

- A Visit to Church of All Nations,**
- Genesis Community Visitation**
- Twelve hours of rolling conversation**
- And a name change for this Nurturing Communities thing**

Dear Friends in the Nurturing Communities Network,

Whenever I make a trip to visit other Christian intentional communities, I like to take along one or two of the younger folks I'm mentoring. Such a travel companion can help with the driving, reflect with me on the communities we're visiting, and go deep into a fresh wisdom-seeking conversation that makes every mile a gift rather than another boring minute to get through.

James Kang is a twenty-something practicing member at Reba Place Fellowship from Korean background, and leader of a singles household called "The Patch." This was a return visit for James to Church of All Nations (CAN), but for me, a first stop on their turf. We arrived in Minnesota on the heels of a gorgeous (for those who didn't have to dig their way out) 20-inch mid-April snow storm that invited picture taking left and right.

**A Visit to Church of All Nations,**



*Church of All Nations sanctuary with Pastor Jin S. Kim and James Kang bearing his burden.*



*The Lake House, a communal dwelling next door to Church of All Nations.*

Our first evening at Church of All Nations (CAN), James and I were invited to a "sauce-making party" -- whatever that might be -- in the church basement. It turns out that Josiah, a



Korean member of the community, is launching a business selling “K-Mama,” a traditional Korean hot sauce in a bottle that, according to the label, is “Seoul for your food.” About a dozen of us gathered to add two ounces of sauce to 720 bottles, redeeming a production design flaw. The hot-sauce sells in forty states, but there is still much room for growth, Josiah, claims. So in our stylish red aprons and sterile latex gloves,

we had a great time joking around, twisting off bottle caps, topping off the sauce, wiping up and resealing the bottles. Along the way, though, we heard stories about the community that stood behind this fledgling business that hopes to soon employ others in the group. By the end of a boisterous evening I had a blister on my hand and could sit down, declaring my “ex-sauce-tion.”

Fourteen years ago, Jin S. Kim became pastor of a dying white Presbyterian congregation in Columbia Heights, twelve minutes north of down-town Minneapolis. With little to lose, Jin and his wife Soon Pac could experiment; and the “Church of All Nations” was born. They created a welcoming space for a multi-ethnic congregation with a growing intentional community at its core. At first this colorful congregation was the darling of the denomination’s PR department, but when Pastor Jin refused to move on, as the Presbytery periodically requires of its clergy, he fell into disfavor. Jin explained, “You cannot ask your congregation to lay down their lives for one another, and then abandon the flock for a more prosperous career elsewhere.” It is not surprising that they enjoy visiting and being visited by their new-found “cousins” in the Nurturing Communities Network.



At present the church has four households of shared life -- three within walking distance of the church, and the Kim home, two miles away, with three families and one single person under the same roof. Their community-building strategy is to tuck as many bedrooms into their homes as possible, pool their rent money, enlarge their houses, and buy property around the church to enable more people to

join the core community of shared life. Even though house titles are held in the name of individuals who can qualify for mortgages, they are administered as if “no one said that anything they possess was their own.” (Acts 4:32) By providing subsidized housing, free food, and free cars, the church can afford to have many volunteer (or minimally paid) ministers on staff



The church meeting house serves as an every-day community center where many ministries and informal gatherings find their hub at a basement coffee shop. Included in this mix is a small cohort of persons participating in CAN's “Underground Seminary,” an intensive two-year course in world history, anthropology, Biblical studies, and theology that develops a thorough-going

analysis of empire, starting from the conviction that the main story is found in subversive non-violent communities renewed and sustained by Jesus’ teachings, and alive in the power of the Holy Spirit. The CAN logo is the cross, made up of four differently-colored segments representing four continents (cultures), all connected by the dove of the Holy Spirit.

Pastor Jin and I fell into some “saucy” conversations, both exploring our shared communal visions and testing each other over our differences. James Kang, who sat in on these talks was afraid I’d get angry, freeze up or walk out. Actually, I enjoy this kind of frank challenge to my half-aware “Whiteness.” I’m eager to understand the radical teaching of Jesus needed to sustain a multi-ethnic community within a hierarchical empire where privilege and oppression are entangled in ways invisible from the top and obvious from the bottom looking up.



I came away from our conversations feeling both embraced and at the same time challenged by the “distain” (that’s his word) with which Pastor Jin looks at American individualism. He sees it as an ideology of defensive self-justification for people who suffer from detachment disorder, people who never deeply bonded into a family or community, who were deprived of a village / communal upbringing. They don’t know what they’ve missed or how to



belong in a deeply meaningful and secure way. Ironically, immigrants often become our teachers in the conversion needed to forge a common life.

In the West, individualism turns a mental health handicap into a supposed virtue. For Pastor Jin, living in communally does not need to be explained. Historically and globally, it is the normal way for human beings to thrive. Individualism, on the other hand, is what needs an ideological prop because it is abnormal, a sickness of the soul, a deprivation, a shameful way to go through life. I'm not sure I can express his point of view adequately. It is obvious, however, in the context of CAN, that a Gospel-based critique of the dominant culture -- with its hierarchies of whiteness, fondness for militarism and rugged individualism -- is needed to level the playing field. This radical critique helps explain how such an unusual gathering of folks from a score of nationalities can find a common home in Jesus.

### **Genesis Community Visitation:**

How old is Genesis Community, this collection of three once-rundown, but now beautifully-restored mansions sitting side-by-side about a mile south of down-town Minneapolis? Well, the Green House (in the middle), anchored by Bliss and Jon Benson, has been communal for fourteen years. Five years ago their best friends, Sarah and Andrew Howard, purchased Ecclesia House next door to the north, and they began living there with a collection of singles also seeking a shared life of discipleship. A year later these two families purchased Luverne House, next door to the south, and helped to launch a similar communal vision. Now, for almost a year, all three houses, under the Genesis Community label, have been functioning as one community with a shared covenant and three-layered membership "onion." So, to make a



human development analogy, they are a strapping teenager, a growing child, and a baby soon to celebrate her first birthday -- all in one. About time for a community visitation, they all agreed.

On the weekend of April 20 -- 22, three local friends of Genesis community, Thor and Mary Adam, Sam Snyder and I assembled to conduct a visitation (something like a community health check-up). In the weeks leading up to this community review, all sixteen Genesis Community adults filled out confidential questionnaires detailing their satisfactions and dissatisfactions with the



community life and leadership. The heart of the visitation process was two two-person teams listening to all sixteen members pour out whatever was on their hearts in the course of the day. Meanwhile, around these listening sessions, the community enjoyed a retreat day of common activities -- walking en mass to down-town Minneapolis for ice-cream, cooking up common meals, skating

with the kids, and hosting a talent show. On Sunday morning, most of the Genesis folks visited the Church of All Nations, and got to know their communal "cousins" in Columbia Heights. It was a festive weekend in which we joined the kids in putting extra whipped cream on our waffles and played on their back-yard pirate ship. By that time the mountains of snow were almost gone and the backyard patio -- connecting all three houses -- was ready for the first picnic of the season.



I won't rehearse the visitation report which we delivered in a concluding Sunday afternoon meeting. But it was obvious to our team that God is blessing Genesis with a context



for healing the many life hurts that members bring to community. We challenged them to all be on a serious path of relational growth and emotional maturity, perhaps using as a common guide the book, *Living from the Heart that Jesus Gave You*. The two anchor couples (Bensons and Howards) are carrying a lot of organizational and pastoral burdens and need breaks for renewal. At the same time, the community has elaborated sixteen task teams for every area of community need and interest, so that everyone in the community is exercising some roles of shared leadership. In June they will complete their first cycle of membership renewal. Except for the Bensons and Howards, everyone else will be completing their first year as

apprentices. They will have the option of continuing at that level or becoming partners, and after two more years, becoming covenant members, sharing overall responsibility for the community. May God continue to bless them in this exciting and perilous adventure of Kingdom living.

Once home, I reviewed their web site ([www.genesiscommunities.org](http://www.genesiscommunities.org)) and discovered a newly-posted group portrait in which there is a suspicious-looking grandpa sitting on the bottom step, a wayfarer in none of their membership categories who was, nevertheless, momentarily embraced in this generous family of Jesus.

### **Twelve hours of rolling conversation**

That was twelve hours both going and coming from Minneapolis with James Kang, who did not wear a red apron or drink K-Mama hot sauce all the way home. But we did talk about the communities we'd visited and the challenges they represented to our old ways of thinking. Specifically, the compassionate and forthright quality of leadership he experienced in CAN caused James to question his own



instinctive defenses against leadership in general, and intentional Christian community in particular. For more than a hundred miles we shared our personal experiences with mentors, both good and bad, and pondered what we can learn from them and what we need to forgive. We began to imagine how this conversation could spill over into a workshop at our Fall Nurturing Communities Network Retreat. What a joy when a so-called “Traditionalist” and a “Millennial” can be led by the Spirit into transforming truth. Perhaps there is hope for all the generations to learn from Jesus together.

So, if you (Dear Reader) represent a mentor-mentee relationship and have an interest in joining us for a three-day retreat at Englewood Christian Church in Indianapolis from October 19-22 on the theme of “Passing on Leadership to a New Generation of Christian Community,” let me know and we’ll explore an invitation.

### **And now a name change for this “Nurturing Communities thing”**

Finally, this is an official announcement that what began ten years ago as **The Nurturing Communities Project** -- which Jonathan Wilson Hartgrove named and which I have coordinated along with a growing cast of team-mates -- has become more than a project, but a movement and a network. This became obvious to many of us at the Nurturing Communities Gathering a year ago at the Spring Valley and New Meadow Run Bruderhofs, when representatives from thirty communities came together for a marvelous time of fellowship and mutual inspiration. We have become a web friends and communities who are already a resource of support and guidance to one another. At our last NCP Steering Committee conference call we decided to begin naming what we have become “**The Nurturing Communities Network.**” That is why you’ll see this new label pop up on our web site, in correspondence, and in conversations. Don’t worry if you get NCP and NCN confused once in a while. I will probably do so, too. But officially, I’m pleased to welcome you to the **Nurturing Communities Network** because it is, by God’s grace, who we already are.

--David Janzen