

A Redeemed Mishap in Waco

Plus

Five Community Visits in the Twin Cities

“What? You’re at the airport? Oh David, the celebration isn’t until next weekend!”

I’d arrived at Waco on Friday, September 5, to join Hope Fellowship’s twentieth anniversary celebration and to deliver the Sunday morning talk. But, suspiciously, no one was at the airport to meet me. So I called community leader, Nancy Gatlin who answered with much surprise, and a good laugh. In half an hour, husband Joe Gatlin picked me up and shared that they had already made plans for the Arroyo family to host me, my meal schedule was in place, and they’d switch the schedule around so that I would be giving my talk “this Sunday at 11:00 am instead of next Sunday.” Hope Fellowship certainly wins the prize for “Most gracious welcome of a guest speaker who arrives on the wrong weekend.” We had good laughs reviewing the multiple lapses of attention that caused and then didn’t catch this error. Like in the Bible, God is still in the business of improvising with human foolishness to create great story endings.

On Sunday morning I felt moved to tell the twenty-year history of Hope Fellowship as a “Once upon a time” story by a grandpa to his grandchildren. And as I like to do with my grandkids, I make mistakes in telling the story of our day together, which they catch and eagerly correct. I tried to tell the story of Hope Fellowship’s twenty years as if they’d tried to live according to the wisdom of the world rather than the wisdom of the Cross. But the audience would not let me get away with that story. So many ways and times, it turns out, their community could have come to an end, but did not, because they persisted in faithfulness and kept discerning the costly way of Jesus in friendship across economic and cultural boundaries.



Fernando Arroyo serves us Sunday breakfast while mom (Carrie) sleeps in.

A week earlier I participated in five community visits in five days in the Twin Cities. The Green House and Ecclesia House are two communities living side-by-side in extended households about a mile south of down-town Minneapolis. They conspired to have me lead them each in two-day visitations assisted by teams of local leaders.

The Green House was doing well in many ways, but needed some extra time to remember and grieve Joi, a troubled community member who took her life last year. Our closing meeting recalled the gifts and stresses of life with Joi. We named our losses and unfinished griefs, and closed with a gentle chorus of “Halleluia, Halleluia, Halleluia, Halleluia.” In our tearful love for one another we found a renewed solidarity in the presence of the God who deeply grieves with us.



At the Ecclesia House our visitation team included Joan (a Franciscan sister), James (an area lay pastor), and Thor (a gentle bearded giant and friend from around the corner). For a couple of years, Andrew and Sarah Howard, the home-owners, have led this household and given pastoral care to its members. After a day of listening to all in the community, we observed that the Howards were doing a good job, but that other leadership gifts in the house were ready



to serve. We noted three agenda which each needed their own forum and suggested the following division of labor: They might benefit from 1) Home-owners meetings, where housing issues would be discussed, but on which the Howards as owners, would decide; 2) Community-wide issues that would be discussed and agreed upon by consensus; and 3) Leadership issues for which a transitional leadership council (TLC) was named to do

business until a more long-term team would be chosen and authorized by all the members. The community liked this proposal and, following our report, met for another hour, taking the first

steps to implement the plan. Our visitation team was amazed that such a significant community transition could happen so peacefully, without rancor or power plays.

We also rejoiced with Green House and Ecclesia House folk in the purchase of a third large house next door - - the Blue House -- whose title is held by the newly formed Genesis Communities LLC. With a critical mass of about thirty people sharing three adjacent yards, it seems that a lot of common life and spontaneous encounters will be possible. The Blue House



ground floor also promises to offer worship and ministry space for The Salvage Yard Church if a zoning variance can be obtained.



Thirdway Community and Groundswell Restaurant: I was also blessed to stop by three other communities while in town. The Third-Way Community, affiliated with Shalom Mission Communities, has been growing steadily and now is shaped around several clusters of folks living together in different neighborhoods of St. Paul. In the past two years, Pastor Seth McCoy has also given leadership to the

expansion of a coffee house into a bustling restaurant called “Groundswell.” The café is becoming a venue for musicians and artist to show their stuff, and for some community members to find employment. After pouring in long hours through the construction and start-up stages, now there seems to be a stable core staff and Seth can begin to look around for what God might want him to focus on next in church or community development. The soft cinnamon rolls with crunchy toppings were all the evidence I needed to believe this café is off to a great start.

God Town comes to Frog Town: Third-Way friend, Josias Hanson, took me along to visit a Holy Spirit-driven community movement in a poorer section of St. Paul called “Frog-Town.” We witnessed a lively charismatic group involving two founding families, a household of women and another of men. Having claimed “Frog-Town” for God, their community now is called “God-Town.” They go door to door, invite neighbors to Bible studies, pray with derelicts, start gardens on vacant lots, organize street-dance parties, and offer training in urban ministry to whoever drops by for a day, a week, or forever. They welcomed Josias and me to their front-porch mid-morning Bible study, which turned into a question and answer session about Reba Place Fellowship, the Nurturing Communities Project, and what God might be up to among them. The Holy Spirit “is a-movin” in God-Town.

Fusion House Community invited me to dinner for a chance to share their dream of a Christian intentional community and a gathering place for aspiring artists in South Minneapolis. At the heart of this group is the fascinating family of Tom and Karene Johnston. Karene teaches dance. Daughter #1, Miki, is a professional violinist and dancer. Daughter #2, Hannah, has just graduated from college in theatre and occasionally finds venues to perform. Both Hannah and Miki have fiancés who seem committed to this community venture as well. With support from a wider circle of friends, they have teamed up to offer free dance classes to inner-city kids, who keep coming back with lots of enthusiasm.



In clockwise order: Tom, David, Jeff (Mikki's fiancé), Hannah, Mikki, and Karene.

The Johnston family transplanted from the suburbs to the “inner corridor” of St. Paul only a year ago, and in that move, divested much of their stuff. Their present downsized home is not their final destination, but they want to learn the city and let God lead them. We discussed how community grows organically under the Spirit's leading rather than by some ideal design, and we took courage from what God is already doing among them -- the first steps toward what is to come.

Joanne's Recovery: I want to thank all of you who have been praying for Joanne's recovery from a bicycle-car accident in early July. Last Friday she got clearance from the surgeon to begin walking again. Each day she can go a little further. Physical therapy is helping restore strength and flexibility to the leg that was inactive for two months. We are most grateful

for all the services Reba Place Fellowship folks have provided in recent weeks as I've begun to travel again to visit other communities. We've postponed celebration of our 50th wedding anniversary till sometime in November when Joanne hopes she can dance. (Me dancing is harder to imagine.)

Preparations for the Nurturing Communities Project Gathering will pick up steam when Natalie Potts (from Thirdway Community via a summer at Plow Creek Fellowship) moves to Reba next week to assist us in local arrangements for the NCP reunion. We still have some openings. Please see the attached invitation and registration form. **See you October 10-13, Lord willing.**