NEWS FROM Celebration!

A People Serving the Church

December 2002

Partners in Ministry, Aliquippa, PA

During the Community's retreat in early December 2001, we courageously picked a date, nine months into the future, to dedicate our new chapel and community center, even though ground had not been broken. We also felt inspired to combine the first Partners in Ministry gathering in the USA with the chapel dedication over the Labor Day weekend, 2002. Our architect and contractor felt confident about completing the construction by the middle of August, and we thought that hosting a conference and dedicating the chapel on the same weekend was reasonable, in view of the fact that many people wanted to attend both functions. Little did we know what complications lay ahead.

In previous newsletters we reported that construction began in April, but in late June serious problems were revealed that necessitated tearing down the chapel walls and re-doing the footers. Needless to say, we did not dedicate the chapel at the end of August as planned. While this setback was disappointing, we decided to proceed with the Partners gathering, even though we didn't have the facilities of the new building.

In order to accommodate the 35 people who came, we converted our basement common room into a chapel/meeting room and managed to shoehorn in just enough chairs for everyone. Meals were prepared in the rowhouse kitchens and served in the backyard under what we called "the tent of eating."



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A Day in the Life of Prayer, London UK



The Community has had a presence in the UK ever since a group of 27 men, women and children from Houston's Church of the Redeemer landed in Coventry, England in 1972. Two years after arriving, we had chosen the name, Community of Celebration, established an English charity, moved into Yeldall Manor, a disused convent, and were a community of 120 men, women and children from five countries. The churches were very open to our ministry of worship renewal through blending various musical styles, and many individuals and families were captivated by our simple, prophetic lifestyle. Before long, we had outgrown the Manor house, and in 1975 half of the Yeldall community moved to the Isle of Cumbrae, Scotland, until we relocated in Aliquippa in 1985. The other half continued their life and ministry as the Community of Celebration in England until 1998, when the community formally dissolved. Although the only Community of Celebration now resides in Aliquippa, Margaret and Phil Bradshaw, who joined the Community at Yeldall, continue the Community's presence in the UK as members on detached service.

During the Community's time in the UK hundreds of people experienced both the joys and the hard knocks of living a

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Maggie Durran explains how the mural will help our brainstorming.

It soon became apparent that it was a relief that we were not trying to accomplish two major events in the same weekend: dedicate the chapel and discern the direction for Partners in Ministry. In fact, it seemed appropriate that the chapel was still under construction as we began to construct a vision of how the Community along with Partners and Companions could work together.

The gathering was a vibrant mixture of people representing the various incarnations of the Community from Church of the Redeemer days in the 1960's to the present. It was a great reunion of those who had shared life and ministry together, and yet it was more than a reunion. There was positive energy devoted to exploring how our gifts and experiences could be woven together to offer the richness of common life and ministry to the church and to the world.



Wiley, Betty and Diane enjoy the reunion.

Facilitated by Maggie Durran's skilled leadership, the weekend was a re-formation of community, centered on worship times that were deep and uplifting. Our brainstorming sessions, aided by a mural (crafted by the Stanley boys) depicting our rowhouses, office, and new chapel, produced an abundance of ideas for Partners in Ministry, places where former members and present Companions could offer their gifts with the Community. Fellowship in the "tent of eating" drew out lots of community stories that were both humorous and uplifting.

At our winter retreat in December of this year, we will re-visit the work we did on the Labor Day weekend and make plans for the next two to three years.



Small group discusses ministry opportunities for Partners.

(A Day in the Life of Prayer, London, UK continued from page 1)



Break-out discussion groups

common life and offering their gifts together in ministry. It was a time of intense spiritual formation and life changing discipleship. Many of those who shared life in this way have continued to exercise their gifts in ministry and to develop new gifts. *A Day in the Life of Prayer* was an opportunity to draw together many strands of the community's life.



(clockwise)
Martin Burch, Jen Hawkes, Joe Beckey, Steven McKeown, Roger Orr

Some of the presenters at A Day in the Life of Prayer

Around 75 people gathered at St. Michael's Church in Camden, north London, on October 12th to spend 6 hours renewing old friendships, hearing talks on prayer, sharing our experiences of prayer in small groups, worshipping together, and learning about the Community's Volunteer Service program, Companionship, chaplaincies, and Partners in Ministry.



Reunion of worship leaders: (from the left) Howard Page-Clark, Jane Porter, Jodi Page-Clark, Dave Porter, Bill Farra, Roger Orr

What's happening in Aliquippa



Companion Mary von Minden reads a lesson at the blessing of her new home. In March, Mary moved from Seguin, Texas to 821 Franklin Ave., Aliquippa, one of Celebration's rowhouses. For Mary, this was the result of several years of discernment and planning. During 2001, she made four visits to Aliquippa, testing the waters of relocation.



David Pulkingham and his wife, Kathryn paid a quick visit to Aliquippa in August. They live in Austin, Texas where David teaches guitar at St. Stephen's Episcopal School. He also freelances as a guitarist/singer and Kathryn runs a catering business.

Work continues on the Chapel of the Holy Spirit with completion presently scheduled for early in the New Year.

Long time member Susan Abbott has been coping with Multiple Systems Atrophy, a degenerating neurological disease, for about 3 years. She has recently moved into a care facility where she is receiving excellent help while she considers any future move.

May McKeown helps Susan explore new living options.

News

Originally built and occupied by a wealthy Russian in the 19th century, Yeldall Manor has been a place of Christian ministry for over 70 years. It was home to the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, an Anglican religious order, for many years before the Community of Celebration moved there in 1973.





The Community grew to 120 persons and served as a center for Fisherfolk ministries and ministry training. Since 1977 the property has been occupied by Yeldall Christian Centres, a ministry to men struggling with addiction, unemployment and homelessness.

The Christian history of Yeldall has been important to the present ministry, so when a member of the staff heard that the Community was coming to the UK we were invited to stop by for a visit. Sylvia Hawkes joined us as we toured the lovely grounds and wandered through the rambling old manor house where many of us had lived 29 years ago. We chatted with some of the residents, were invited to sing, which prompted an invitation to return for a longer visit.



After our week in London it was time for something completely different. The 6 Aliquippans, joined by former members Ruth Wieting and Håkan Joëlson, embarked on a 4-day Narrowboat trip in Wales. Living on a boat that was 67 feet long and 6½ feet wide was definitely an experience in close community! It was exciting to navigate the narrow canal aqueduct (*left*) that stands 126 feet above the River Dee. The scenery was spectacular and the 3-mile-an-hour pace provided plenty of space for relaxation and re-creation.

The Pontcysyllte Aqueduct (above)
Negotiating a canal lock (right)





I became a monk in 1964. The significance of that date is that it was "BC," that is "Before Celebration." For the first five years I learned to pray the five offices each day in Latin. My basic training was learning to worship God in a language I did not understand—not easy to do. I had to learn to use it in such a way as to let it rise above human language and to express things that human language is not able to say. I certainly learned a lot about traditional Christian spirituality in the monastic tradition, which has become second nature to me.

In the short time I have to talk about prayer, I would like to say something about my monastic life and what I've learned over 38 years of plodding along monotonously, day in, day out, year in, year out. When people come into our life and say they're bored with it, I tell them they don't have a vocation. If they come in and say how monotonous it is, I say, "Great, stick with it."



Abbot Basil Mathews, OSB, is Abbot of Elmore Abbey, Speen, near Newbury, UK. He has been a close friend and trusted mentor of the Community of Celebration since 1974.

What has kept me on this course? I think it's an insight into what prayer is at it's very root. We have so many prayers, but there is something right at the heart of it all, right down deep, that makes sense of it all. Jesus taught only one prayer. And the most important words are the opening words: Our Father. Jesus said, "When you pray, say, 'Our Father.'" He didn't say when you pray, feel good. He didn't say when you pray, feel holy or special. He just said, do it. He said, say "our," so you never say it alone. You always pray the Lord's Prayer with the one who said "our" because Jesus includes himself in that opening clause. In the truest sense, Jesus is incorporating his hearers into himself. As we pray, we are bonded to Jesus.

Likewise in the Holy Eucharist, on the night before he died, Jesus took bread and blessed it and gave it to his disciples and said, "Take and eat." He didn't say, "Take and understand." This is a great mystery, being bonded to Jesus, entering into his life, so that we can say with St. Paul, "Now no longer I live, but Christ lives in me." I challenge every one of you when you're cleaning your teeth, or shaving, or putting on your makeup, or looking in the mirror, to ask yourself, who am I looking at? We must look at ourselves through new eyes. Now no longer I live, but Christ lives in me. If we don't recognize the face of Christ in our own faces, we find it very difficult to recognize the face of Christ in others. If you know yourself, your own sinfulness, your own desperate need, your own inner pain, you know the hidden self. No one knows himself fully, but we know enough to know our own unlovableness sometimes, but in Jesus we become lovable. He wants us in the first instance to love ourselves. If we don't do that, how can we love others? We are members of the body of Christ. In our baptism we were made inheritors of the kingdom, we were bonded into Jesus.

If I distill down my own personal discipleship, my path in life, it always comes down to, "Lord, teach me to pray." I keep returning to that point, day in, day out, always going back to the starting point. When Benedict wrote his little rule (he called it a modest and little rule for beginners), he described it as a school for the Lord's service, a school for children.

So, use the Our Father. Break it up into bits, like you break up bread. Don't always say it as a formula from beginning to end. At times you will say, "Hallowed be thy name." Sometimes you will say, "Thy kingdom come." Sometimes you will say, "On earth as in heaven," bringing down the kingdom of heaven. Sometimes you will say, "Give us this day our daily bread." You can do that in a myriad of circumstances. And above all, "Forgive." That is the real hard core of this prayer: forgive us as we forgive. There is no way around that clause. If we are ever caught in an unforgiving disposition, then we are simply asking God not to forgive. "You are my friends if you do what I command you." What Jesus commands us is to 'agape' one another, and that means to forgive. When he says, "Be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect," he's not giving us an impossible command but one that we can realize if we work at it, day in, day out. Go back to the beginning, sit at the feet of the Savior and say, "Lord, teach me to pray."

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