

WITNESS MAGAZINE



VOLUME 83

NUMBER 10

OCTOBER 2000

● INTENDING COMMUNITY:

Honoring people and place

CONTENTS

8

"The icon 'round God's neck": *toward sustainable community — an interview with Larry Rasmussen by Marianne Arbogast*

Any meaningful community-talk today has to include the whole of creation, according to theologian and author Larry Rasmussen. Rasmussen describes some of the "earth-honoring communities" he has visited and calls for a Christianity that values pluralism and respects its connections to both people and place.

14

Hamtramck, Mich.: *a small city grapples with diversity and change by Camille Colatosti*

Residents of "the most multicultural city in the state of Michigan" are working to creatively address the tensions — and strengths — inherent in a diverse community.

18

Re-seeding community: *a monastic experiment in ecology and ecumenism by Marianne Arbogast*

A small women's Benedictine community in the midwest is expanding the boundaries of traditional Roman Catholic religious life to embrace members of other Christian denominations, while also working to restore the prairie lands where they live.

20

L'Arche communities: *learning to live from the heart by Richard and Stephanie Bower*

Communities which include members who are mentally disabled reveal fundamental truths about what matters in life.

26

The calling walk: *attending to the community of life by Mary Romano*

A contemplative exercise in a natural setting leads to heightened awareness of the whole community of life.

on the cover

©Jim West
IMPACT VISUALS

Volunteers from the community and across the country work in a community garden in Detroit as part of the Detroit Summer project, a three-week program where young people come together to work on projects to improve the community and to participate in educational activities.

on the back cover

©1999 Mark PoKempner
IMPACT VISUALS

Organized by Chicago's Neighborhood Housing Services (NHS), Neighborworks Day brings together people from businesses, local government, community organizations and NHS boards and staff to volunteer time for community improvement projects.

DEPARTMENTS

3 Letters

24 Short Takes

28 Book Review

5 Editorial Notes

25 Classifieds

30 Witness Profile

7 Poetry

VOLUME 83

NUMBER 10

OCTOBER 2000

Since 1917, *The Witness* has been examining church and society in light of faith and conscience — advocating for those denied systemic power as well as celebrating those who, in theologian William Stringfellow's words, have found ways to "live humanly in the midst of death." With deep roots in the Episcopal Church, we are a journal of spiritual questing and theology in practice, always ready to hold our own cherished beliefs and convictions up to scrutiny.

Manuscripts: We welcome multiple submissions. Given our small staff, writers and artists receive a response only when we are able to publish. Manuscripts will not be returned.

The Witness

Editor/Publisher
Julie A. Wortman

Senior Editor
Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann

Associate Editor
Marianne Arbogast

Staff Writer
Camille Colatosti

Magazine Production
KAT Design, Camden, ME

Book Review Editor
Bill Wylie-Kellermann

Poetry Editor
Gloria House Manana

Controller
Roger Dage

Development/Marketing
Wes Todd

Office Support
Patrica Kolon, Beth O'Hara-Fisher,
Mary Carter

Episcopal Church Publishing Co. Board of Directors

President	Stephen Duggan
Vice-President	Harlon Dalton
Secretary	Anna Lange-Soto
Treasurer	John G. Zinn

Owanah Anderson, Richard Bower, Louie Crew,
Jane Dixon, Ian Douglas, Mark MacDonald,
Chester Talton, Mitsuye Yamada

Contributing Editors

Martin Brokenleg, Kelly Brown Douglas,
Carmen Guerrero, Mary E. Hunt,
Jay McDaniel, Bill Wylie-Kellermann

Subscriptions: \$35 per year, \$5 per copy.
Foreign subscriptions add \$10 per year.

Change of address: Third Class mail does
not forward. Provide your new mailing
address to The Witness.

Offices: To reach Julie Wortman: HC 35 Box
647, Tenants Harbor, ME 04860.
Tel: (207)372-6396.
To reach Wes Todd:
118 Main Street, Thomaston, ME 04861
Tel: (207)354-7041

Website: www.thewitness.org

LETTERS

De facto apartheid

I am writing as someone who reads *The Witness* at the Michigan State University Library. The July/August issue on Denver 2000: Signs of justice and hope was even more compelling than what I had come to expect. This year brings me two separate but related assignments: I'll be serving as the President of the East Lansing Board of Education at a time when vouchers are the latest rescue-du-jour on the ballot for public education; I also serve as a volunteer member of the Lansing Catholic Diocese's Advocates for Justice Committee, attempting to form a minority-plank voice within the Catholic church here in Michigan opposing vouchers as bad public policy.

With all that as an introduction of sorts, you will understand why I was so impressed with your issue featuring Jonathan Kozol and the de facto apartheid faced by so many students in America. I'd like a copy of the issue for me to share with my colleagues on the East Lansing Board and my other colleagues in the Lansing Catholic Diocese. I applaud the work you are doing and call down blessings on your head in great abundance.

Rod Murphy
East Lansing, MI

Congratulations

Congratulations on the July/August 2000 issue of *The Witness*. You did a wonderful job of integrating so many aspects of this bioregion. We even heard from friends of ours from New York and Kansas City who enjoyed reading it.

Cathy Mueller
Denver, CO

ED. NOTE: Cathy Mueller of Earth Links not only provided us with a great article on that ministry, but also helped us become acquainted with the region during the issue-planning process. We are very grateful for her help.

No easy answers

Recently, while talking to my niece who lives in Colorado, I spoke about the April 2000 issue on No easy answers: Gender and sexual ethics for a new age (A REAL WINNER!!! Thank you for having the courage to educate this 83-year-old straight person!) and she would like to read it, but I don't want to give up my copy. Please send her a copy and sign her up for a gift subscription.

Betty Rees
Ann Arbor, MI

log on
to The
Witness

Money:

God's
principal rival
*Comments from
Peter Selby*

Spirit of Justice Awards:

*Awardees
respond*

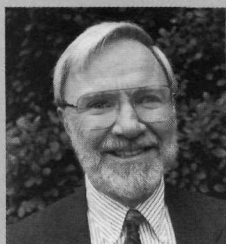
After Denver 2000:

*Louie Crew,
Katie Sherrod,
Jack Winder*

www.thewitness.org
www.thewitness.org

WITNESS BOARD ELECTS NEW PRESIDENT, DIRECTORS

The board of the Episcopal Church Publishing Company [ECPC], publisher of *The Witness* magazine, has elected a new board president and four directors.



At a board of directors meeting held in Denver, Colo., on July 9, 2000 **Stephen Duggan** was elected president of ECPC. Duggan currently serves as the Treasurer of the Executive Council of the Episcopal Church.

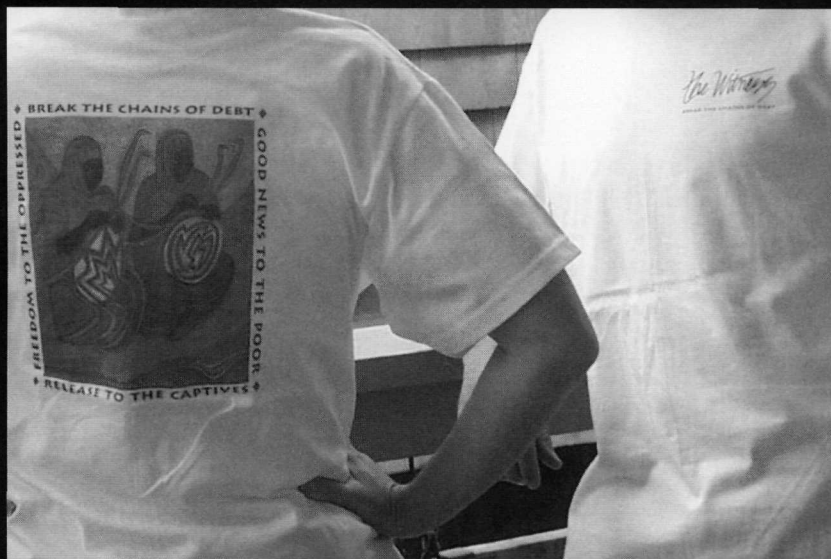
Newly elected directors include **Jane Dixon**, Suffragan Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington, **Ian Douglas**, Associate Professor of World Mission and Global Christianity at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Mass. and **Chester Talton**, Suffragan Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles.

John Zinn, ECPC treasurer, was elected to a second term. Zinn is the Chief Financial Officer of the Diocese of Newark. Other directors are: **Owanah Anderson**, elder, author and long-time Native American advocate; **Richard A. Bower**, recently retired as the Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in Syracuse, N.Y. in order to continue his work in El Salvador and the U.S. on awareness and justice in immigration issues; **Louie Crew**, author, founder of Integrity and Associate Professor of English at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey; **Harlon Dalton**, member of the Yale University Law School faculty; **Anna Lange-Soto**, Co-Vicar of El Buen Pastor in East Palo Alto and San Mateo in the Diocese of California, **Mark MacDonald**, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Alaska and Native American advocate; and poet, writer, and human rights activist **Mitsuye Yamada** of Irvine, Calif.

FOR MORE INFORMATION about *The Witness*' board of directors and their life commitments to social and economic justice please visit <www.thewitness.org>.

BREAK THE CHAINS OF DEBT ♦ GOOD

Peace and Justice proudly on your back!



Witness T-shirts
featuring art by Betty LaDuke

Just \$15

Available in MED. LRG. X-LRG.
all are 100% cotton

CALL 207.354.7041
E-MAIL wes@thewitness.org

ORDER ON-LINE
www.thewitness.org

♦ RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES ♦ FREEDOM

NEWS TO THE POOR

Intending 'queer' community

by Julie A. Wortman

Thomas Berry, one of today's foremost thinkers on ecology and religion, once said in an interview in *Parabola* that he is constantly asked about hope.

"It's not an easy question to answer, except that there's no existence without hope," he said. "I think constantly of the future of the children, and of the need for all children to go into the future as a single, sacred community. The children of the trees, the children of the birds, the children of the animals, the children of the insects — all children, including the human children, must go together into the future."

His last sentence brought me up short. Of course I knew that trees and birds and animals have children, and that all life is interdependent. But when I hear "children," my mind is conditioned to picture the human variety. And when I hear "community," I think of the bonds between human beings — which, God knows, are challenge enough to forge and sustain.

Yet at some level, doesn't all community require bridging the gap between ourselves and the "other" whom we perceive as different and separate from us? Doesn't it require resisting the conditioning that tells us who belongs and who does not?

In this issue we have tried to look at some efforts to build community across difference — difference in nationality and race, religious denomination, sexual orientation, physical and mental ability. We have highlighted, especially, the frontier that Berry points to — our need to live in community with the earth — because we believe what Larry Rasmussen (interviewed in this issue) says: Any community-talk that does not include the whole of creation is obsolete.

The natural world is more than a stage for human activity. People and place are bound together intimately. There is no hope for the future if we exclude anyone's children.

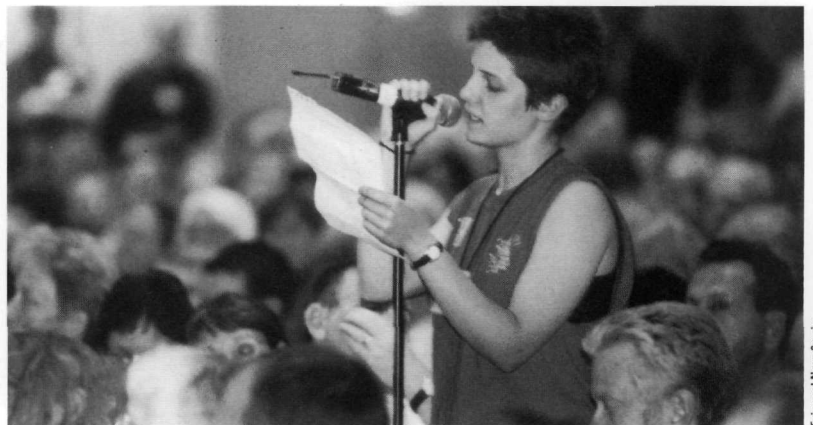
— Marianne Arbogast,
associate editor

MANY PEOPLE LEFT the Episcopal Church's General Convention this past July feeling that some decent progress had been made in the acceptance of gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered (glbt) people into the life of the church. After all, for the first time — and by an overwhelming majority that included prominent conservative leaders whose anti-gay views have been well publicized over the years — the General Convention officially recognized that members of the church are living in committed lifelong relationships other than marriages and that these relationships can be characterized by "fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God." The convention also promised that the church would do its best to supply "the prayerful support, encouragement and pastoral care necessary to live faithfully by [these values]."

At odds with this promise was the convention's rejection of a proposal to develop possible rites (to be tucked away in the Book of Occasional Services) for signifying the holiness of such relationships. Such a move, opponents were able to successfully argue, would be just plain too much for the good folks back home. Still, many proponents of the full inclusion of glbt people in the life of the church felt we had moved one step closer to our goal. It is, they said, only a matter of time.

So why did I leave Denver feeling so disheartened? The WOW2000 (Witness Our Welcome 2000) gathering held in DeKalb, Ill. a few weeks later offered a chance to think through much of the answer. The event attracted about a thousand people committed to the ecumenical "Welcoming Church" movement aimed at making Christian churches "inclusive" communities — that is, communities not just grudgingly tolerant of, but positively glad for, their glbt members.

Asked to define "inclusive community" during the conference's opening session, Roman Catholic feminist theologian and ethicist (and new *Witness* contributing editor) Mary Hunt observed, "It seems odd to speak of the



Open hearing on sexuality resolutions at General Convention.

Episcopal News Service

Christian idea of 'inclusivity' because my understanding is that the norms of Christianity are love and justice, norms which are expressed in the Christian practice of sacrament and solidarity — everyone is welcome!"

The next morning another feminist theologian, the Episcopal Church's own Carter Heyward, underscored Hunt's remarks.

"A just world," she said in a wry play on words, "is one of the queerest things in this world. Our struggle for gender and sexual justice is something much more than a struggle to be accepted to participate in the unjust structures of this world. To be 'queer' is to refuse to collude with any injustice."

Although the WOW2000 audience enthusiastically embraced both Hunt's and Heyward's messages as expressing the very heart of the Welcoming Church movement's mission, any sense of self-congratulation was quickly dispelled when a number of black participants protested both the gathering's racial tokenism (a very diverse slate of speakers, but the all-too-typical situation of the otherwise sparse presence of persons of color) and some participants' apparent obliviousness to the workings of white privilege.

"I don't mind rejection when I see it coming," pointed out the young black woman who bravely took the lead in calling the group to accountability, "but I am hurt by it when it comes in a gathering where we say all of me is welcome all the time." As Urvashi Vaid of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute stressed in a panel presentation that immediately followed, "We need an 'intersectional politics,' because we are not single-identity people."

The incident highlighted a basic requirement of making good on an intention to be inclusive that author and Episcopal priest Eric Law rehearsed at the beginning of the conference. "Inclusive community," he said, "engages in the practice of extending its boundaries when challenged that it is not inclusive."

The biggest stumbling blocks to such a radical widening of the circle in the church, needless to say, is the widely worshipped idol of church unity and the political impulses which use this abstraction to justify an anything-but-queer status quo.

At the WOW2000 conference banquet

Michael Kinnamon gave his own personal experience of how this phenomenon works. An ordained Disciples of Christ clergy person and prominent ecumenist, Kinnamon was in 1991 nominated for the position of General Minister and President of his denomination. He and his wife had previously made a modest, not very public, commitment to glbt concerns by joining GLAD (Gay, Lesbian and Affirming Disciples), an affiliation which was included in the General Minister nominee profile that was circulated during the election process. Very quickly he was branded the "pro-gay" candidate and the election turned controversial, with Kinnamon at the restless center. (One angry man wrote him repeatedly, ending each letter with, "News of your death or resignation will be welcome.")

"At the beginning of the nomination," Kinnamon told us, "I still thought in political terms: 'How can I keep from offending all parts of the church?' That was soon no longer possible, and thus I was freed to approach the months leading up to [the election] theologically: 'How can I best proclaim the good news of God's amazing love?' The question was no longer, 'Do they like me?' but, 'Am I faithful to my understanding of the Gospel?'"

That understanding received rigorous testing during the election process. At one pre-election meet-the-candidates gathering, a Disciples minister ended a question with a qualifying afterthought, "After all, these homosexuals are just worthless scum."

"What haunted me throughout those months," Kinnamon recalled, "is that I was in the position of leadership and I did not denounce him."

"Why? I tried to tell myself that I was just caught off guard, but the truth cuts deeper. My life's work as an ecumenist centers on reconciliation, on the attempt to hold community together, on the insistence that diverse voices be heard. But that night I realized there is something fundamentally impoverished about an understanding of reconciliation that left me unprepared to respond immediately and forcefully to this man."

Taking his cue from Paul's ability to live with enormous diversity because every member of the body is equally an undeserving recipient of God's grace, Kinnamon said it finally became clear to him that "one cannot stand above the

fray in the name of a reconciling vision.

"I learned that, while we are, in Paul's words, 'ambassadors of reconciliation,' we can speak that word too easily and too early. I learned that unity, if it is of God, is inseparable from justice. I learned that we must be willing to risk — to disrupt — our partial, temporary unities for the sake of God's inclusiveness. I learned that in a dangerously narrow world we dare not be caught off guard. I learned that the church, by its very nature, must be an aggressive counter-culture to every society bent on exclusion."

As I headed home from DeKalb, I realized my own deep disappointment — and, yes, anger — over the General Convention's decision to continue tolerating the exclusion of glbt people from the rites of the church was rooted in the simple Christian conviction that some things, queerly enough, are categorical. Quite bluntly, it is not okay to draw the circle more narrowly than creation's reality. And if the folks back home don't understand this, it is evidence of our church leadership's failure to make the concept clear.

Everything we know of God's reality is that it involves more, not less, than we believe. The sanctity of marriage isn't in dispute here. But there is sanctity in other relationships, too. And, most importantly, the historic privilege of some is never an acceptable reason to deny the dignity of those long denied it.

The fact is, politics, not theology, is driving the church's decision-making. And, quite frankly, although I can't claim any virtue in this regard, I am weary of it. As Michael Kinnamon reflected of his "worthless scum" experience, "Though everything in my guts doesn't want to, I must recognize this man as my brother in Christ. But this relatedness is precisely the point. For his sake and the church's, my response should have been, 'Brother, sit down! Such talk has nothing to do with the good news we proclaim. Such talk has no place in a community of those who know that they are redeemed only by grace.'"

What a queer place the church would be if we cared for each other enough to risk rejection in this way. Our willingness to do so, I believe, has everything to do with the sort of community we intend. ●

Julie A. Wortman is Witness editor/publisher.

Beguinage revisited

by Janet Shea

It is a thirteenth-century beguinage,
a community of holy women — mothers, aunts,
ancestral sisters — tending the sick.
Mary of Oignies, Juliana, Marguerite ...
shuttle trays of soft food, medicinal tea,
warm milk to the many suffering
souls to be cared for: Old women, children
on cots, restless babies in cribs.

Every so often a sister stops to rest, leans
against the bannister or door jamb. Mary
of Oignies, weakened by the marks of stigmata,
wipes the back of her hand across her forehead,
swipes a bleeding palm down the sides of her apron.

Local friars, arrayed in hooded burlap,
sit on the porch with neighborhood
men in plaid shirts, caps swinging between their knees
all awaiting instructions from the women. The men
were summoned to ward off encroaching disaster,
invasion, a possible flood. Already their boots
are slick with mud. Already the wind howls, rain
pelts the roof, fir trees like old bones creak
in the woods out back.

Bonded in time and place, tired of waiting,
the men convene in the cellar. They hammer,
check beams and joists, sandbag the foundation, trace
strategic escape routes on a torn and crinkled
map, vigilant for marauders, heretics, petty thieves.

Later, in my grandmother's Victorian, a labyrinth
of hallways and stairs, sisters ... Patricia,
Virginia, Mary Louise ... gather at Grammy's
oak table for supper. Overhead, mothers and aunts,
in rooms pungent with the aroma of lavender
and oil-of-wintergreen, settle in bed, side
rails secured, night lights aglow, The Sacred
Heart of Jesus, consoling the wall. Nearby
children and babies breathe easy, exhaling
in sleep a fragrance of warm milk and honey.
The winds out back coo like a covey of doves,
the rain a soft patter on glass.

After supper the eldest cousin retreats
to the pantry, a tumble of disarray.
She chooses among the monochromatic cache
of Mother vessels a familiar blue bowl, dried
up and cracked, its vanilla rim chipped.
She fills it with tapioca.

"I enter the circle of holy ones," she whispers,
returning to the table,
the ancient vessel steady in her hands.
Sisters and cousins, we welcome her with song.
We tell stories, pass the bowl of abundance,
feast in the mounds of meringue. White
peaks whipped firm, but not stiff.

Janet Shea is a poet who lives in
Tenants Harbor, Me.



THE ICON 'ROUND



Copyright 2020. Archives of the Episcopal Church / DFMS. Permission required for reuse and publication.

GOD'S NECK

Toward sustainable community — an interview with Larry Rasmussen

by Marianne Arbogast

LARRY RASMUSSEN is Reinhold Niebuhr Professor of Social Ethics at Union Theological Seminary in New York. His recent books include *Earth Community, Earth Ethics* (Orbis, 1996) and *Moral Fragments and Moral Community* (Fortress, 1993). Last year he delivered a series of Kellogg lectures on “Re-framing and Re-forming Community” at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Mass. Rasmussen recently returned from a sabbatical year during which he visited earth-honoring Christian communities around the world.

Marianne Arbogast: You have said that any God-talk and any community-talk that focuses solely on human beings and excludes the rest of creation is obsolete.

Larry Rasmussen: It simply doesn't do justice to creation if we only talk about community and human beings. Scientists of all kinds these days are saying, in effect, that nature is a community. The genome, for example, underscores the fact that we share the basic code of life with the rest of the community of life. The same physical laws apply across the board in the material universe. There are many different ways in which one could say that the proper word for describing creation is as a community. And Christians have said that for a long time, but since the Industrial Revolution, especially, we've limited our community-talk to one species only, that came on the scene very, very late. We occupy, as human beings, the breadth of a hair at the end of a football field in the life of the universe. So when we talk as though we were the only members of the community of creation that count, that's simply quaint.

I think it's actually worse than that. It really means

that we're worshipping a species idol or a tribal god or even a race god — as though the human race were all that mattered among how many million species. Or that one planet — ours — around a kind of middle-sized star in a universe of probably a hundred billion galaxies, is all that counts. So I think any kind of community-talk that doesn't include the whole creation doesn't do justice to creation and isn't worshipping the God of creation. I want to expand the very notion of community to include the whole cosmos.

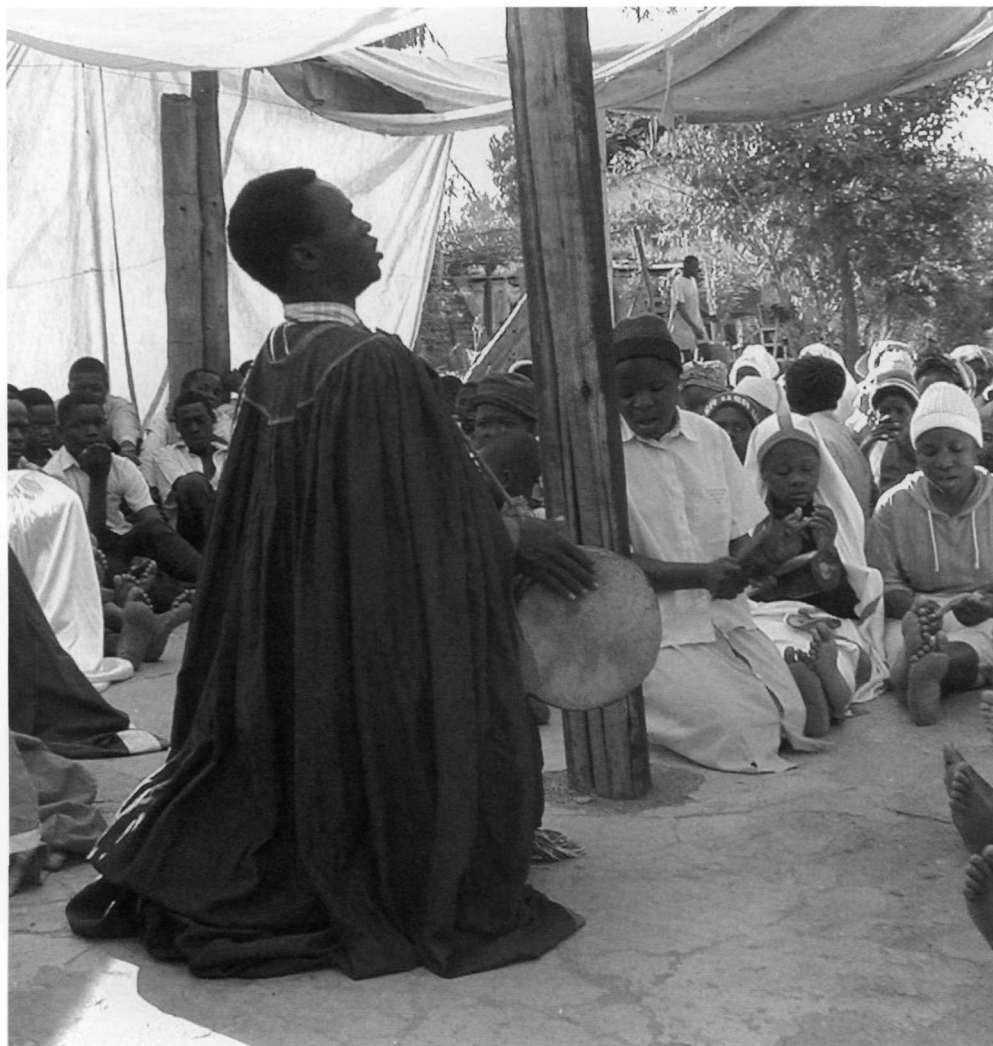
M.A.: I'm interested that you say Christian tradition upholds that, and that you date the human tendency to think only in terms of ourselves as beginning with the Industrial Revolution.

L.R.: That's a major turn, because from the time of the rise of the Industrial Revolution in the West we came to view ourselves as a kind of ecologically segregated species. We set ourselves up as subject over against the rest of creation as object. I call it apartheid thinking on the species level. And then we turned all of the talk of salvation, redemption — all the great theological words — to focus only on human beings. For the Hebrew prophets, for example, redemption is always the redemption of all creation, deliverance is always deliverance of people and the land, liberation is always the liberation of the whole community of life.

For the modern world, the Industrial Revolution is where the constriction really takes hold, but theologically it's prepared for by the Middle Ages. Medieval Catholicism took a wonderfully rich notion of the whole universe being alive and a sign of God — but, in practice, medieval Catholicism focused salvation on the standing of human beings before the judging God. And with the Reformation,

I do not think the question is, how do we wrap the global environment around the global economy?

I think the proper question is, how do you wrap both economies and environment around healthy community?



**When they
celebrate Eucharist,
they plant trees,
they gather
the harvest or
they dedicate seed.**

too, the focus became a focus on how human beings are faring in the presence of God, and salvation and redemption became reduced to the human community and human species only. And you can go back somewhat farther than that — although it's surprising to see how in the patristic teachings and the Orthodox understanding of creation you don't have the separation of the human species from the rest in the way that it developed elsewhere.

M.A.: You have argued that we should think in terms of "sustainable community" rather than "sustainable development." What's the difference?

L.R.: First of all, we have to listen very carefully to how people use these words because there isn't a single agreed-upon definition. I've had people say, "What you mean

by sustainable community is what I mean by sustainable development." But the distinction is a meaningful one because, in most cases, "sustainable development" assumes the fact and operation of the global economy and tries to sustain that ecologically. It tries to green the present efforts to integrate the economies of the world into a single global economy.

It assumes a long history that started 500 years ago with the first wave of globalization, when European tribes settled the rest of the planet in a series of neo-European civilizations here and there. Then, the language of "development" emerged after World War II, when all economies and societies were placed on the same spectrum, of whether they were "developing" (or "underdeveloped") or "developed," but you measured them all the same way — their social well-being was measured by their levels of production and consumption of goods. You didn't ask about biological wealth or cultural wealth, you just asked about economic well-being, and you identified that with society's well-being.

And then the third wave of globalization is the post-1989 triumph of liberal capitalism, or the market itself, as the model for society, and its very economic measure of well-being for the whole world. So when people talk now about sustainable development, they are assuming that history of those waves of globalization and asking, how do you make that environmentally or ecologically sustainable?

I do not think the question is, how do we wrap the global environment around the global economy? I think the proper question is, how do you wrap both economies and environment around healthy community? What is an economy for? What economy is supposed to be for is to help facilitate healthy communities. So start with local and regional community and ask, what are the proper economic arrangements, the proper

political arrangements, the proper care of the earth for healthy community, and how do you sustain that?

I do not want to assume that the global economy — and its tendencies toward monocultures and its tendencies toward disrupting local democracy, removing people's capacities for their own self-provisioning, self-organizing, self-directing activities — is that which should necessarily be sustained. I want something where folks — all the folks — have a greater say in what their life together will be, and that requires a kind of decentralization that “community” indicates and “sustainable development” does not.

M.A.: In your lecture series last year at the Episcopal Divinity School, you said that an important task for the church today is to “rightly valorize Christian pluralism,” and you contrast that to both orthodoxy and liberal tolerance. What's the difference between tolerance and valorizing pluralism?

L.R.: Tolerance was looked to, especially out of the Enlightenment, as a way of overcoming those terrible religious wars and the intolerance that has characterized so much of human history. So tolerance was a great gift of liberalism and the Enlightenment, and I don't want to sound like I don't favor tolerance and prefer the alternative! But tolerance of itself doesn't build community — certainly not among enemies and not even among interdependent strangers. Tolerance issues the invitations, but it doesn't set the table or talk about the terms by which we live together, other than not bothering one another. Well, not bothering one another is necessary, but it's not sufficient.

I think it's necessary to value the pluralism itself. How do you create community out of multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-racial, multi-lingual reality? I live in New York. There are 144 languages spoken in the city and we've got all kinds of people who occupy the same island here, and they've got to find ways to get along. So it's a terribly

important modern experiment and one that requires, for Christians, valuing Christian pluralism itself. And saying that it's *because* Christianity is expressed differently credally and culturally that it is a gift — that it can speak to so many people's different ways of leaning into the world and still provide commonality. But we have to get over the notion that Christianity is a European religion, for example. It started on three continents simultaneously and was never homogenous. I think we need to use that very fact of Christian pluralism from around the world in learning how to create community out of plural reality.

M.A.: I was struck by the statement, in one of your lectures, that “Jesus got crucified because of the folks he ate with.”

L.R.: The table and meals are always a microcosm of society, quite apart from Jesus. Society is what it eats. And how it eats, how the food is grown and gathered, who serves it, how it is produced, who's invited to the table, who's not invited to the table — all these reflect the divisions and strata in the society. Jesus, by eating with tax collectors and sinners, is crossing the division of “we” and “they” that all societies have insisted are important and that are always reflected at the table. And he gets in trouble for building a movement that puts the marginal at table on equal terms with those at the center. You've got tax collectors, who are colluding with the Roman occupation, eating with others who are part of a movement to be rid of the colonizers. However, the terms are the terms of equality.

M.A.: You have suggested that when we talk about Eucharist we need to think in terms of real economics.

L.R.: Yes. What is the economy of the Eucharist? What do the practices of shared community at the table mean for all of the tables that are set by us humans and society? I think we have radical economics and radical politics embedded in the meaning of the

sacraments themselves. They're not a kind of private space that pertains only to the gathered life of the church — they're the public space as expressed by members of the church.

M.A.: Where do you see examples of the kind of community-building needed today?

L.R.: One example is Threshold Farms, which brings farm produce to the church where I and my family belong, Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, on 100th and Amsterdam. Threshold Farms is a part of what's called CSA, community-supported agriculture, where small farmers growing produce offer subscriptions to city folks. We pay x number of dollars a share for the growing season, and then on a weekly basis we pick up the produce. The farmers use this urban-rural link for their livelihood and there's a real community dimension to it. Recipes are shared, subscribers are invited to participate in events at the farm, kids are especially welcome. Once in a while, in town, folks will stay on a Tuesday when we have pick-up of our produce and we'll all have a community potluck together. That's a very different experience from industrialized agriculture where the farmer is producing for a mass market and where the consumer doesn't know how or where the food was grown, and has no meaningful relationship to the producer of the food.

Another kind of example is faith-based community organizing, where the churches become anchor communities in the efforts of people to address the needs of their neighborhoods. The philosophy of some of the community organizing has changed. Instead of organizing around an issue — say, more jobs, or getting rid of a toxic waste site — and then dissolving until the next issue comes around, there is an effort to organize for the sake of creating community and supporting community gifts and assets, and then, from there, taking on the issues as they arise.

Another example is the Maryknoll Ecological Sanctuary in Baguio City in Luzon, the northern island of the Philippines, where I spent some time during my sabbatical year. In 1991, an earthquake destroyed much of Baguio, including the convent, and they decided to rebuild not a convent but a bioshelter and to establish an ecological sanctuary. Baguio's a mountainous city and they're on top of one of the hills. They established the sanctuary there, in part, to preserve the 200-year-old pines that are being lost to deforestation as the city grows. But it wasn't just that kind of protectionist thing. There are 14 "stations of the cosmic journey" in the ecological sanctuary, that express the whole tale of evolution as a religious tale. It's all told Filipino-style. A Philippine artist and students from the university, together with the sisters, said, how do we tell the story of who we are as peoples of these islands as a part of the cosmic story?

The Maryknoll community has, for a long time, been working with the peoples of the mountains who have lost much of their land and some of their culture to the impact of international mining and logging interests. So this ecological sanctuary with its meeting-place, which is called Center for the Integrity of Creation, is a place where the urban poor and the rural poor come together and work on how to address the sustainability of their own local communities and the region. The ecological sanctuary is an effort to provide the context, host those meetings, but also give it ritual shape. Every major event there starts with earth prayers. They are danced in the environmental theater by people who are having the meeting and by students from the school for the deaf which is in the sanctuary itself. It's a beautiful example of community-building, of sustained efforts at sustainable community that addresses the issues of the human community together with the issues of environmental well-being. They would just say "the justice issues" and mean by that

society and nature together.

M.A.: Could you say more about your recent sabbatical?

L.R.: It was a wonderful year. I have a research project — and I'm trying to find people interested in joining me — that I call "Song of Songs: Christianities as Earth Faiths." "Song of Songs," of course, refers to that earthy little book of the Hebrew Bible where you've got two love stories going on at the same time — you've got this sensuous love between human beings, and then you've got the sensuous love of these passionate souls for the land and its life. But it's also a reference to a statement by Dietrich Bonhoeffer in an address on the foundations of Christian ethics in 1928. He says: "The earth remains our mother just as God remains our father, and our mother will only lay in the father's arms those who are true to her. Earth and its distress — this is the Christian's song of songs." So Bonhoeffer is saying that fidelity to God is lived as fidelity to the earth.

I want to find the expressions of Christianity that contribute to earth-honoring ways of living. So I went looking for communities that were already living earth-oriented, earth-enhancing ways of life. I purposely picked a very wide spectrum of confessional, cultural, racial, ethnic, geographical expressions of Christianity. I think the wrong way to go is to try to develop an eco-theology and call people to an eco-church as some new and separate stream. Instead, we need to draw upon the deep traditions that have been around a couple of millennia, expressed in a variety of ways. So I asked the communities I visited, what deep traditions of Christianity are you drawing upon and what are you doing with them?

The Maryknoll Ecological Sanctuary was drawing on rich Catholic sacramentalism and Roman Catholic mysticism and traditions of the contemplative life, and their work was deeply informed by that.

The Coptic Church in the desert in Egypt

was drawing upon the traditions of the desert fathers and the desert mothers as it greens the desert. In that tradition, the desert is the place of death and barrenness and the assaults of Satan and evil, and the way in which you show resurrection or new creation or new life is to green the desert. You create Eden on the home turf of death itself. So the greening of the desert is theological as well as a way of putting food on the table.

The African Association of Earthkeeping Churches in Zimbabwe was another. This is part of a group of African-initiated or African independent churches that are trying to, as they say, "regain the lost lands and reclothe the earth." When they celebrate Eucharist, they plant trees, they gather the harvest or they dedicate seed. They try to restore the land, but they're also working very hard for land reform, which is a big, volatile, contentious issue in Zimbabwe, because the land was taken by the colonizers and the best land is in the hands of white Zimbabweans who are a small minority.

Then I went to the Iona Community in the Inner Hebrides off the coast of Scotland. The Celtic tradition is a tradition of creation-filled asceticism. You say no to one way of life and yes to another way of life, and live it out with very disciplined spiritual practices. It's the tradition of the monks. This creation-filled asceticism intrigued me, because so much of asceticism has been earth-denying and body-denying.

One of the other communities I visited was Orthodox Alaska, because the Orthodox Church in Alaska, which was founded by the Russians, is overwhelmingly native American. I wanted to see what kind of synthesis there was of a native American cosmology of sea and land and sky, with Russian Orthodox earth-filled asceticism. One of the iconographers there who's a native person himself told me a Russian saying that he says is a favorite: "Earth is the icon that hangs 'round God's neck." In the iconic tradition you take



the particulars of earth — you know, there's a plant, there's a saint's face, there's a raven, there's a wolf. These are all ways of looking at the reality of earth in order to enter into the mystery of God and the cosmos.

M.A.: It must have been encouraging to experience that breadth of positive models.

L.R.: Yes, and it was great fun when I would tell people in one community about the ones I'd been to before. They found it so energizing to know that there were other folks concerned with the same things, because oftentimes they felt they were the only ones, and often they met a lot of opposition in their own churches. Many of them encountered the criticism that attention to the environment was detracting from attention to people's issues and problems. (The African Association of Earthkeeping Churches never met that because the problems were one and the same — they had to survive on degraded land. I've never found a poor community that has said, it's either the environment or people, because they experience degradation to the environment as a

part of the same dynamic by which they experience oppression.)

One of the reasons I emphasize valorizing Christian pluralism is because to be rooted and honor earth means doing so in a particular place. You can't do that generally. It's the flora and the fauna, it's the geology of a particular place. So you have to be able to have varieties of Christianity that can give expression in a variety of places. You have to think ecologically about ecumenism and ecumenically about place. It was fascinating to me to see how desert spirituality mirrored the desert, how mountain spirituality mirrored the mountain, how Celtic spirituality mirrored Ireland and the west coast of Scotland. All the images in their prayers are images of the world around them — it's just good reporting! So the pluralism of Christianity needs to be one that lets that Christianity resonate with the people and the place together. ●

Marianne Arbogast is associate editor of The Witness, <marianne@thewitness.org>.

**It was fascinating
to me how desert
spirituality mirrored
the desert, how
mountain spirituality
mirrored the
mountain, how Celtic
spirituality mirrored
Ireland and the west
coast of Scotland.**

HAMTRAMCK,



Hamtramck artist Denis Orłowski standing before one of many murals he has painted throughout the city.

A small city grapples with diversity and change

by Camille Colatosti

MY HUSBAND, Phillip Kwik, grew up in Hamtramck, Mich., where we now live. He lived with his parents, four sisters and one brother in a wood-framed house crowded on a standard 100 x 30 lot. He played with the neighborhood kids, attended mass on Sundays at the Catholic church down the street, and walked to school during the week. His parents owned a candy and beer store — Kwik's Beer and Wine. This store, with barely enough room for a counter, beer cooler and ice cream freezer, supported the family for 30 years and put all six children through college.

When we first started dating, about 10 years ago, I realized that my husband's connection to his hometown differed from any feeling that I had ever had for a place.

Hamtramck, to him, was home. As he puts it, "Hamtramck is people-centered. It's real. We have neighborhoods and neighbors. You can walk around Hamtramck and interact with people." It didn't take me long to see that I love Hamtramck for the same reason that he does: This is a place that defines community.

Hamtramck is a 2.2-square-mile-city surrounded by, but politically independent from, Detroit. In the 1950s, it was home to about 50,000 predominantly Polish-American working-class immigrants. It was best known for its rowdy bars, fresh kielbasa, crowded blocks, meticulously maintained lawns and Polish bakeries.

The Dodge Main auto manufacturing plant, located in Hamtramck from 1910 until it was demolished in 1981,

M I C H I G A N

employed, at its height, over 25,000 people. It was the place of one of the first sitdown strikes of the United Auto Workers. In the spring of 1937, Dodge Main workers forced Chrysler to recognize the union. This strike revealed the power of the people of Hamtramck, their ability to join together to fight for a common cause. My 83-year-old father-in-law, who participated in the strike, remembers this struggle with pride. "Hamtramck people have always known how to get something done," he says.

New immigrants

The Hamtramck of today, with almost 18,000 people, differs from the Hamtramck of 30 or 40 years ago, when my husband was growing up. The Polish Catholic dominance is decreasing. While there remain three Catholic parishes, they have lost population. The schools at one parish closed all together; the other Catholic schools are shrinking. The Polish fraternal organizations — the Alliance of Poles and the Polish Falcons — left the city and moved to the suburbs.

Hamtramck does remain an immigrant community, however. Some immigrants still come from Poland, but many more come to Hamtramck from other parts of the world. A large population of Arab-Americans, mostly from Yemen, arrived in the 1970s, and continues to bring family and friends to Hamtramck. At around that same time, Albanians arrived from Yugoslavia. More recently, beginning in the mid-1980s and continuing to the present, immigrants arrived from west Asia — Pakistan and Bangladesh, especially. Bosnian refugees have also settled in Hamtramck. According to Walter Wasacz, a reporter with the weekly community paper, *The Hamtramck Citizen*, Hamtramck is "the most multicultural city in the state of Michigan." Over 65 percent of the children who attend Hamtramck public schools speak English as a second language. Nearly 20 percent of the students speak Arabic at home;

15 percent speak Bengali; 14 percent speak Serbo-Croatian; 7 percent speak Polish and another 7 percent speak Albanian.

This diversity is intoxicating. When I walk down the street, I hear different languages spoken. The rich spicy scents of Middle Eastern food and curry compete with the smells of cabbage and kielbasa. I hear the call from the mosque as well as the bells from the parish church. The girls who live across the street wear traditional Indian dress as they strap on inline skates and race each other down the cracked sidewalks. Small boys play cricket in the parking lot of the neighborhood school. The women who push baby carriages down the block sing lullabies in Bosnian.

Suburban refugees and artists

In Hamtramck, there is also another group of newcomers — refugees, not from war-torn countries, but from the suburbs. Most are young. Many attend college at nearby Wayne State University, a huge public school located five minutes from Hamtramck, or at the Center for Creative Studies, a nationally renowned arts school.

Ellen Phillips moved to Hamtramck six years ago. "I grew up in the suburbs, but I was looking for a real community," she explains. "I had a sense of something missing in my life but I wasn't able to put my finger on it. I came to a festival in Hamtramck and found something here. I said to my husband, I think this is it.

"Not a day goes by," continues Phillips, "whether I'm walking or riding a bike, without something happening that makes me feel profoundly connected to life. Yesterday, I saw a little old lady stop to wave at a cat in a store window. When I walk out my front door, I wave to my neighbors and the kid riding by and I know that I am part of something larger than my own life."

Hamtramck is also home to many artists. Autumn Dunbar is one of them. Now 31 years

old, Dunbar moved to Hamtramck 11 years ago when she was a student at the Center for Creative Studies. It was the bustle of Hamtramck's main shopping street, Joseph Campau, on a warm afternoon that attracted her.

"I prefer to live in a community where I can walk to shopping," she explains. "And I like the little front lawns. They're unique. The streets remind me of New York." Dunbar also likes the diversity of her neighborhood. "At dawn and dusk I can hear an Arab neighbor saying his prayers," she says.

As Greg Kowalski, chair of Hamtramck's Historical Commission and author of *Our Town: The Story of Hamtramck*, explains, "Artists and other creative people are attracted to the city for its grittiness." In fact, Hamtramck's current mayor, Gary Zych, is a sculptor who was born in Hamtramck and raised in the suburbs. He moved back to the city when he began teaching at Lawrence Technical University.

According to Wasacz: "We can compare Hamtramck to areas like New York, Brooklyn and Queens. People left the city for the greener pastures of the suburbs and now many of them, or their children, are moving back to the city where they see fabulous opportunities and a kind of energy that they long for."

Preserve our parks

This energy, and the potential of all Hamtramckans to work together to create the kind of community we want, became clear in 1996. That year, then Mayor Robert Kozaren joined with the city's director of public housing to devise a scheme to use Housing and Urban Development funds to replace the city's major park — Veterans Memorial — with a police station.

Veterans Memorial Park had been neglected for almost 20 years. Its six tennis courts had grown cracks and were almost completely covered with weeds. The city did not mow the park at all. Litter was strewn everywhere. Rotting boards and a rusting

fence surrounded the skating rink. Swings were taken down and never replaced.

The threat of the bulldozer spurred the community to recognize the park's importance. A group called Preserve Our Parks formed in 1996. My husband was president and I served as secretary. Approximately 20 people, of mixed ages and ethnicities, met weekly to discuss ways to save the park.

We took a three-pronged approach: First, we questioned the legality of building a city police station with HUD funding. Second, we put a referendum on the ballot in November 1996. The referendum created the Ordinance to Preserve Park Land, prohibiting the city from putting a building on a park without first winning a two-thirds vote of the people. The ordinance won 65 percent of the electorate. Days before the election, HUD ruled that the Hamtramck Housing Authority would be misappropriating funds if it were to build a police station on the park.

The third prong of the campaign involved not only saving the park but also repairing it.

Volunteers chopped down weeds and mowed the lawn. We installed tennis nets, new swings, trash cans and benches. We replaced the old boards around the skating rink. This past summer, we ran an inline hockey program for over 100 children. In the fall, we will hold our fifth annual Children's Day, a free festival for children. The event features arts and crafts, sports, games and prizes and draws over 1,000 children.

Preserve Our Parks was successful because it involved the community — young and old, children and adults, all nationalities. The campaign also led the community to remember its history: Once parks and recreation were important to the city. Veterans Park was home to Hamtramck's championship Little League team in 1959, the only team in Michigan ever to win the Little League World Series. Hamtramck also produced tennis champions, including Jane Peaches Bartkowicz.

Reviewing our history led us to discuss the future: What kind of community could Hamtramck become? Shouldn't we have well-tended parks and green spaces? And just as important, the Preserve Our Parks campaign showed that united, we can improve our lives. Sharon Buttry, an Ameri-

can Baptist minister and the executive director of the Friendship House — a Hamtramck community service agency — describes a feeling that many of us share. "Hamtramck is a place that you can get your arms around. It's not just statistics here. You can have hope that something can be done, that we can change people's lives."

Community nightmares

Unfortunately, for every success like Preserve Our Parks, there are dozens of other stories in which former Hamtramck officials' poor decisions resulted in economic or environmental nightmares.

alley was replaced with a Rallys, while the city's last movie theater was torn down for a Wendys. A strip mall, complete with chain grocery, as well as drug and auto parts stores, was built at one of the city's main intersections, the site of the former high school. Across the street, a McDonalds was erected.

In an attempt to become a player in the real estate game, Hamtramck purchased the site of the former Sherwin-Williams lead paint factory. When the city later sold the land to Freezer-Services, the new owner discovered, not surprisingly, lead-contaminated soil. Freezer-Services sued the city and the taxpayers were forced to pay \$6 million for



Hamtramck teens at Preserve Our Parks' Children's Day — a children's festival in 1999.

In 1980, Hamtramck and Detroit officials conspired to allow General Motors to build the Poletown Assembly plant on the border of the two cities. Together, both governments razed 465 acres of land, knocking down hundreds of homes, 16 churches, two schools, a hospital, and the closed Dodge Main plant. In addition, the cities gave GM generous tax abatements of 50 percent over 12 years. Despite this corporate welfare, the workforce at Poletown never reached more than half the proposed size, and the surrounding industrial park, promised to revitalize Hamtramck, never materialized.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, this trend continued. The funky two-story bowling

the clean-up.

And in 1991, former city officials allowed a medical waste incinerator to open in a poor, predominately Arab-American and African-American neighborhood. This facility, the only commercial one in the state of Michigan, pumps mercury into the air at 30 to 60 times acceptable rates.

These policy disasters led many into the public realm. Some, like my husband Phillip Kwik, Ellen Phillips and Gary Zych, ran for and won public office.

Zych and Phillips are proponents of "new urbanism" — the idea that Hamtramck needs to maintain and expand its sense of neighborhoods and community. Kwik and

Rob Cedar, the founder of the Hamtramck Environmental Action Team (HEAT), have developed an inside-outside “green strategy”: Kwik on the inside as president of the City Council, writing and passing tough environmental ordinances, and Cedar on the outside, applying the much-needed community pressure.

“People in Hamtramck are victimized by corporate pollution,” Cedar says. “We have to adopt a new way of thinking so that we don’t bend over backwards for industry. We deserve clean air. We want our community to be a green place to live.”

Race

In order for Hamtramck to grow, people will need to redefine not only their relationship with development and the environment, but also their relationships with each other. A number of conflicts plague Hamtramck. These are related mostly to diversity and to differences in political expectation.

As Kwik sees it, “Divisions among people are largely racial, sometimes phrased as the ‘new’ versus the ‘old’ people. The security that existed in this community when I was growing up — when the large majority of the population was Polish Catholic — is no longer there. To me, this makes Hamtramck exciting, but to some this makes Hamtramck scary. So many encounters that I have with others make some mention of race or nationality.”

A recent encounter with an acquaintance, a Polish Catholic woman who is selling her house and moving to the suburbs, is representative. She told me not to worry because she sold her house to a young Catholic couple. In City Council chambers, one member — a Polish Catholic man — complains repeatedly about “those new stores.” While he speaks in code, all know that he is referring to a strip of new restaurants and clothing shops owned largely by Bangladeshi-Americans.

“The comments about race keep us divided,” says Kwik. “They make it clear that there is not an acceptance of diversity and difference.” Hamtramck’s young people note this obsession with race as well. Sixteen-year old Sammy has lived in the U. S. most of his life. He came to New York from Bangladesh when he was a year old and he has been in Hamtramck two years. He likes the “different

colors in Hamtramck,” he says. “But everyone is classified; everyone is in one category or another and people don’t mix so much.”

The reluctance to mix is especially clear in city politics. In Hamtramck’s 78-year history, all but a handful of elected officials have been Polish-American Catholics. A few were of Ukrainian descent. Only one African-American has ever been elected to public office. No people of Arabic, Bangladeshi or Albanian descent have been elected.

About 30 percent of the city’s workforce is African-American. But until Mayor Zych began his term in 1997, there were no African-American department heads. Recently, the city hired its first Bangladeshi-American — Shahab Ahmed — to fill the new position of multicultural director.

Ahmed tries to welcome newcomers to Hamtramck. “A lot of people are coming here from other countries,” he explains. “If they find someone in the mayor’s office with an accent, they feel they are talking to someone who understands.”

Since taking the job in 1998, Ahmed has made a concerted effort to include newcomers in the political process; he also helps people earn their citizenship and register to vote. In 1997, there were only 67 Indian voters in Hamtramck, Ahmed says. Last year, there were 450 and now there are close to 800. People are motivated to get involved in politics.

Despite his achievements, Ahmed admits that working in City Hall can be difficult. “Some of the longtime workers and some Hamtramck citizens come directly up to my face and say racist things, like ‘we have a boat to ship you back home.’”

This anti-immigrant feeling became clearest during the 1999 mayoral and city council election, when Ahmed ran on a slate with Zych and Kwik. The opposing mayoral candidate — a Polish-American Catholic who has lived in Hamtramck his whole life and whose father served as mayor 20 years ago — was supported by a group called Concerned Citizens for a Better Hamtramck. CCBH claimed that non-citizens would be voting in the election.

The group registered as challengers to the November 1999 election, in order, as they put it in their literature, to make sure that

the election remained “pure.” On election day, CCBH challenged more than 40 voters for “citizenship,” violating those voters’ civil rights. According to the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice, whom Zych and Kwik called to investigate the discrimination, “Some voters were challenged before they signed their application to vote. Other voters were challenged after they had signed their applications and their names had been announced. The challenged voters had dark skin and distinctly Arabic names, such as Mohamed, Ahmed, and Ali.”

Worse, the City Clerk’s office, which runs the elections, clearly allowed these violations to continue. City Clerk Ethel Fiddler has made it known that she does not support Mayor Zych or the new direction of the city.

Justice Department officials said that they had not seen such blatant violations of the Voting Rights Act since the 1960s. Because of this, a number of important changes will be put in place: All election officials, including the Clerk, must undergo a training program; all election materials must appear in English, Arabic and Bengali. Each polling place must hire at least one bilingual Arabic-American and one bilingual Bangladeshi-American. In addition, a federal examiner will oversee all elections until December 31, 2003.

Ahmed is hopeful about the changes that will be put in place. He is also optimistic that he, or another immigrant, will be elected to public office in the near future. While he did not win a city council seat in 1999, he lost by only 100 votes (out of 3500 cast). “If there were an Arab-American or a Bangladeshi on Council, things would be different,” he states.

Ahmed’s optimism is shared by others in Hamtramck. As Buttry explains, “There is, in Hamtramck, an underlying sense of hopefulness. This is why people stay here. We can envision what our actions can do. We all focus on community: What will the future look like? How can we define ourselves? How can we reach our potential and use Hamtramck’s conflicts constructively, to create the kind of world that we want to be remembered for 100 years from now?” ●

Camille Colatosti is The Witness’ staff writer, <colakwik@ix.netcom.com>.

RE-SEEDING

A monastic experiment in ecology and ecumenism

by Marianne Arbogast



Lynne Smith, an ordained Presbyterian minister and Benedictine sister, joins in the community's work of restoring the prairie lands surrounding it.

WHEN THE SISTERS of St. Benedict of Madison, Wis. established their monastery in 1954, they were surrounded by pastureland. Today, they are ringed by high-priced homes and recreation developments. But for the small, traditionally Roman Catholic community of women, the changes provided a catalyst which led them to a new commitment to the land and a new venture in ecumenical monasticism.

A decade ago, after a developer approached them with a proposal to build a golf course on their property, the sisters decided they needed to do some planning of their own. "We had consistently said no to the developers on selling any of our land, but we began to realize that the building being done around us had begun to heavily silt in a small glacial lake on our property," says Joanne Kollasch, the community's director of formation and one of its founding members. "We were beginning to lose the

wildlife, the deer and the birds. So we began an initiative to reclaim the lake by dredging some of the silt, and also to re-seed the hills with prairie grasses and plants."

The community is now committed to restoring half of their 130 acres of land to pre-settlement prairie, and the reclaiming of 10,000-year-old "Lost Lake" has been officially designated as part of the Lake Mendota Priority Watershed Demonstration Project. "It will look the way it did before the Europeans arrived," says Marykay Bell, director of communications for the monastery's large conference center, and an Episcopalian. "They are planting native wildflowers and grasses and building up an oak savannah. Hospitality is a Benedictine charism, and the restoration of the land is hospitality to the people who come here and to the land itself."

As the sisters continued their visioning process, they were also drawn to embark on a unique ecumenical experiment.

"Since we were doing this planning, we said, let's do some planning for the community," Kollasch says. "We asked, what kind of monastic presence will we take into the next century? The strain of ecumenism was very strong for us, because from 1966 we had an ecumenical retreat and conference center. So we took the next step, which was to invite celibate Christian women of other denominations to form community with us."

A number of women have explored the possibility of membership, and this past June Lynne Smith, an ordained Presbyterian minister, made her first profession of vows, joining Kollasch and Mary David Walgenbach in the core monastic community. (Three other sisters are retired and living elsewhere.)

"Ecumenical work has always been an important part of my own life and ministry, but a lot of ecumenical work is done on the national level, as

COMMUNITY

opposed to actually living it out," Smith says. "This is pretty exciting to me. I don't know of any other monastic community I could join without becoming either Roman Catholic or Episcopalian." Smith maintains membership in the Presbyterian Church and has formed ties with a local Presbyterian congregation.

"Each tradition has its own gifts and strengths, so the women who come will bring those," she believes. "The strength of the Roman Catholic — and not just Roman Catholic, but the Benedictine tradition — is liturgy. The Presbyterian heritage is theological reflection and study of the scriptures. What unites us is the Liturgy of the Hours, which is Benedictine. That liturgy was there before there were any splits in the church. We all take turns leading. It is so lifegiving to me — it's powerful to pray together like that."

Kollasch also stresses that the goal is not to erase distinctions. "We need to help people understand that we're not setting up some new sect, and that traditions do not wash out in an ecumenical community."

But in the day-to-day rhythm of monastic life — marked by prayer, retreat work, hospitality and care for the earth — "there is so much more that unites us than divides us," she says. "The question should not be, why are Christians coming together, but why are they separated? We take as normal the separation, but we should take as normal our common baptism."

"Ecumenism finds an easy entry into Benedictine monastic life, because of the values of respect for persons, hospitality and dialogue," Kollasch says. "And Benedictine life is organic. How do you define clearly what is a tree? By the time you get through defining it, you're not interested. There is something of that in the Benedictine psyche. There is a great deal of emphasis on love of poetry, of beauty, of nature.

Those things are universal."

St. Benedict's Center has hosted not only Christians of various denominations but Jewish and Buddhist guests as well — including, once, the Dalai Lama.

"People who live here expect that we will pray with Lutherans, Presbyterians, Methodists, Episcopalians, Hindus sometimes, on any given day," Kollasch says. "So it is an easy next step to live in community together."

The core community forms the heart of a much larger circle of spiritual kinship. An ecumenical group of men and women called the "Community of St. Benedict" meets regularly for prayer, reflection and mutual support. Benedictines from overseas often live at the monastery while studying in the U.S., and the staff of St. Benedict's Center forms yet another circle of extended community.

"Our co-workers buy into the vision very deeply," Kollasch says. "Our groundskeeper, for instance, is married, but he is a monk in his heart. He's been here a long time, and he subscribes to care of the earth."

"If you put this community of ours in the center you can draw some concentric circles around it, and how porous you make the membrane has to do not only with the community but with how other people identify with that community. I tell people that there are many doors to St. Benedict's."

"The spirit of St. Benedict says, respect people of all backgrounds. Benedict took into his monastery the barbarians who were overrunning Europe, the wealthy as well as the very poor. That tradition of hospitality, to receive each person who comes to the monastery as Christ, gives the framework in which to insert 21st-century dynamics. People still need acceptance. When they come to the monastery, we don't ask them to pass a test on their beliefs. They are looking for something in this place, so we invite them in and hope they find it. There is dialogue in which we

and the guests learn and are blessed."

St. Benedict's regularly offers a program called T.I.M.E. — Together in Monastic Experience. Participants spend three to six days sharing in the life of the community. Each day begins and ends with silent centering prayer. The Liturgy of the Hours is prayed in common in the morning, at midday and at dusk. Mornings are spent in conference or dialogue, afternoons are given to manual work — often outdoors — and evenings are free.

The sisters have also led retreats with brothers from the Taizé community, hosted the Madison Interfaith Dialogue, and held a Jewish-Christian-Buddhist retreat. Numerous volunteers also come to St. Benedict's to help with earth-tending projects.

At the dawn of the new millennium, 175 people showed up for a New Year's Eve gathering which had been advertised on local radio and television stations. Guests shared a meal, then chose between a variety of spiritual exercises including centering prayer, Taizé prayer and a hymn sing. At midnight, everyone gathered around a bonfire on the hill outside.

"It was fun and people absolutely loved it," Kollasch says. "And there were people from a lot of different backgrounds."

In the transition to a new style of monastic community, flexibility and patience are important, she says.

"It has to be the experimental approach, not an approach whereby you figure it all out in advance. It is very important for us to learn to hear each other. We can't do that if we have determined all the answers before we have the questions. The vision must have its time, I'm convinced of that. We have to take the approach of waiting, seeing, not casting it in a mold." ●

Marianne Arbogast is associate editor of The Witness, <marianne@thewitness.org>.

L'ARCHE COMM

Learning to live from the heart

by Stephanie and Richard Bower



Stephanie Bower with Eric, a core member of the L'Arche community in Syracuse, N.Y.

L'ARCHE BEGAN 36 years ago in the northern French village of Trosly-Breuil, with three men living in community. Jean Vanier was a French Canadian philosopher, the son of a prominent family in Quebec, Canada. Raphael Simi and Philippe Seux were two men who had lived most of their lives in mental institutions.

"I had created inner barriers to protect myself from my fears and vulnerability," Vanier writes in *The Heart of L'Arche*. "In this beginning of community, the three of us, I began to learn to live from the heart."

L'Arche is French for "the Ark," a safe place to hold people where God's covenant has been manifested. There are now approximately 120 L'Arche communities around the world, including 14 in the U.S. Rooted in the teachings of Jesus, especially the Beatitudes, L'Arche offers family to the outcast and hope to neighborhoods where they live.

UNITIES

Learning to be community, to be family together, is at the heart of L'Arche. Vanier reminds people continually that "society regards people with disabilities as 'misfits,' 'sub-human.' The birth of a child with a handicap is considered a tragedy for a family. But in L'Arche we discover that these people have a great openness of heart and capacity for love; they seem to reveal what is most fundamental in all of us. Living with them in community can be difficult, but it also transforms us and teaches us what really matters in life. We may come to L'Arche to help the weak, but we soon realize that, in fact, it is they who are helping us."

Taking time to be present

A L'Arche assistant of several years (assistants are the people who live in community with the core members, those who are mentally disabled), Stephanie Bower recalls that "one of my earliest lessons in L'Arche was to take time to be present to people. Trying to be efficient in the many tasks that needed to be done, as well as keep core members involved in meaningful activities, I asked a core member of my community, Eric, if he would like to have coffee with me. While I was preparing the coffee, I remembered I was supposed to make a birthday cake. Time was of the essence. I began preparations for the cake. I gave Eric his cup of coffee at the kitchen table near where I was working. By this time another core member had expressed interest in helping cook. I began to involve this person in mixing the batter. Realizing that I had somehow forgotten my promise to Eric, I tried to involve him too. When I asked him if he would like to help, he simply pointed to the coffee, looked me straight in the eye and said very quietly, 'You and I are having coffee together.'

"What I had promised was to share coffee and to be fully present to him, not to do something. I asked his forgiveness. We sat and sipped coffee together for several minutes in silence. In due time the cake got made. In the meantime I had learned an important lesson that has affected all of my relationships since then. I began to listen deeply and with my heart to people I love."

At the heart of the L'Arche family is the spirit of celebration. Everything gets celebrated in L'Arche — healing, return from time away, birthdays, anniversaries, sacramental milestones such as baptism and confirmation, achievements as well as failures.

And L'Arche is a community of forgiveness. Members of the community, both core members and assistants, may bring years of loneliness and rejection — and often even deep anger — to the common life. Many people who are mentally handicapped feel guilty just for living. This guilt is often expressed in anger. Individuals who are mentally disabled are people who live with an open directness. The hurt and pain they have lived are inevitably expressed, touching the more repressed pain of the assistants.

Core members

Sandrita, a child whose home had been swept away in the 1998 Honduran hurricane, was brought to the L'Arche house, Casa San Jose, in Choluteca. Sandrita, mentally disabled, lived in a loving but poor home, with many siblings and no discipline. Most of the skills she had learned to cope with her earlier life were disruptive to this new community. After a little more than a year in L'Arche, Sandrita is learning how to forgive and be

Lifesharing Communities

by Linda Strobmier

MY DAUGHTER MAGGIE, now nearly 30, has lived for the last 11 years in a "family of choice" called the Life Needs Coop, part of a larger community of lifesharing families known as Cadmus Lifesharing Association. Maggie is multiply handicapped — brain-damaged, with multiple physical handicaps. She is also absolutely at home in this family, where she knows herself to be whole and wholly accepted — essential, even.

Maggie's particular household is the largest in Cadmus. Nick and Andrea Stanton are the heads of the household, which they share with seven to 10 handicapped adults and three to eight "co-workers." The household is constantly shifting in composition and number, depending on who needs a vacation, who needs respite care, how many volunteers from overseas have come to work and live alongside, and even how many of Nick and Andrea's five children or their six grandchildren are staying over for a few days or a few weeks.

The house, whose kernel is a two-over-two New England farmhouse with a walk-in fireplace built in 1750, has grown, like the family — a bit here, some more there — into a rambling, comfortable home surrounded by flower beds. There are now at least four usable common room spaces and 12 or so bedrooms in the main house, decks and balconies and patios on three sides, plus offices and shops in outbuildings and the barn, which also houses an eight-loom weavery and a pasta-producing operation, the handiwork of their middle son, a professional chef.

This lifesharing community is rooted in the Camphill Movement, started by a German pediatrician, Karl Koenig, in Scotland in the late 1930s. Having fled Nazi Germany and its eugenics program, Koenig and a group of coworkers began a household and school to care for "spastic children" near Camp Hill, outside of Glasgow. Camphill has since grown into a worldwide movement of schools for

► Lifesharing Communities continued

handicapped children and of larger and smaller communities in which handicapped and non-handicapped adults live together.

Lifesharing varies the Camphill model by basing itself in individual family units, each an economically viable, independent entity. Life Needs Coop/North Plain Farm is a lifesharing household, now associated with six other lifesharing households in southern Berkshire County, Mass. Each household stands alone, but they collaborate in sharing activities, community meals, work projects, and each member's own specialized skills. They weave with Andrea, bake with Nina, work on recycling with John, frolic in the river behind Rachel's house. Each household is a "family of choice" or "volunteer family" guided by a married couple or individual dedicated to creating and maintaining a healthy extended family life. People with disabilities are included in these extended families as in a natural family.

In Cadmus Lifesharing, the motto is: "Everyone is perfect in their essential being, and everyone is handicapped in bringing their essence to expression." In practice, that works out to mean that everyone in a lifesharing house genuinely needs and is interdependent upon everyone else there. Or, as the Cadmus Philosophy statement says, "The Cadmus Lifesharing Association seeks to create a community in which it is no handicap to be handicapped."

Maggie knows that, while you might think she lives at Life Needs Coop to be taken care of, instead she is an essential part of the whole functioning family. Yes, she needs help bathing and dressing, and she gets it. On the other hand, one day this spring Andrea called to ask if we could rearrange Maggie's spring vacation time so that she could stay with them for the two weeks they had Amy for respite care. Amy is a more profoundly handicapped young woman — non-speaking, probably autistic — with whom Maggie has formed a strong bond of care. She will sit for hours talking with Amy, reading to her — inhabiting her world and often giving voice to Amy's needs and wants, which she seems to intuit. Andrea called to say that they just didn't think they could manage Amy for those two weeks without Maggie. It was one of the proudest moments of my life. It's also, I think, the essence of "lifesharing." ●

Linda Strohmier is a priest in the Episcopal Diocese of Newark, N.J.

Intentionally, L'Arche seeks to build community across language, religious and cultural barriers.

forgiven. She is learning that no matter what, she is welcomed and cherished.

Richard Bower met Santos, another core member of the Choluteca L'Arche community, on a visit during his sabbatical in Central America. Santos, a man of about 30, had been in this community about 13 years. He does not know his parents, nor any of his family. He was abandoned in the streets of Choluteca, autistic and with severe physical defects.

"He was welcomed into the L'Arche family, and over the past 13 years has learned a bit how to speak, and a lot about how to communicate," Richard says. "He walks and he works now with his hands with 80 percent of full capacity. He makes beautiful hammocks in the L'Arche workshop, something he is very proud of. His eyes sparkle with excitement and warmth. He loves to sing and celebrate, and is the leader of most of the celebrations in his small community. He can be demanding and bossy at times, but that is mostly because he has moved from passivity to being empowered in his life."

Ted is a core member of the L'Arche Community in Syracuse, N.Y. He came to L'Arche as a young adult, abandoned as an infant by his family, living in an institution. Ted was unable to speak, hardly able to navigate. He was so troubled, so angry when he came to L'Arche that assistants had to take turns caring for him. There were long weeks when assistants had to change every 15 minutes or so because of the turmoil Ted was experiencing. The community did not think it had the capacity to keep Ted in their midst. But they remembered that there were no outcasts in L'Arche, and Ted remained.

Today, 20 years later, Ted is a lovely, caring, joy-filled member of the L'Arche family. He has come home, and the richness of his gifts, the exuberance and joy he brings to his new family, are signs of what can be true for the whole human family.

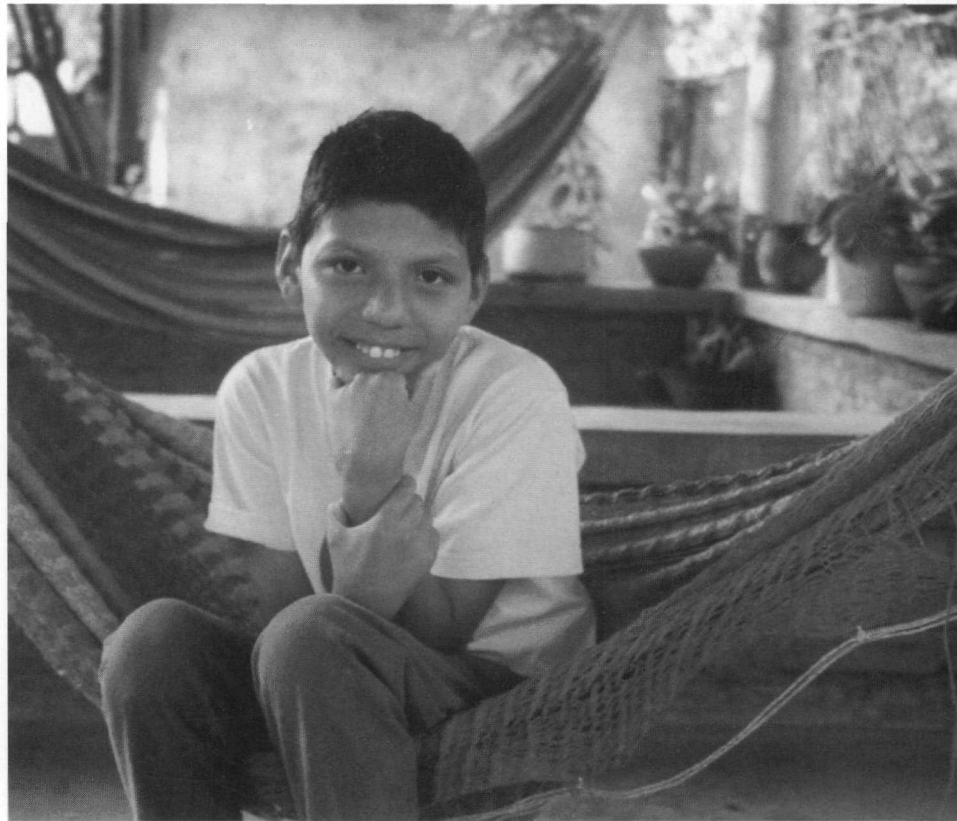
Core members are welcomed for life to these communities. Some come from the streets, some from institutions, some from private homes. Assistants come from all parts of the world, bringing a variety of motivations. Intentionally, L'Arche seeks to build community across language, religious and cultural barriers. Some assistants serve for two or three years, some longer, and some with a lifelong commitment. This dynamic of permanent and transient members, and of an international mix, offers both a gift and a challenge.

Signs of healthy communities

From his 36 years in L'Arche, Jean Vanier has reflected on the signs of healthy communities. First, he identifies health in community as the kind of openness to the weak and needy in one's own community that opens our heart to others who are weak and needy. A second sign, says Vanier, is the way a community humbly lives its mission of service to others in gentle mutual ways, not using or manipulating, but empowering them. A third sign is that, as we begin to recognize and value the gifts we find in others, we move beyond our own tight certainties, and become more open to each other and to what is new. A fourth sign is that a community can learn and grow from its errors, moving beyond the need for superiority, open to God's truth from wherever this truth comes. Rooted in the Roman Catholic tradition, L'Arche has grown into a vital ecumenical community, and in places like India has sought to live in faith with people of non-Christian religious traditions.

"Our communities want to witness to the church and to the world that God knows all persons in their deepest being and loves them in their brokenness," Vanier says (*The Heart of L'Arche*). "L'Arche is not a solution to a social problem, but a sign that love is possible, and that we are not condemned to live in a state of war and conflict where the strong crush the weak. Each person is unique, precious and sacred."

Our lives so often (even in the church) are shaped by competition, rivalry, busyness, fear and guilt. We have found in L'Arche not a perfect community, but one which seeks to live the Gospel life of welcome, sharing and simplicity. We have learned new ways to live the unity which is God's dream for all people. We have learned that faithfulness means we learn and are shaped by the weakest members of our community. And we are learning that reconciliation is made possible by communities that have "a simple life-style which gives priority to relationships" (from the *Charter of the Communities of L'Arche*).



Most of all, we have learned what it means to be a sign and not a solution. Solutions come and go, make sense one day and not another. But living in community is a sign, a light of hope that society can truly be human. Jesus lived his sign in being present with and offering healing to the outcast, the marginalized. L'Arche roots its sign in welcome and respect for the weak and the down-trodden. Jesus did not solve all the spiritual and social problems of his day. Neither does L'Arche. But L'Arche, living the way of Jesus, seeks to give concrete expression to the reality of the reign of God in our world.

We have been drawn to L'Arche because L'Arche communities "want to be in solidarity with the poor of the world, and with all those who take part in the struggle for justice" (*Charter of the Communities of L'Arche*). L'Arche has renewed our commitment to live in and foster healthy communities, in the church as well as in places where we live. ●

Lita (left) and Melvin (top), are core members of Casa San José in Choluteca, Honduras.

Stephanie D. Bower is an assistant with the L'Arche Community in Syracuse, N.Y. Earlier this year she served L'Arche in Choluteca, Honduras for three months. Richard A. Bower is the recently retired Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in Syracuse and a member of The Witness' board of directors. He has been appointed by the Presiding Bishop to be the Episcopal Church's link with L'Arche U.S.



Moratorium 2000 calls for halt to death penalty

Helen Prejean, spiritual advisor to death-row inmates and author of *Dead Man Walking*, says it's time for her supporters to step up the pressure on their elected leaders to stop state executions. "The first thing I'm asking folks to do," says Prejean, "is sign the Moratorium 2000 petition, to put their name down and commit themselves to ending this terrible system."

Coordinated out of an office in New Orleans, the Moratorium 2000 campaign already has more than 80,000 signatures — and thousands more are arriving each week. The signatures will be gathered for presentation to the United Nations in December, in honor of International Human Rights Day. State groups will also use the names from their area to lobby state legislatures for a moratorium.

"A moratorium is like a cease-fire in a war," explains Prejean. "It's the first step towards peace on this issue, with governments agreeing not to execute any more prisoners. Many people find it's a safer way to begin moving away from their support of the death penalty, like a mid-point, so they can really take a look at what we are doing."

It's a particularly newsworthy topic these days, with a diverse group of moratorium supporters like Pat Robertson, actress Susan Sarandon, Illinois Governor George Ryan (a Republican), and musician Bruce Springsteen. The presidential candidates (both death-penalty supporters) are routinely confronted by questions about capital punishment. The movement against executions has been fueled by discoveries of innocent men on death row, stories of public defenders who were drunk or asleep during trial and a disproportionate number of poor minorities on death row.

"We can show that this is a broken system that can never be fixed," insists Prejean. "And we've got to stop this killing now, with an immediate moratorium."

Moratorium 2000 hopes that those who sign onto the petition will be willing to get further involved with the struggle by participating in local activities and circulating the petitions in their communities.

To sign the petition and make donations, visit the Moratorium 2000 website (www.moratorium2000.org). For materials, contact the Moratorium 2000 office: P.O. Box 13727 New Orleans, LA 70185; (504) 864-1071; info@moratorium2000.org.

— Theresa Meisz

Phone strikes and 'free time'

"In Sunday's *New York Times* (7/30/00) there was a major article on a possible impending telephone workers strike — the CWA (Communication Workers of America) vs. "Verizon" — what was Bell Atlantic, plus other global-corporate parts," writes Rabbi Arthur Waskow of the Shalom Center (www.shalomctr.org) in an email communication to groups involved with the Center's "Free Time/Free People" project.

"As you know, about two years ago, the Shalom Center began bringing together people from a broad spectrum of religious communities and traditions with some secular scholars, to address the issue of overwork in American society, and its destructive impact on families, neighborhoods, and spiritual life.

"Among the folks we started working with was Jobs with Justice (JwJ), a national network of pro-labor community people and the most creative energies in the labor movement. JwJ invited us to lead a workshop on Free Time/Free People at their recent annual national meeting, including a sub-conference on Religion & Labor.

"The conference had about 700 participants — about 150 from religious groups/congregations, about 200 students, maybe 100 from various community organizations, the rest from labor.

"There was a very strong sense of excitement and forward energy, and a consensus that specific critiques and issues fit within a critique of the increasing anti-democratic power of global corporations, which have been growing in their power to brush aside national governments, labor unions, environmental groups and consumers.

"How did this perception of growing corporate power and this feeling of more resistance-power co-exist? Through a sense that public attention and organizing energy are now focused on the right place, and that workers, students, religious folk, and environmentalists are beginning to see a common oppressiveness in global-corporate institutions that endanger the values of each of those gatherings of people.

"There was a plenary session with five or

six major figures from labor movements in South Africa, Europe, Latin America, and Asia — as a working effort to bring together a transnational labor movement to resist the new global corporatism.

“Most of the workshops were focused on nuts-and-bolts stories of effective organizing, rather than on theoretical or ideological debate. In the religion-labor discussions, there was some discussion of the difference between ‘calling a collar’ — that is, getting a priest/ minister/ rabbi to come speak on behalf of a labor struggle so as to give it legitimacy in public eyes — vs. the notion that labor unionists might listen to religious concerns closely and deepen their own approach to organizing by taking religion seriously.

“Here is where the Free Time/ Free People project comes in.

“Once upon a time, the labor movement fought for the eight-hour day and the 40-hour week. More recently, large parts of it have succumbed to sheer money-ism and have not complained even at huge amounts of compulsory overtime, because it pays more.

“But this is now changing. The CWA telephone struggle is an example.

“The entire JwJ conference, instead of only sitting in classrooms to learn together, went on Friday afternoon to join a mass picket line at a nearby Bell Atlantic plant. Most of the workers there answer phone calls from customers who need various kinds of information. The work force has been halved over the last two years. But the work has not. So workers are now on intense speed-up.

“When a certain number of calls pile up unanswered, the bosses announce ‘red alert.’ That means no one can leave the desk, stretch, shmooze, pee — no free time. This is one of the major oppressions against which CWA is organizing.

“One of CWA’s major concerns is that after two generations of being a unionized company, Bell Atlantic/ Verizon is now making sure that the new-tech areas in the bigger ‘Verizon’ holding company are not unionized — so that the phone workers are being boxed in and will not be able to resist such speed-up pressures.

“As we pointed out in our own workshop

at JwJ, the Free Time vs. Overwork issue could call forth a cross-class alliance. Fancy lawyers at fancy firms, blue-collar workers with no time to breathe, and very poor workers holding two or even three jobs to barely get by are all being overworked. Addressing this issue could bring them together.

“JwJ invited the Shalom Center to create a ‘Welcome to the Sabbath’ of some sort for the whole conference, not just the Jews.

“What I chose to do Friday evening was to begin with invoking one of the great labor organizers of all time — i.e., Moses — who in a society where construction was very big business organized Bricklayers Local #1 (an image from A. J. Muste). I talked about how hard the organizing was — even workers who joined the union quit when the boss, CEO of Egypt, Inc, got tougher. But finally they called a strike and won.

“Two strands of practice grew from this victory: rules against exploiting workers or foreigners and — Sabbath. I connected that with the CWA/Verizon struggle — red alerts, etc. — we had learned about on Friday afternoon.

“And I said that even organizers need to rest, to reflect, to sing, to celebrate with joy.

“So — I hope you all will reflect on your own experiences with forced overwork, and the ways you could make ‘space’ in your lifetime, and on how these experiences point the way toward what we should be doing next to open up Free Time.”

Accessible congregations

The Accessible Congregations Campaign, a project of the Religion & Disability Program of the National Organization on Disability, Washington, D.C., seeks to recruit 2,000 congregations by Dec. 31, 2000 that are committed to removing their barriers of architecture, communications and attitudes and welcoming people with disabilities. To date, the campaign has received commitments to become hospitable and welcoming to people with all types of disabilities from 1,256 congregations of all faiths nationwide, including 94 Episcopal Church congregations. Campaign leaders believe that access to worship for people with disabilities is as vital as

access to employment, transportation, health care and education.

Visit the campaign’s website at www.nod.org for more information and to find a list of congregations by state.

—Lorraine Thal

Voting for faith, not theology

The Christian Science Monitor’s Peter Grier reports (8/10/00), “Polls show atheism would be far more damaging to a presidential or vice presidential candidate than adherence to any major religion.

“But U.S. voters prefer that candidates’ public religiosity remain bland. General pronouncements of faith and values win votes. Specific theological discussion can lose them.”

CLASSIFIEDS

Preaching award competition

Virginia Theological Seminary invites all Episcopal preachers — bishops, priests, deacons, laypersons — to submit one sermon for the 2000 John Hines Preaching Award. Sermon must have been delivered to a congregation between I Advent 1999 and end of Pentecost 2000. Prize: \$2000. Write The Rev. Robert Burch, VTS, 3737 Seminary Road, Alexandria, VA 22304. Email: <Bburch@vts.edu>.

The Way of the Wolf

The Way of the Wolf on CD. Brand-new reading by author Martin Bell. All stories and poems from the bestselling book, including the Christmas classic “Barrington Bunny.” 2-CDs \$24.95. Call 906-643-6597 or visit <barringtonbunny.com>.

Order of Jonathan Daniels

An Episcopal religious community-in-formation striving for justice and peace among all people. OJD, PO Box 29, Boston, MA 02134; <OrdJonDan@aol.com>.

Attending to the community of life

by Mary Romano

LIKE SO MANY who enjoy living in Colorado, I love to hike in the mountains, along the streams, through dense woods, and to pristine alpine lakes, discovering the many vistas, treasures, and natural wonders of our state. Yet, most typically, in my adult life, I have hiked toward a designated location, walking with the goal of seeing something specific — a waterfall or a particular vista.

On one wet September morning, while traveling on the West Elk Loop scenic drive in the Kebler Pass area, I experienced a vivid reawakening of the benefits of a less intentional way of walking, a way I knew as a child.

My husband and I were heading off for a week-long vacation, enjoying the Colorado mountains. We needed to be in Crested Butte by evening, but it was still early in the day, and we had no specific goal other than to enjoy a relaxed time in the hills. Since we had spent most of the morning together, inside the car and rain-beaten, we were a bit edgy — so we were quite comfortable with the idea of each taking off in our own chosen direction to spend a bit of solo time outdoors.

I meandered down the side of the hill, being careful to walk gently on rocks or pebbles, as there was no trail and the ground was rather soft. I had no goal in mind, other than capturing yet another variation of the favorite vista before me. After a few moments of observing the vast sea of aspen and evergreen on the laps of the mountains across the valley, I was struck by the absence of agenda in this

moment.

My slow, careful steps reminded me of a “calling walk” exercise that I had experienced during a workshop. The idea is that rather than deciding consciously where to walk (as we most typically do), you simply walk, quiet your mind and allow yourself to be called by the wild, by all the life-forms around you — the rocks, the wind, the cricket — opening yourself to listen to the guides around you.

With this agenda-less opportunity before me, I began shifting my intentions to open my heart to the “Call of the Earth,” as Theodor Roszak has described it. I simply began to listen with my heart open. My eyes softened their focus, attentive to the varietal hues of this wet, terraced slope. My ears began to notice more subtle sounds, even the sounds of the moisture dropping from leaf edges to the grass below. My heart grew more sensitive, deepening in appreciation of the variety of fertile, moist life around me. My pace was slow and mindful as I carefully and respectfully placed my steps on rocks and gravel to minimize my impact on the soft, rain-soaked soil. Yet the direction of my travel was not intentioned by my desire to go any particular way — rather, I was being called.

The call came not from a single voice, but from a sort of intuitive interaction with a vibrant community of organisms — plants, creatures, air, moistness and stone — surrounding me. The first bit of nature that called me was the color of the leaves of some scrub oak. Then the moisture

Mary Romano

CALLING WALK

among the grasses — and the colors of the foliage dying, going to sleep for the fall — all kept drawing me back to the edge of a bramble of decomposing branches and rotting leaves, still wet from an early morning rain.

Among this earthy moist thicket, I saw a small spiral shell, like the kind you find along a beach. I had first seen this type of shell on the west side of the Bellvue hogback, north of Ft. Collins. The shells, roughly an inch in diameter and one-quarter inch wide, form a spiral like most any other shell you'd find along the shore of the ocean. I assumed they were some recent ancestors, uprooted with the uprising of this hillside, exposed from some long-ago sea bed. Preserved somehow in near-perfect condition, they appeared to be recently occupied — like the kind of shell I would find on the beach. But I could not imagine a snail living so far from the ocean, here in Colorado! Over the years, I'd been left with questions in the back of my mind: How old were these shells? When did they live? Why were the shells in such perfect condition, and not fossilized into stone?

And now, here on Kebler, the same type of shell! I drew closer to see more detail. There were familiar subtle bandings of browns, grays and white, shimmering lightly in the rain — and then I saw it move! There was a snail inside. This was not an ancient home, but a land-dwelling snail! I was filled with gratitude toward the little creature.

Time seemed to melt away. What in actuality was about 20 minutes in duration seemed like hours. The experience of the present moment was much fuller and richer than any typical experience of time.

Much of what had prepared me for this “calling walk” was my study of ecopsychology over the years. Ecopsychology is a new field that attempts to heal the gap between humanity and the earth. Ecopsychology recognizes that sanity must include sustainability and a strong and mutually-enhancing relationship with the natural world. Specifically, ecopsychology proposes the concept that at the core of our mind is the “ecological unconscious” or “ecological self” that is present in each of us at birth, but becomes muted and silent as we age, dampened by our corporate-industrial, consumerist culture. Ecopsychology contends that the suppression of this ecological unconscious is the root of madness in industrial society and that the road to sanity and sustainability is opening the access to this ecological unconscious.

Additionally, my inquiry into the emotional lives of animals (described by J. M. Masson) and consciousness of other life-forms — mammals, birds, insects, or plants — has led me to know that we, as a species, are not alone in our communication. We are capable of caring, loving relationships with our pets, and trusting, working relationships with draft animals, certainly. But there is also the potential for communication beyond our limited language, and even beyond our five senses, that allows us to “speak to” or “listen with” other forms of life.

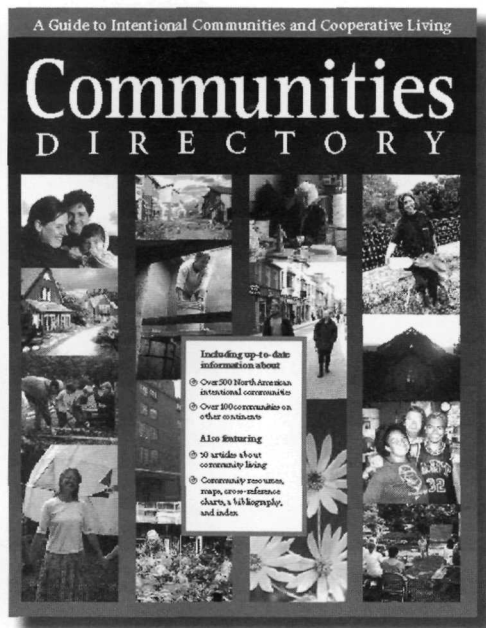
It is experiences like my calling walk at Kebler Pass that bring such understandings to life, that help us know in a deeper way that we are not separate from the natural world — we are within the diverse community of life which is part of a complex, self-organizing system, moving through our creative journey through time and space, all part of the original gift born of a fireball. We share the energy of that creative moment with all that is. The natural world is always speaking to us, calling us home. If we nurture a willing openness to our intuitive abilities, we will hear that call. ●

Environmental activist and Colorado native Mary Romano works with EarthLinks in Denver, Colo.

**The direction of my travel
was not intentioned by my
desire to go any particular
way — rather, I was being
called. The call came not
from a single voice, but
from a sort of intuitive
interaction with a vibrant
community of organisms
— plants, creatures, air,
moistness and stone —
surrounding me.**

Communities Directory

by Joseph Wakelee-Lynch



Communities Directory: A Guide to Intentional Communities and Cooperative Living,

Fellowship for Intentional Community (FIC),
Rutledge, MO, 2000

To order, write
Communities
138 Twin Oaks Rd.,
Louisa, VA 23093

JUST ABOUT 18 YEARS AGO, I joined an intentional Christian community in Washington, D.C. Ronald Reagan had been elected president, and his secretary of state, Alexander Haig, was eager to confront the Soviet Union, perhaps by using nuclear weapons. I had recently spent five weeks in Japan, highlighted by a sojourn to Hiroshima, and I was determined to respond politically and personally. Fortunately, I had discovered a community in which my political commitment could be united with my faith.

I vividly recall a bright, warm, late Sunday afternoon in D.C. At the intersection of Columbia Road and 16th Street, the sun illuminated several churches, turning their walls golden. I peered down Columbia Road into the neighborhood where I'd make my new home, a neighborhood ravaged by riots in 1968. I uneasily pondered the step I would soon take. But the reassuring words of the Psalmist were in my mind:

*"Lord, you have assigned me my
portion and my cup;
you have made my lot secure.*

*The boundary lines have fallen for me
in pleasant places;
surely I have a delightful
inheritance"*

(Psalm 16:5-6, NIV)

The choices that people make to live in community, it seems to me, are probably rooted in both a critique of culture — a society's politics, lifestyles, ecological policies, power structures, gender relations — and belief, or for religious people faith, in an alternative. For most of us, building community engages our head and our

heart, and communities born in one without the other are probably destined to fail. The absence of flexibility and love and the absence of vision are usually fatal to community life. For religious people, faith may also be essential; it certainly is a kind of community grease that can keep the wheels turning even on uphill slopes.

The *Communities Directory*, published by the Fellowship for International Communities (FIC), is a massive compendium of community models, the work of many hearts and the fruit of social and political critique. The current volume is the third edition produced by FIC, a nonprofit, educational organization that acts as an information hub and a community-building resource. FIC also offers referrals and support resources to people who want to learn about community living, including weekend conferences on managing the nuts and bolts of life together.

Compiling this resource was a multi-year project for Jillian Downey and Elph Morgan, the project's managing editors. To gather information, they mailed several thousand surveys and traveled the country in an old RV to visit communities. They paid their way by offering 10 hours of work a week in return for room and board.

The "Communities Directory" consists of a list of communities with their self-descriptions, articles about many aspects of community life, an annotated reading list, maps, and a listing of organizations serving as resources for community or alternative lifestyles. Information is included about more than 700 communities, more than 100 of them located outside of North America. That the communities have provided their own descriptions is noteworthy. The editors offer a kind of caveat emptor to readers about evaluating information included in the book. "The FIC," explain

the editors, "asked communities to participate only if they do not advocate violent practices or do not interfere with their members' freedom to leave their group at any time." But Downey and Morgan caution that the FIC has few resources with which to verify any group's claims. In effect, they've asked participating organizations to follow an honor code.

The communities included defy categorization: rural, urban, Christian, New Age, environmental, vegetarian, lesbian, nonviolent, egalitarian, service-oriented, devoted to political resistance and civil disobedience.

One, made up of eight people, was formed as recently as 1997; another, the Hutterian Brethren, was formed in 1528, and has 40,000 members spread throughout communities across the U.S. and Canada.

In fact, the diversity of views about this most excruciating and exhilarating of ventures is a great strength of the volume. The directory includes articles about cults, etiquette for community visitors and how to nurture longevity, along with useful advice about the finances of community: land trusts, common ownership, housing zoning laws, and even capitalization.

It's gratifying to read the comments of a Catholic Worker member, who also touches on the Atlantic Life Community, because those communities often work on political resistance as much as on their ways of living together. And the reflections of a lesbian community that is determined to counter patriarchy are enlightening for anyone interested in examining power and gender relations.

The book offers a great deal for communarians to wonder about, though much of it is admittedly based on anecdotal evidence. For instance, eras that spawned communities were the 1990s, the 1960s and 1970s, and the 1930s and 1940s. Most communities fail before reaching their fifth year, perhaps because people change, because a community lacks the flexibility to adjust to the changes in its members, or because a community's central mission or purpose is too vague, making expectations muddy and con-

flict difficult to resolve.

The *Communities Directory* is very much a handbook on forming and living in communities. Maybe that's why the most gripping articles are about death: the death of a community and the suicide of a community member who lost a battle with depression.

Carolyn Shaffer, in "Committing to Community for the Long Term: Do We Have

THE COMMUNITIES INCLUDED

DEFY CATEGORIZATION:

RURAL, URBAN, CHRISTIAN,

NEW AGE, ENVIRONMENTAL,

VEGETARIAN, LESBIAN,

NONVIOLENT, EGALITARIAN,

SERVICE-ORIENTED, DEVOTED

TO POLITICAL RESISTANCE

AND CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE.

What It Takes?" writes about the loss of her labor of love. She takes the reader through a forest of doubts and questions as she relates how she finally agreed to disband a community that two years earlier she had pledged herself to through a vow much like the marriage promise ("for richer and for poorer, in illness and in health, until death do us part"). She thought she'd live the rest of her life there. Shaffer draws crucial distinctions between duty's burden and commitment's engagement, and she makes clear the danger of subtly rooting a selfish invest-

ment of one's ego in a group's altruistic goals. Most of all, she helps to map out the complex and sometimes shifting ground of integrity on which we stand in community. One must be able to stand on integrity, Shaffer advises, to remain in community. But knowing what integrity demands we do, and discerning when integrity requires that we act, or not act, is the height of wisdom for those who see community life as a long-term endeavor.

In "Mental Illness in Community: What Can We Offer?" Rajal Cohen recounts the life-changing experience of her friendship with Delancey, a woman who came to community with a history of depression and suicide attempts. Cohen goes partway down roads of questions: Did the community fail Delancey? Did it fail its members? Were its decision-making structures part of the community's inability to solve Delancey's problems? Those torturous roads have no ends, as Cohen recognizes, and she brings the reader back to the harsh but unavoidable reality that life in community must be more than a political experiment, even if it is partly that. Community at its fullest is a way of life, with all its tragedies, joys, victories and unanswered questions.

The death of community, like the death of a loved one, takes years to accommodate to (probably, one never gets over it). It is the loss of a vibrant agent of love, at the least. We may hope that a sense of peace will someday follow today's agony and grief. But when one leaves a community in anger, perhaps we should hope to gain humility as much as peace. Those departures are akin to divorce, and in relationships, as perhaps all of life, true wisdom lies in understanding one's faults. The *Communities Directory* serves its purpose as an encyclopedic primer; it also sheds a bit of light on the mysteries of, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer called it, "life together." ●

Joseph Wakelee-Lynch is a writer and editor in Berkeley, Calif. For the past six years, he hosted a radio interview program in Claremont, Calif.

'Round our skiff be God's aboutness

by Julie A. Wortman



Ruth (second from left) & Bobby Ives (far right) with class of 2000.



'Round our skiff be God's aboutness

Ere she try the depth of the sea.

Seashell frail for all her stoutness,

Unless Thou her Helmsman be.

— prayer from the
Hebredian Islands off Scotland

THEY BEGIN by jointly building a Monhegan skiff. From there they move on to something a bit more complicated — a dory tender, say, or perhaps a peapod. By the time their nine months of apprenticeship at The Carpenter's Boatshop are up, they've each become experienced at handling and caring for carpentry tools and machines, can point to a couple of boats they've built on their own and, if needed, can competently row or sail them. In addition, Robert (Bobby) and Ruth Ives hope, each will have gained a deeper understanding of life lived in Christian community. "May [every apprentice] not only build fine wooden boats," the Ives say in the final section of the handbook every student who joins the community receives, "but may they with God's blessing build their own lives into ones of love and peace so that they can more gently serve in the world about them."

The 1849 farmstead which houses the boatshop — a classic New England farmhouse with an attached barn and a rambling collection of outbuildings planted along the

further wooded reaches of Branch Road in coastal Pemaquid, Me. — reinforces the idyllic, rat-race-eschewing image which the Ives' gentle prayer projects. So do the muffin-abundant "tea breaks" held in the barn each weekday morning, the late-afternoon sailing excursions out of Round Pond harbor and the clucking free-range chickens — the source of the fresh eggs served at meals around the 12-seater dining room table which determines the Boatshop community's size.

Still, however warmly offered, the life the Ives annually invite eight boatshop apprentices and two instructors to share is one founded on a disciplined devotion to a Benedictine "rule" of life — a life not only of shared work, but also of prayer, study, service, worship, recreation and hospitality. Apprentices pay no fees for tuition nor for the simple room and board they are provided; neither do the Ives pay them for their work.

"We've been in the red for 21 years!" laughs Bobby Ives. But the struggle to keep the Boatshop ministry afloat is continuous. Fifty percent of the barebones budget comes from selling the boats the community builds, 40 percent comes from donations and 10 percent from payments made to the Ives for a variety of reasons — Bobby is an ordained United Church of Christ minister who occasionally officiates at weddings and funerals, and there are honoraria for speaking engagements. Barter is another way the community survives and, although it is a not-for-profit enterprise, the Boatshop pays taxes out of a commitment to the small rural community in which it is located.

Yet the Boatshop community's daily life is driven, not by financial considerations, but by the Ives' desire to "live right," as one of last year's apprentices put it.

Both Bobby and Ruth Ives have been exploring what that might mean since early adulthood. Bobby, who comes from a family of Congregational ministers, was a conscientious objector during the Vietnam War. Ruth, who studied philosophy, church history and ethics in college, had since high school been drawn to upholding "the Gospel's relevance" through social service.

They met at a lecture on "Divine Providence" at the University of Edinburgh in 1971. The newly married couple became schoolteachers at the one-room schoolhouse on Maine's Monhegan Island in 1973. Island residents persuaded Bobby to pursue ordination so he could officially serve the Monhegan Island Church. A couple of years later the Ives moved to Louds Island off the Pemaquid Peninsula in the hope of helping keep that small rural lobstering community alive. On weekends they rowed to the mainland where they served the Sheepscoot Community Church. From 1977 until June of 1979 they served the churches in Round Pond and New Harbor.

By then the parents of young children, they wanted to find a way to minimize the discontinuities between an intentional, but Sundays-only, congregational life and the daily process of living out Christian values and commitments in the midst of working for a living and raising a family. The Carpenter's Boatshop ministry was their answer, combining Bobby Ives' love of boats and woodworking with their joint desire to live lives of discipleship.

"Jesus talked about life and relationships," Bobby reflects. "Everyone has their own path to walk, but you also walk it daily with others."

The structure of that daily pace at The Carpenter's Boatshop is clear: 7 am breakfast; 7:20 am devotions; 8 am boatshop work begins; 10 am tea break; 12:30 noonday meal; 12:50 pm a reading for group reflection; 1:15 pm quiet/prayer time; 1:30 pm boatshop work; 4:15 pm clean-up; a break for sailing, weather permitting; evening meal. Everyone helps with the domestic chores, but evenings are free (apprentices

may work on personal building projects until 10 pm, when all power tools must be shut down).

The weekly schedule includes a Wednesday chapel service and designated times for community decision-making. Saturday afternoons and Sundays are free time, although participation in a local worship service is encouraged. Saturday mornings are reserved for "service work," most notably with the Community Housing Improvement Program (CHIP) that Ruth Ives directs — a program that provides families with help in paying their light and power bills, getting crucial repairs made and finding needed appliances or furniture. "I have a compulsion to be of service as much of the day as I can," admits Ruth Ives, who regularly receives five to 10 phone calls asking for CHIP assistance each day.

"If you don't allocate time for the things you feel are important, it gets absorbed into things you don't want to do," says Bobby Ives of the ample time provided in the Boatshop schedule for spiritual reflection and recreation. "Scheduling means that you do these things, freeing you for the full diversity of life."

Boatshop instructor Lisa Casey agrees. "I've learned that it is important to the rest of the community how I spend my time," Casey says. "The schedule is a daily reminder that it is my life and that I should be taking care of myself."

But, she adds, 12 people on the same schedule, with a typical age range of 19 to 65, has its limitations — and stresses.

"The frictions that arise," says Bobby Ives, "are an opportunity to learn how to live more compassionately with each other." The Ives bring differences in values to the surface by raising controversial topics such as sexuality, gender and other social justice issues in the context of weekly chapel gatherings devoted to the Boatshop goal of learning how to "live without fear, love without reserve and willingly work for peace, justice and the common good of all."

But the perennial issue of dispute, Bobby Ives says, is "Music!" Classical music is

played in the workshops until 12:30 pm each day, but the community takes it in turns to choose the afternoon's listening fare. "The person who chooses Country Western is in for it!" he says with a laugh. "Or one time there was a big complaint when a particular apprentice chose only Celtic music — and apparently the same particular piece over and over."

Trivial as this and other problems that arise might seem — differing perspectives on how clean the workshop and other communal areas should be kept is another routine source of strong feelings — it is the process of working problems out that is critically important, the Ives stress.

"Working out problems is how communities are formed," says Bobby Ives. "Our hope is to learn how to work problems through in a way that values everyone as God's creation."

"The open-mindedness here is not all that common," observes recent Boatshop apprentice Bruce Dove, a former trucker and schoolteacher from Alaska. "I came to learn a way of life, something about community as much as how to build a boat — though that is certainly an asset."

Indeed, that practical asset, the very concrete enterprise of learning to build, and sometimes restore, finely crafted wooden boats, remains the tangible tie that binds each year's apprenticing community. This month, right about now, the class of 2001 will be finishing its first Monhegan skiff, a group project that provides a course in the basics of the boatbuilder's craft. Soon they will take it to the nearby ocean and, once everyone is on board, launch it. If their group effort has been successful, they will all remain dry; if there is a weakness, they will all begin bailing.

Either way, say the Ives, they will have learned their first important lesson about the joys — and challenges — of sharing a common life. ●

Julie A. Wortman is editor/publisher of The Witness. For more information about The Carpenter's Boatshop contact them at Branch Road, Pemaquid, ME 04558; 207-677-3768.

Copyright 2020. Archives of the Episcopal Church / DFMS. Permission required for reuse and publication.



©Marc PoKempner / IMPACT VISUALS

The Witness

The Witness
7000 Michigan Avenue
Detroit, MI 48210

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Permit No.893
Champaign, IL