NEWS FROM Celebration!

A People Serving the Church

Fall 2003

The Community of Celebration's newly built Chapel of the Holy Spirit was the newest church in Christendom! So said Abbot Basil Matthews of Elmore Abbey, England as he preached at the Dedication of the Chapel on Saturday the 30th August.

Gathered for the occasion, presided over by Bishop Bill Folwell, were family and friends, ministers, Companions and Partners in Ministry. The exuberant and joyful congregation was led through the Community's grounds by a Scots piper, before a sprinkling of water from the rock-that-is-the-font prepared them for the dedication service in the newly built chapel.

For thirty years, from humble beginnings in Houston, Texas, the Community of Celebration has traveled the world spreading a new and infectious spirit of worship, across 30 States, Europe, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. Then 18 years ago God called the Community to plant roots in the depressed Pennsylvania town of Aliquippa and make it their permanent home. Establishing a Benedictine lifestyle of prayer, work and study followed. Till now the daily office and weekly Eucharist have been celebrated in a small room in their administrative office.





Five years ago the vision came for the small octagonal chapel, its expansive windows providing the backdrop of the lush wooded hillside and the dappled shadow of the rear gardens of the Community's row houses. It was down this green and sometimes shaded garden that the piper led the worshipping congregation.

"For we are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, holy nation; once no people, now God's people, proclaiming his marvelous light," they sang to herald the gospel. While the bishop preached about the rock that is Christ in our lives and the sun shone on the rocky hillside, the Abbot summed up the message of the day, 'Relax (in the Holy Spirit) and enjoy Life (to which God has called you in abundance).' The Chapel was truly baptized in the sunshine of God's love.

-The Rev. Maggie Durran

Dedication of the Chapel of the Holy Spirit

Photos: Maggie Durran



The Lord's Prayer - Steven McKeown, Phil Bradshaw



Rehearsing the Te Deum

Bishop Folwell





Piper's Dismissal



Address by Betty Pulkingham

The Revs.
Daphne Grimes, Kevin Hackett, Steven McKeown



Clare (Morris) Chiesa, Margaret Bradshaw, Jeanne and Andy Kohn



'Watching the Blessing of the Rock'



Diane Andrew, May McKeown, Michelle Farra





John Farra, Abbot Basil Matthews, Bill Farra

News

Celebration Center



Companions Robin McKay, Sr. Elizabeth Mary Burke

In the Spring edition of News from Celebration we announced the completion of our new building. Since then we have put the space to good use. In May we hosted a landscaping workweek to prepare the ground and begin planting trees, shrubs, and flowers.

In June we held our 18th Annual Conference at the Community's home and received two thumbs up from all who attended. The theme of the gathering was Benedictine spirituality, focusing on the rhythm of prayer, work, study, and recreation. The weekend was rounded out by another humorous visit from that very dour Scottish minister I.A.M. Jolly (a.k.a. Steven McKeown) and an evening's worship in the Taizé style. James set a high standard in the kitchen, offering fine cuisine at traditional community thriftiness. Partners in Ministry provided invaluable practical help in the catering and housekeeping departments.



Eighteenth Annual Conference - Closing Eucharist

The Music Workshop in August was led by two former Community members, Diane Andrew and Wiley Beveridge, with help from Mimi. One of the highlights was showcasing at the concluding Eucharist the original compositions of the participants.

Our inaugural season climaxed with the official dedication of the Chapel of the Holy Spirit on August 30th.

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Please pray for Susan Abbott who continues to decline physically with Multiple Systems Atrophy. She enjoys receiving cards and letters at the facility where she is being cared for: Ms. Susan Abbott, The Westminster Reigate Beaumont, Colley Lane, Reigate, Surrey, RH2 9JB, UK

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Companion Margaret Farra went to be with the Lord on October 16th, after two months in the hospital dealing with complications following total knee replacement surgery. The Community released Bill for nearly one month to help care for Margaret. He was privileged to engage in this holy work for a person who spent her adult life giving sacrificially as a nurse, mother, and friend. One of Margaret's distinguished achievements was her attendance at 17 of the 18 Annual Celebration Conferences. She missed the 1996 conference because (at the age of 80) she was serving as a medical missionary in Malawi.

Taizé

In September the Community inaugurated a monthly Taizé worship service at 7:00 pm on the first Sunday of the month. The new chapel makes a sympathetic venue for the blend of simple chant, silence, and listening to Scripture and inspirational readings.

Celebration-Church Army partnership

After months of hard work by John Stanley and many volunteers, the projected date for opening the Aliquippa Community Café (working name) is January 1, 2004. It has proven to be a massive undertaking, transforming an old, dilapidated bar into 2300 sq. ft. of gracious space where people from all walks of life can meet over coffee and snacks and share their stories or just hang out. We welcome this opportunity to engage in a grass roots, community evangelism, harkening back to the days of The Way In coffeehouse in Houston.

Taylor College, located in St. John, New Brunswick, is the national training center for the Church Army in Canada. In late October, 13 of the students, faculty, and staff came to Aliquippa to see what Church Army was doing here and to work at renovating 789 Franklin Ave., which was donated to Celebration to be used as supervised housing for ex-offenders and those leaving drug rehab. The group worshipped with us at Morning and Evening Prayer, ate meals and held study sessions in the Celebration Center. Their enthusiasm and passion for the gospel was an inspiration to us all.

ACE update

Support is growing for the ACE Women's Training Project to begin on a part-time basis in early 2004, moving to full-time in September 2004. Alison Stanley has volunteered part-time to get the program started. The program will target single mothers who are unemployable because they lack basic skills. It will include courses in math, computers, parenting and work skills; childcare will be provided on site.

Coming alongside



Jim and Frankie Ring have been long-time Companions and encouragers of Celebration's life and ministry. They know about sacrifice, commitment, and following the Lord wherever he leads. For several years they spearheaded an effective ministry to at-risk teens in Charleston, SC. When that door eventually closed, they prayed and put out feelers about whether God had a place for them at Celebration. We said, "Come and see," and in this calendar year they have come 3 times to live among us and offer their gifts, which have been extremely helpful. All of us continue to stay open to the Lord's leading with respect to the future.

Dates to mark in 2004

May 17-21	Work project
June 11-13	Annual Conference
June 23-26	Vocations Conference: *Exploring life in the Community of Celebration*
Week of July 12	Evangelism workshop, led by John Stanley of the Church Army
Aug. 3-6	Music workshop
Sept. 4-6	Labor Day House Party

The Chapel of the Holy Spirit - A Vision of Possibility

The dedication of the Chapel of the Holy Spirit on August 30 marked the climax of a journey which, for some of us at least, has taken nearly 40 years.

What has the journey all been about? It began in the early days of the charismatic movement, but unlike some developments in that movement it was never focused exclusively on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The spiritual impulse that led to living in community was more about a response to God from the heart. This has always been true for us, and hence it seemed the most natural thing in the world to call our new permanent place of worship the Chapel of the Holy Spirit.

If the heart of our life is a response to the Spirit, what does that involve? First and foremost, the worship of God. For us, worship is similar to its meaning in the old marriage service: "with my body I thee worship", something which goes beyond words and feelings and is present in the mundane as much as in the sublime. It is the givenness of our lives to God, for richer or poorer, in the joy and in the pain. The religious act of worship is the means by which this gift to God is externalised and given objective meaning.

Giving our lives to God inevitably meant giving ourselves to one another. God is love, and you cannot worship love in the abstract. For example, it meant giving ourselves to worship in a public event, no matter how we felt or what our relationships were. The way songs were sung and music played combined to convey the worship of our lives.

At a secular level (ordinary life as opposed to religious activity) giving ourselves to each other needed a more specific reason than love in general. It was to be the local presence of Christ wherever we were. Since we are all members of Christ's body, this is a difficult goal to achieve in any one place as independent individuals. We then had to deal with Jesus not as an exalted figure but as a person who taught some concrete principles about what it means to love God.

Love means dealing with relationships, the complex interactions between human beings which bring out the best and worst in all of us. It also means dealing with economics. Not just frowning on world trade systems, but with the way we manage our personal affairs and the way we relate to our neighbour. It means trusting that our real needs will be met.

This was often where our biggest struggles lay. Many community members had gifts and abilities, longings and desires, which could never be fulfilled in the limited milieu of community life. Gradually we began to realise that, while the vision could be held by many, the structures we developed to contain its visible expression would require a specific calling.

But the vision of responding to the Spirit remains. Most of the sayings of Jesus are so radical in a modern context that it seems impossible to fulfil them. Maybe this is why so much religious enthusiasm tends to concentrate on the person of Jesus rather than on what he said. At any rate, when we give ourselves to God and to each other, all of a sudden the sayings come within the realms of possibility.

And it is a vision of the possible that is perhaps the Community's most significant legacy to the church. We were always "following the Spirit." We didn't learn some principles and then attempt to live them out. We lived life and reflected on what God was doing among us. It meant that there was always an openness to the possibilities of God.

"Openness to possibility" should not be confused (as it often is) with infidelity to revealed truth, or with a position in issues of political correctness. It is a spiritual mode of being, as opposed to a dogmatic or political one, the ultimate source of which is scripture and in particular the sayings of Jesus.

Implicit in the life and teaching of Jesus, and explicit in Paul's commentary about them, is the struggle between spirit and law. For both law is death, because it not only judges but defines the limits of goodness. Yet much of what we hear today is law. Dogmas and rights are insisted upon. People are condemned for believing or not believing, condoning or not condoning, conforming or not conforming. In Jesus the spirit was above the law. He often set it aside, yet claimed to fulfil it. That is a very hard line for us to walk with integrity, and we can only come close by sticking close to Jesus himself.

Those sayings reflect Jesus' spirit. They are not laws or a comprehensive code waiting to be fleshed out with case law. They are the sayings of a man who has internalised the law and has caught a vision of possibility. How else do you explain the oft repeated "You have been taught one thing, but what I say is…"?

Possibility goes beyond requirement and dogma. It opens the door to creativity, which is the nature of God. It does not explore innovation for convenience, but is rooted in what is already known about God. In that spirit, non-Jews were admitted to a very exclusive club, and we believe the same Spirit is available to transform human life and relationships today.

The Community of Celebration has a vision of ordinary Christians putting their lives together to be the presence of Christ where they are. The enduring relationships that have resulted are in themselves sufficient to commend the vision to many. But if one reflects on its deeper meaning, it opens the door to possibilities that are limitless.

For those trapped in dogma it offers freedom. For those seeking transcendence as a way to salvation, it offers more down to earth (and equally godly) remedies. For those in despair at systemic injustice and the tyranny of private economics, it opens up ways to rise above the insurmountable. For a church locked into division over social and religious issues, it holds out the possibility of unity based on the Spirit of Jesus rather than definitions of right and wrong.

The Chapel of the Holy Spirit echoes with these possibilities. In one sense it is just an ordinary little chapel. But it's our hope that spiritual history that brought it into being will continue to produce echoes that find a place in many hearts around the world.

- Phil Bradshaw, SCC

The Rev. Phil Bradshaw is a member of the Community of Celebration. He and his wife, Margaret, currently reside in Redhill, England. This is an abridged version of the original article. For the full text, go to our website and click "about us," "Newsletters," then "The Chapel of the Holy Spirit."

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