

Among the Gifts of the Platte Clove Community the Holy Spirit Gathers Us

A holy buzz: It's hard to describe the holy buzz of many conversations that animated our October 11-14 Nurturing Communities Gathering of about fifty adults plus children from sixteen different communities. We were generously hosted by the Platte Clove Bruderhof Community



and surrounded by the breathtaking fall colors of the Catskill Mountains. For a few days we relaxed from busy schedules back home and joined in their traditions of large common meals, garden work, circle-dancing, cider-making, mountain hiking, campfires, and even touch football. Perhaps the accompanying



photos can convey the lively joy we felt in discovering other groups who share the love and struggles of our same calling to be all-out disciples of Jesus in community.

We experienced up close the charisms of Platte Clove and their family of Bruderhof communities. They maintain a life that struck us urban folk as pristine and wholesome -- fresh as the mountain air -- though they would contend that they have the same temptations and struggles as any other community. We remember especially the bright-eyed faces of hosts who greeted us with great anticipation, eagerly showing us around and asking questions of our home communities.

The Bruderhof definitely maintains a unique culture of simplicity, modesty, hard work, and a forthright search for truth in conversation. As obvious as our cultural differences were -- kerchiefs and skirts on the women, braids on the girl's heads, plaid shirts on most men and boys -- we quickly found a common spirit in our calling to live out, in our different settings, the good news of reconciliation in Jesus. We worshipped, prayed, and brainstormed community problems together with a seamless grace that flowed from mutual respect. Such a gathering would have been much more awkward a



decade or two ago when the Bruderhof communities were in a more self-contained and wounded season of life.

The radical pacifist Bruderhof movement, which began under the leadership of Eberhard and Emmy Arnold in post-World War I Germany, now numbers about 2,000 members worldwide. These communities have traditionally lived in large rural “hofs” of about 200 persons with their own workshops, grade schools, dining halls and gardens, constituting a substantial no-money internal economy. In recent years, however, their younger members have pushed for a Bruderhof presence in a dozen urban settings where they have planted households sharing a common life while engaged in outside earning jobs and various kinds of civic engagement. They have also begun to partner with other intentional Christian communities by sending volunteers



to groups like Koinonia Farm and Englewood Christian Church (Indianapolis) for both short and longer-term service. With numerous visits back and forth, the Bruderhof communities have been a force for encouragement in the New Monasticism movement. This Nurturing Communities Gathering, however, marks a further step in their engagement with other Christian communities, where they hosted an event in which they were collaborators rather than chief initiators.

Most of those who gathered at Platte Clove are newer, urban communities in the first generation of life. We met in worship and workshops exploring issues of diversity, membership commitments, leadership, and how to balance priorities of common life and mission in our sometimes challenging settings.

In our wrap-up session we gave thanks for some of the following gifts:

- Having a variety of communities host the annual conference gives an in-depth experience of different community cultures that God uses in unique ways. Jesus People U.S.A. in Chicago is hoping to host next year’s Gathering.
- We appreciated the wide representation of many different individuals and communities who shared in the leadership of worship, general sessions and workshops.
- There was a generous margin of free time for play with children, for informal conversations with each other and host families.
- Columbus Day added an extra 24 hours to our weekend gathering. We want to do that again by meeting October 10-13 in 2014.



- We greatly appreciated community childcare, the refreshment of outdoor spaces and a common work project with our hosts.

We also made plans and set priorities for the coming year including



- Continue apostolic visits with newer communities to help them grow in sustainable practices and connect with other community resources.
- Help set up visitations (community reviews) as requested for communities in the NCP network.
- Explore connections with various other networks of

intentional communities of which we have become aware.

- Further develop and update our web site with news and prayer concerns from participating groups about projects, gatherings, retreats and needs.
- Network communities based on proximity/ affinities/ common issues and concerns.
- Explore the possibility of regional NCP retreats for communities within easy driving distance of each other.
- Host another annual gathering especially for community members rather than seekers, for which there are other venues such as “Schools for Conversion.”
- Provide and strengthen a network that can foster friendships and inter-community visits for single communitarians.
- Create a letter that clearly explains how to contribute financially to NCP.
- Restructure the NCP Steering Committee to both oversee David Janzen’s leadership and to plan for the annual NCP Gathering.



A few concluding personal reflections:

I still really love this job which isn't a job at all. Everything I have lived and learned comes into play in this calling. I look forward to a five-day visit with intentional communities in the Toronto area beginning January 8. Other visits and events will follow as God gives grace. Several communities are proposing visitations in the New Year. If you are interested in accompanying me on one of my trips or visits, let me know.



My biggest joy is to meet younger communities and their leaders, to help them understand the importance of their life and work together in the bigger scheme of God's coming kingdom. New communities always have problems, but these problems usually are like the problems other communities have struggled with, so if I can introduce them to each other the conversation usually goes on great without me. I confess that I still don't know where this movement of newer discipleship communities is heading, but I do know that when we come together the Holy Spirit has already prepared us for a rich encounter with Jesus in one another. So I found myself at times, sitting back at the Platte Clove Gathering, watching folks from different communities offering workshops, leading worship, and sprawling out into many little circles eagerly talking about their stuff. I felt like a grandpa watching the cousins play and realized that some of them are bonding for life and will keep seeking each other out for years to come because of the gifts they have shared.

Yours in Christ's love,

David Janzen

P.S. For a look at other photos from our Gathering at Platte Clove, check out this link:
<http://www.shalommissioncommunities.org/nurturing-communities/ncp-photos/#all/1/list>