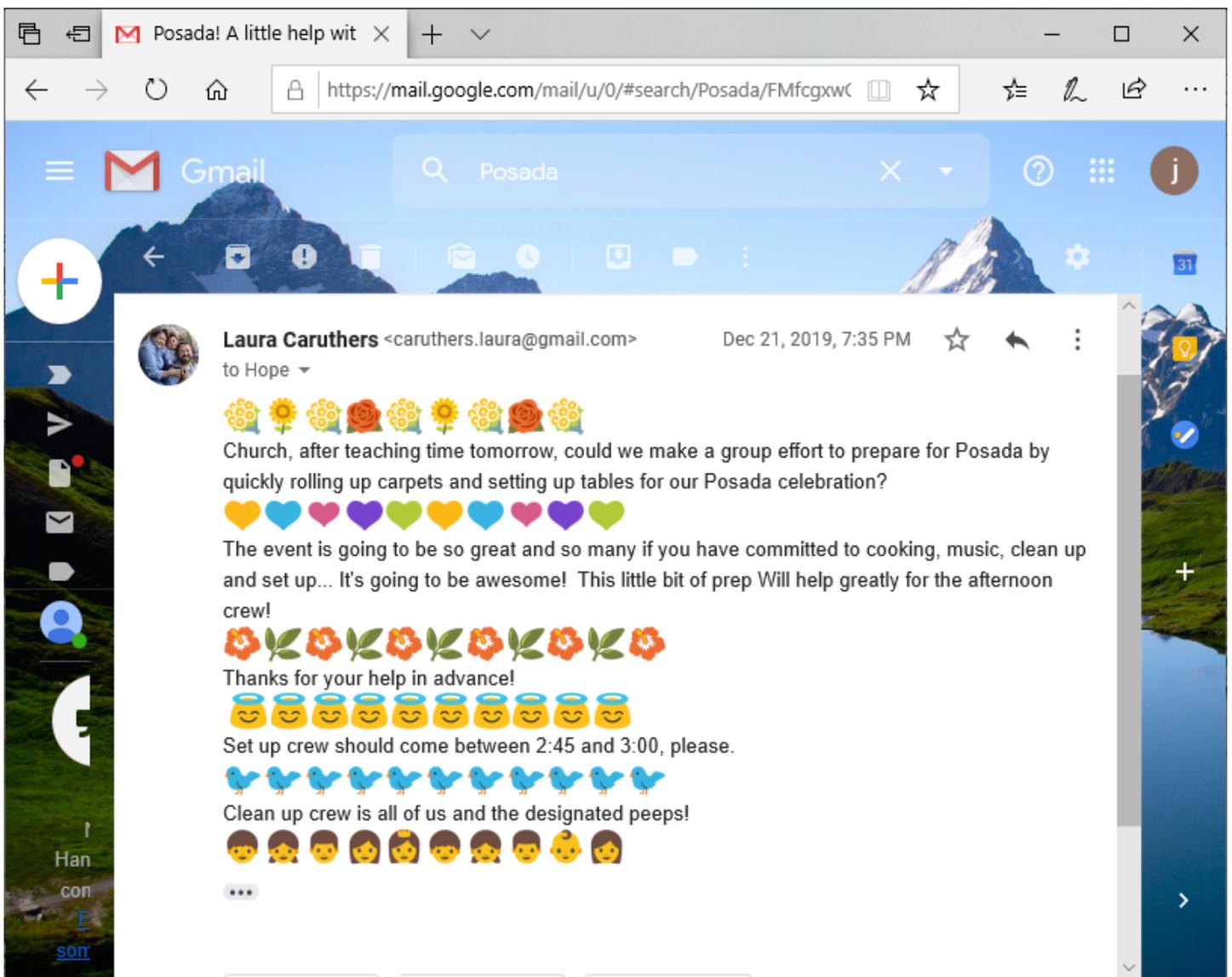
*–Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together*



Photo by Joel Looper

“And let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”

—Galatians 6:9





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Hope Fellowship's annual posada  
Photo by Joe Gatlin

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