NEWS FROM Celebration!

A People Serving the Church

Fall 2002

This has been an encouraging year for us. Several developments are taking place, and we are still in the midst of them.

First, of course, there is the chapel project. This inevitably has taken up a great deal of time, especially for James who has been overseeing it from the Community's point of view. It was James's concerns which finally led to meetings with the architect and contractor which exposed serious flaws in the construction.

Thankfully, the contractor accepted full responsibility for the errors and agreed to put them right. He was still optimistic about meeting the August deadline, but in the end had to agree that the building could not be completed in time. For our part, we by far preferred that the chapel should be constructed to our satisfaction than that it be rushed through for the sake of the ceremony. As soon as we knew of the likelihood of a delay, we decided to postpone the Dedication.

Although this is disappointing in some ways, we are assured by many people that it is the way of things with building projects. The good news is that the chapel will be finished in the not too distant future, and we will let everyone know the revised dates in good time.

Another encouraging feature this year has been our involvement in the UK. We have spoken in previous newsletters about the launch of the Partners in Ministry scheme, which had a good response in the UK. At the same time we have also been developing the links between the US Community and Phil and Margaret Bradshaw, who are Community members living in the UK. One result of all this is the upcoming visit of the Aliquippa Community to Britain in October.

We are looking at ways of combining the US and UK newsletters, a task which is also part of a wider rationalization of our current publications – pruning our mailing list, reducing the number of letters serving different constituencies, looking ahead to the production of new publications. Phil is contributing writing, design and editorial skills to this process. With digital photography now being used on both sides of the Atlantic for website purposes, the use of colour in newsletter photography becomes ever more attractive. It has already been used with success in the UK newsletter, and we hope to make it a standard feature in our future combined printed letter as well as in the online version.

Transformation of Aliquippa Property 1985-2002



Space behind the rowhouses in 1985 was a run-down parking area.



Now a park-like garden space invites residents and visitors alike.

The websites have proved themselves to be an important part of our resources for communicating with the public. The web is a primary source of orders for Celebration products, and for attracting inquiries about the Community. The UK site, which is less directly focused on the Community and features history

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and articles, attracts more than 7,000 hits a month with inquiries on a wide range of topics.

The intern program has now been running for several years. Gradually it is building up a group of young people who are connected to the Community on both sides of the Atlantic. We are especially pleased that the visit of a youth group this year (*see article at right*) caused some to think about returning as interns. This was something of an experiment for us, but we hope to repeat it with other groups. The Community needs such connections with young people as we look to the future.

After a year's sabbatical, Mimi returned this fall to Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry in Ambridge. She continues to serve as Chapel Musician for the weekly Eucharist and Adjunct Faculty in Music and Liturgy.



Mimi and Bill leading worship at the Opening Convocation with oboeist Ray Gustafson.

Finally, we must not forget the town of Aliquippa itself. Various initiatives are taking place to bring about renewal in the town, in which we also take part. This year we commited ourselves to develop two ministries in conjunction with the Church Army, under John Stanley's leadership:

1) a coffee bar and center for outreach on Franklin Avenue
2) a half-way house for men in recovery (*far right page 3*).

We continue to seek your prayers for us as we pursue these exciting areas of ministry.

Youth Pilgrimage

A group of young people from St. Christopher's Church, in Grand Blanc, Michigan, spent five days with the Community during July. The pilgrimage was part of a program to give their youth a wider experience of Christian discipleship.

Apart from their own leaders, members of the Community involved with the group together with Companions **Barb Gessner, Peggy Campbell**, **Mary von Minden** and **John Stanley**.



Steven McKeown, who is a chaplain attached to the local Police Department and FBI, gave them a tour of Aliquippa including the Police Station, City Hall and Fire Station. The local paper ran an article with a photo.



Dancing a Celtic Blessing

As well as their own activities, the group took part in the life of the Community through daily prayers and an evening Taizé service. A tent was set up in the garden for common meals and fellowship (*above*).

The visit proved to be a significant time both for the young people and for those leading and helping. Several of the young people are thinking about returning as an intern, and the Rector of the church discussed the possibility of the Community's going to Michigan next year, together with Church Army Captain John Stanley, to do some form of ministry in the parish.









'Loving our Enemies' June conference

Freud thought loving enemies would cause more misery than not doing so. But Christians differ. If they suffer, for them it is not pointless but a sign of hope for a better world. We see our enemy as the other person, but the real battle is a spiritual one between good and evil. Freud actually made no distinction between loving enemies and loving neighbors. Often our 'enemy' is someone close to us. By naming our enemies and seeing things from their point of view, we hold up a mirror to ourselves. Our enemy thus becomes the key to our own happiness.

The Rev. Susan Eastman (*far left with Bill Farra*) guided us through this theme by means of talks, journaling, sharing, lively discussion and prayer. Capt. John Stanley of the Church Army led a workshop on the 'Violence Tree', (*left*) a powerful interactive tool showing how violence begets violence. The Rev. Daphne Grimes spoke on the reconciling work of the Anglican Church in Africa and Israel. At the final Eucharist, the Rev. Phil Bradshaw preached on the sending out of the Apostles. All this and much more made for a memorable conference.

First gathering of Partners in Ministry in Aliquippa, August, 2002. News of this gathering and the October event in London will appear in the next issue of ***News from Celebration****.*



News

Ordinations

We are thankful for the recent ordinations of four Companions. In June **Martyn Hawkes** was ordained Deacon. Martyn, who is married to **Jen**, is serving in the Isle of Dogs, east London. Jen's brother, **Phil Dinwiddie**, was ordained Priest in June and is serving in East Lansing, Michigan. He, Jen and Martyn are all former interns with the Community. **Dennis Wilson**, long time friend and Companion, was ordained to the vocational diaconate (*below*) on the very weekend of our June conference. **Esther Clarke-Prebble** was ordained Priest in New Zealand in September. We rejoice with these Companions as they grow in their respective ministries.



The Rev. Dennis M. Wilson

Susan Abbott

We give thanks that there is a buyer for Susan's house and continue in prayer that she will soon be relocated in a property more suitable for her needs.



This summer the Community once again enjoyed an extended visit from Sylvia and Granville Hawkes from England.

October event in the UK

As reported in the last issue, members of the Community will be traveling to the UK in October. A day long event has been planned at St. Michael's, Camden (north London) which will include members both past and present. Entitled *A Day in the Life of Prayer*, it will be based around the Daily Office and a CD of some of the day's worship will be on sale.

We are hoping that a good number will attend this event, helping to re-establish the Celebration network in the UK. Meanwhile, in another development, the Community has been invited to lead a service at **Phil** and **Margaret Bradshaw**'s church, St. John's Redhill. We hope that this will help to introduce the church to Phil and Margaret's 'other life' as Community members and lead to further contact.

Health update

Prayer concerns for on-going healing: **Harvey Haack**, back surgery; **Elizabeth Tunnacliff**, chemotherapy treatment; **Bill Farra**, shoulder surgery; **Mimi Farra**, knee replacement.

What's happening in Aliquippa



Streetscape project on Franklin Avenue



Future site of halfway house

Aliquippa Arts Festival



Alison, face painting



John, Zac, Alison, May and Bryce singing

Visit our on-line catalog at www.communityofcelebration.com

On being passionate about religion

Phil Bradshaw

The anniversary of September 11th caused me to reflect, amongst other things, on why religion generates so much passion. For some, it's as if the fate of the world is at stake, or if not that, then at least their own personal identity.

This is not something confined to the fundamental wing of the church either. The arguments rage with passion and plenty of ill will at all points of the Christian spectrum, especially where human rights issues are involved. Why is this? After all, it's not as though anybody actually *knows* anything about God in any 'objective' sense. Or do they? Clearly, many people are sure they do.

Paying for belief in God with one's life is as old as Jesus himself in Christianity, although it would be as well to be clear about what he was doing – and indeed about what many of the early church martyrs believed they were doing. Jesus did not go to the cross to defend a doctrine about the Sabbath or even to protect the rights of unborn children. The cross was a natural consequence of living in the freedom of the Spirit of God, which in turn was threatening to the powers that be. By simply accepting it, Jesus demonstrated his trust in the aliveness of God and his disregard of death and its importance.

Many early martyrs died in the same spirit. In a way, this had little to do with religious belief as such. It had more to do with humanity. Religious belief tends to focus on rules and laws, all in the name of God. The spirit of Jesus has more to do with what kind of a human being you are, and in fact Jesus was always being taken to task for his supposed irreligion.

What is it, then, that makes people so passionate about their beliefs? Given the example of Jesus, does it really *matter* what anybody believes – within pretty broad limits? Why do people feel their very identity is at stake, if challenged?

The answer probably lies in the question. We all experience God at a profound personal level. God is so close to us that we cannot distinguish 'him' from our own being. That is the character of God: to be part and parcel of the creation. Jesus once said the glory of God in the flowers was finer than all the robes of Solomon. Just by being what they are, they mirror God.

The same is true of human beings. God is revealed in our humanity, not in our beliefs and dogmas. There is a sense in which God and we are one, just as Jesus said about himself. This is probably why we feel so personally attacked, whenever anyone criticises our picture of God. There is a sense in which 'God' is a projection of our own selves – and indeed it could hardly be otherwise, when you think about it. Flowers would do the same if they could think.

Where Christians differ from secularists, of course, is that we do not think God is 'only' or 'merely' a projection. For us, God has a real existence that is revealed in the humanity of Jesus. But the trouble is, we often behave just like the secularist's view of things. We project 'God' to be a person over against us who requires everyone to conform to whatever we think is important. Hence religious passion and intolerance.

One non-religious definition of God is 'what is over us'. In other words, God is that to which we give our spiritual allegiance. It seems that everyone does this. We give our spiritual allegiance to something, even if it is not the God of Jesus Christ. That is why we have to be very careful about projection. It is very easy to confuse the God of Jesus with what is in *fact* 'over us'.

It makes little difference whether we do this unconsciously, or whether we make a virtue out of it, by, say, parading our faithfulness to a God who, at best, bears only a passing resemblance to the God whom Jesus worshipped. The end result is much the same: a form of humanity that is less than the humanity of Jesus, and which reflects the glory of God to a lesser degree than the humble flower.

We acknowledge the fact that God is not merely a projection by addressing our prayers to a person who stands separate from us, whose aid we seek. Yet that does not alter the fact that, for Jesus, 'I and the Father are one', and therefore for all human beings God can only be known in the kind of humanity taught and shown to us by Jesus. Religious beliefs and convictions are relevant only in so far as they describe, elucidate and enhance our understanding of that humanity – which, like the glory of the flowers in Jesus' illustration, is self-evidently God.

Perhaps this sounds too dismissive of religious belief and practice. Perhaps we feel that however important it may be to be a good person, it is even more important to combine that with saying and believing the right (i.e. divinely appointed) religious things. But this takes us back to the secularist's view of God as a projection of our own inner needs and confusions. Jesus was at home with religion but didn't live by it, as his clashes with authority show. God in Christ – God as the projection of *Jesus'* humanity, so to speak – does not use religion in ways that limit human possibilities.

Which kind of behaviour most reflects the glory of God – lying and cheating, or honesty and straight dealing? Not much contest there, perhaps. But the possibilities in Jesus' imagination are limitless, going far beyond codes of behaviour. In fact, when we imagine God as primarily or exclusively separate from us, *that* is when we tend to limit the notion of God in us to laws and codes. God is alive and has nothing to do with death. When such a God is translated into human behaviour, the results cannot be contained within rules. They can be seen in human beings en masse as much as in any individual. They are both public and private.

If we are going to be passionate about our religion, maybe that is what we need to be passionate about: using our imagination to stretch the boundaries of understanding about what it means for God-in-Christ to be God in us too. If Jesus is anything to go by, it may lead us into new ways of living, but it should not lead us to defend our dogmas.

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