NEWS FROM Celebration!

A People Serving the Church

Fall 2004

Signs of Hope in Aliquippa

When Bill Farra sent me a copy of an article from the Wall Street Journal (May 27th) giving Aliquippa's classification as "distressed," I had to smile. Distressed status describes a city where the earned income is too unstable for tax income to be reliable and the city stands a good chance of reaching bankruptcy. Franklin Avenue is the icon of Aliquippa's "distress."

Why smile? Just this springtime I bought a house, 801 Franklin Avenue, the old Salvation Army building adjacent to the Celebration office. It didn't cost much compared with prices in London, England, where I live and work. And I don't even know if it's a bargain to buy a cheap house in a depressed city where prices are still falling.



Celebration's office (R) with 801 Franklin Ave (L)

I have often felt a fool for the sake of the kingdom and I really don't mind appearing like one again. The Community of Celebration on Franklin Avenue, their houses and chapel surrounded by bright flowers, freshly cut lawn or friendship lights in winter, presents a sign of hope in the midst of distress and local despair.

For several years now I have spent time - a month or more each year - living with and working among the members of Celebration. Out of the corporate life, right there on the dereliction of Franklin Avenue, Celebration has found hope. There is no overpowering need to change the world in order to find justification; there is rather a sense of being faithful –and hopeful – in being present in this little backwater of Pennsylvania. The flower tubs and carefully tended lawn and the friendship lights offer a moment of brightness and hope to those who drive by, or visit Dave's bar opposite, or live out their years of retirement in the dilapidated houses across the street.

My working life is frantically busy; I work for the Diocese of London creating strategies and finding solutions for heritage churches at risk – that is unless something happens soon they will be beyond repair. I help clergy and councils of distressed churches who care for amazingly beautiful buildings, make funding applications, find strategies for renting church halls, always seeking to help churches re-establish mission and ministry when the odds are stacked against them.

When I arrive in Aliquippa I can just be. That's what they do in the life of prayer. Everyone works extremely hard but, mixed in with the cycle of prayer, it makes for justification by being more than by doing. Now I've put down my marker – like Abraham setting up his marker at Ebenezer – here's where the Lord has brought us. I have bought a home here and I belong.

801 Franklin Avenue is large, too large for one part-time resident. The third floor is almost complete as a small one-bed apartment; the second floor is being remodelled to create five new guest rooms for Celebration's conferences and guest ministry. The first floor will largely be dedicated to Celebration's project for local women. A big meeting and training room, childcare space and an office will house the program that Celebration began in April that benefited the women from the local jail.



Former Community member David Gustafson used his construction skills in remodeling 801 Franklin Ave.

I am smiling because with true generosity and a gift of evangelism, the Community shares its being with anyone who is among them and it is liberating. With 801 Franklin Avenue I have become a partner in being. At Easter I planted some flowers in the garden of 801 and eventually there will be friendship lights in the windows. Soon my house will become part of Celebration's gift to Franklin Avenue and 'distressed' Aliquippa. All we do is live faithfully and just maybe the Spirit of God can take Celebration's little acorn of hope and spread it out over Franklin Avenue.

-The Revd. Maggie Durran

News from the UK

Phil and Margaret Bradshaw joined the Community of Celebration at Yeldall Manor in England in 1974, taking life vows with us in Aliquippa in 1996. Since 1998, when the Community of Celebration in England closed, they have maintained Celebration's UK house.



Phil and Margaret Bradshaw

Phil is Honorary Curate at St John's Redhill, their local church. He also circulates a newsletter, Celebration Link, maintains a website and takes speaking engagements from time to time. He is currently writing a book. Margaret is involved in the music ministry in the parish, and is also responsible for child protection procedures, a very demanding task which nowadays has a high priority in the Anglican Church.

One of the most useful roles of the UK house has been its interaction with ordinary folk at parish level. At the same time, it also maintains contacts and keeps in touch with developments in the wider church. This year, Margaret has decided to retire from her job in the Health Service. This will open up new possibilities, which they are both thinking and praying about at present.

The Bradshaws' children, Ian and Rebecca, now married, have always maintained their interest in the Community. Bill Farra is godfather to grandson Jake.



The Bradshaw clan in Italy for Ian and Favorita's wedding.

On August 21st, Joe Beckey, the Community's newest full member, made his profession to life membership in the Community of Celebration.

A retreat, just days before his vows, affirmed for Joe that "there was no other way I wanted to live" and those doubts that all of us experience as we take decisive steps in our vocation were dismissed. "I became aware that God meant for me to be happy and that intention applies to everyone, not just those of us who live in tightly woven communities."

The day was sunny and the service presided over by Bishop Bill Folwell, Celebration's Bishop Visitor, assisted by Steven McKeown, with Dennis Wilson in the role as deacon. Among the congregation was the Rector who first introduced Joe to the Community of Celebration, Rick Simpson and his family. Joe's nephew, Andy Beckey, came from Nashville and played classical guitar music as a prelude to the service.





Steven baptizing the McKeown's newest grand-daughter, Gwyneth.

Joe's life journey began in Muscatine, Iowa and he's been many places and lived many lives before re-establishing his relationship with God on the way to Aliquippa and Celebration. Joe dedicated himself "to the service of God within the Community of Celebration" and received his distinctive Celebration ring as a sign of his vow.

Of course, the occasion led into a celebratory common meal with the many gathered members, friends and neighbors.



Top: Bishop Folwell presiding at the declaration of vows. Below: Joe and Rick Simpson celebrating.

Please join us as we pray for Susan Abbott, whose health continues to deteriorate. She loves to receive cards, emails, and other newsy items.

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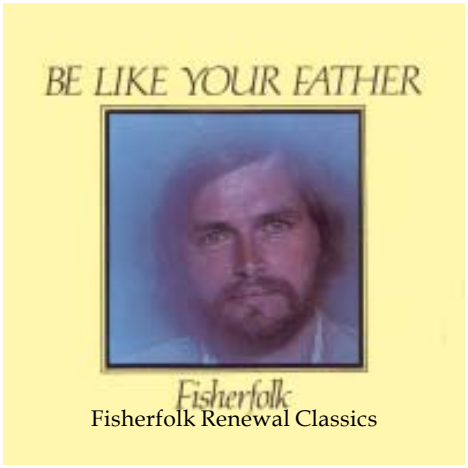
Worship in the style of Taizé



On the first Sunday evening of each month a Taizé style service takes place in our chapel. The music and the style come from the world renowned community of brothers in France. It is a reflective, candle-lit opportunity for silence interspersed with songs and readings. For this special hour people arrive from all around Beaver County and Pittsburgh; thirty attended even on Labor Day weekend.



Sarah Hoskins on cello, James on French horn, and Mimi at the piano contribute to the Taizé service.



Fisherfolk Renewal Classics

This Post Green Community recording is now available on CD.

You can access our complete catalog and hear selected tracks at:

www.communityofcelebration.com

Betty Pulkingham's mother, Betty Carr, died on December 17, 2004, aged 104. Bey was a remarkable Christian who served the Lord and his people in countless ways. She always seemed to know just how to pray for people, carried her petitions and thanksgivings directly to the throne of grace, and persevered until she knew her prayers were answered. Bey was always generous with her prayers and support for the Community. She is deeply missed.





Celebration Companion Sarah Turnblom assists with Conference cooking.



The Rev. Moni McIntyre leads the Annual Conference in considering issues of ecological ethics.





Above & right: Labor Day visitors and friends join in playing Kubb, a game Ruth and Håkan brought to us this year from Sweden. In the background is the earth oven where we cooked fresh pizza and bread.

Celebration has a house on Franklin Avenue for sale. The price is right!

ACE Women's Training Project gets underway, spreading hope in Aliquippa

For more than a year Celebration has been preparing a new ministry, one that reaches out to local people in the economically depressed local neighborhoods. And this summer the ACE (Aliquippa Community Enterprise) Women's Training Project began its work. Courses on Mondays and Thursdays brought in up to nine women at each.

Crafts feel therapeutic, but for many of the women who attended, this was a first venture into making anything at all and their first soft toys, a teddy bear or a puppet, were a fantastic achievement. They went on to design and make their own jewelry. "Here I am modeling my jewelry at Celebration. It was designed for me, by me. Check me out!" wrote one woman under a proud photo in the course scrapbook. Another wrote, "I really enjoyed my time here at Celebration. It has brought out talents I never knew I had. My only hope is that my daughter will enjoy playing with this as much as I did making it."

The second course, **Parenting through Play**, enabled the women to reflect on how they and their children (or grandchildren) learn. Two local women joined Alison Stanley and May McKeown on a couple of sessions to discuss family literacy and how many of the ordinary things of daily life, from labels to road signs, can help us to help our children develop new skills. As one woman said, "We found we are never too old to learn from one another" and another, "The things I've learned here will have a very positive affect on mine and my children's lives."

None of the women here are named and our photos show only their craft achievements as all of them came from the Beaver County Jail, under escort for their journey by minibus to Franklin Avenue. The positive impact was attested to by jail staff who saw the women working hard to behave well in order to maintain the privilege of coming to Celebration. For Celebration members themselves, it was an honor to be involved in the lives of these women from Aliquippa and to share in their struggles to prepare for a more hopeful future.

In October two new courses will begin. Crafts will continue with new challenges, including learning to use a sewing machine so if anyone out there has a sewing machine that never gets used, here's an opportunity to donate it to a life-changing program!

The second course will be creative writing and a financial donation will help with materials for this class and for the craft group.

Early this year a government department donated 12 computers to Celebration's ACE Women's Training Project. The hard drives were removed for security reasons, but we have received several donations of replacement drives and now have enough computers for the program. We expect soon to be able to offer basic math, literacy and typing courses on the computers enabling women to develop work skills that take them into the mainstream instead of the destructive paths that brought them to jail in the first place.

By Christmas, we hope to have moved the women's project from Celebration's gathering area and dining room into a permanent space in the new property at 801 Franklin Avenue. Maggie Durran has made most of 801's first floor available to the project and a careful remodeling of 801 has effectively separated this from our guest space on the second floor. The large room that the Salvation Army used for services will be set out with a computer area and general training area, an adjacent room will be set up for childcare.

Over the summer we have received several generous gifts, $2,000 here and $1,000 there. This will get us part way. We still need to lay new flooring, get more equipment for childcare and chairs suitable for working at the computers – we have been given some desks. Can you help? Every donation for ACE goes straight into helping our courses help women who as yet are unable to help themselves; all they want is a chance.

Become a partner in this new ministry, bringing hope to those without hope by making a donation.



Women from the training program proudly display some of their crafts.



New neighbors Rosa Maria and daughter Diana on a visit to improve their English skills and seek our help in securing pre-natal care.



Celebration members Steven, Bill, May and Joe, along with Alison Stanley and Michelle Farra attended training for teaching Adult Literacy.

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