

Fall, 2018, Nurturing Communities Network Report

Dearly Beloved in the NCN,

This is a goodbye letter of sorts since I've been officially "retired" as coordinator of the NCN since Sunday evening, October 21, at about 8:00 pm. I'm pondering what metaphors might describe how I feel about it all. Am I like an old horse put out to pasture? No, it's not that, because I'm still going to keep on doing what I've been doing, visiting communities. Only now I'm free to do that at a slower pace, while others do more of it -- which would allow me to, Lord willing, finish a few half-written books in the coming year.

Someone suggested that I'm the bride who tossed a bouquet that was caught by three hopeful people who now have to figure out between them what to do with it. Good luck with that!

At other times I feel like a runner who has passed a baton forward to others with fresher legs, eager for several more laps around the track.

Or was it like the picture shows here, a circle of friends commissioning a younger three-some, Nancy and Joe Gatlin (Hope Fellowship, Waco TX), and Elizabeth Turman Bryant (Spring Water Community, Portland OR), ready to carry on the calling of nurturing a network of communities in the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Yeah, that says it best.



So, what follows is a report of the past month with three stops, including the commissioning of new leaders for the Nurturing Communities Network.

September 28-30: Bloomington (Indiana) Catholic Worker Community Visitation.

The Bloomington Catholic Worker Community (BCW), made up of three families offering hospitality for formerly homeless guests, has been in a season of turmoil. The six adults,



Elams, Martinie-Eilers, and the Gershoms meeting with their visitation team.

however, easily agreed on one thing -- to ask two local friends, Virginia and Forest, to join me, coming from a distance, to conduct a much-needed community review.

Earlier in the year, the BCW had said farewell to another family, releasing them to explore a farming community with a more inter-faith spiritual base. However, the way that decision was processed in BCW left two brothers estranged, and the community somewhat paralyzed regarding long-term planning and commitments. Virginia, Forest and I went through the motions of reading the

questionnaires, doing personal interviews, eating in different homes, playing with children, and enjoying a “lack of talent” show, but the essential work of reconciliation, the turning of hearts, was something we could only pray for.

And indeed, in answer to everyone’s prayers, during a session of “listening patiently to one another with accurate empathy” the two estranged brothers began to confess how hard is their inner work of facing rejections from the past, and trying to control patterns of anger stemming from family of origin. These were, it turns out, some of the triggers that kept exploding in their conversations before. But in that holy moment of brokenness God also worked to reveal their love for one another. Instead of land-mines being triggered when they came close, tears of regret led to in a spontaneous embrace. When love is confessed like that, the demons have to flee -- they just can’t take it.



Bloomington CW folks watching some “lack of talent” unfold before their eyes.

However, in the few minutes that remained in our visitation, there was a sober realization that a house where an evil spirit has been cast out, cannot long remain empty, or others will return, and according to the parable of Jesus (Matt. 12:43-45) the end might be worse than the beginning. So, what would it mean to not just try to control one’s feelings of anger and rejection, but to do one’s homework, to seek healing from Jesus for these memories at their root? What changes in community decision-making might do a better job next time they face a crisis, if someone is discerning whether to stay or leave the community? We gave some suggestions and blessed the community as we went on our way back home. Still, even as we are apart, we’ve remained connected through several rounds of e-mails and other conversations that continue the work of visitation. In the midst of such honest struggles, we have become dear to one another and bonded in the love of Christ.

October 19-22: NCN Retreat at Englewood Christian Church (Indianapolis)



We were about fifty persons representing eighteen communities from Vancouver, New York, Texas and points in between, who met for a leadership retreat October 19-22. Englewood Christian Church/Community, bunked us in guest rooms, fed us lavishly with meals and bed-time snack, and lovingly cared for our every need. This freed us to explore the theme, “Empowering a New Generation for Community Leadership.” Many mentor pairs, older and younger, shared what

they're learning about growing in maturity in Jesus in the work of community across the differences of the generations. The social, theological and personal issues that need to be resolved in order to make authentic commitments to Jesus and to community, seem increasingly complex for each generation in this corrupt and corrupting society. Thus the work of discipleship, we learned, is a long-term task, and the good news is that we will all be changed, mentors and protégés, into the likeness of Christ. Click below to listen in on some workshop and plenary sessions: <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1KNxe2wqAuemPFSQvNK8eqWHaDhxgsRHa>.

The really good stuff of retreats like this happen before, between and after the sessions. We were brave enough to eat burgers in the childcare center's "garden" despite a chilly, windy, sunny fall day. We got a walking tour of the Englewood neighborhood, traipsing through the yards of houses that two decades of community workdays have salvaged from urban blight to allow for the proximity that builds community. We hung out to make music, tell stories, and pass around the latest communal baby -- Maggie DeLaurel.



hours to meet your cousins in the network. In 2020, we plan for a continent-wide "Y'All Come" kind of gathering at a place to be announced. And in 2021, we look forward to another leadership retreat. In the mean time, we're building a map of communities who know each other well and are eager for more visits. If you want to be included in this NCN membership listing, please click on the following link to learn what is involved: ____ ??? ____.

We also made some calendar decisions, launching a three-year cycle of meetings. In 2019 our leadership team hopes to encourage and facilitate regional gatherings of intentional Christian communities so that you don't have to drive more than a few



Maggie and mama, Natalie DeLaurel.

October 28: Barnabas House Dedication Visit

The Barnabas House community is three years old, but they've only lived in their spacious newly-renovated two-story Milwaukee home since later July. Barb Grimsley, Carol Youngquist, and I drove up from Reba to join them last Sunday afternoon for their open-house and dedication celebration. Going up the main stairway they have three community photos taken at annual intervals, hopefully adding steps, years and new community mates as God leads. Three years ago we had our first visit between Reba and Barnabas House, and since then the contacts have grown. At first it was only Rusty Dahler and Quinten Andersen. Then Mikaya Larson was added a year later. Now within the last year, since moving into more spacious quarters, they have added Lauren Janka and Benhaam Sabbaghi.



These words from Acts 2 remind Rusty and Mikaya of the Barnabas House mission.

The house dedication service began with their CRC pastor, Chris Ganski leading out with a reading of Mark 3 where Jesus puts off his family's wish to take him home because they believe he is "out of his mind." Jesus, instead points to the people around him and says, this is my family, the people who do the will of my father who sent me. A new spiritual family with its own priorities of mission and conversion is born.

Pastor Chris Ganski recalled how this household has been a dream of the

congregation for quite a few years, and this group of people was, perhaps, the 4th or 5th iteration of the dream. Always before, he said, the problem was not money or property, the problem was finding people who wanted to commit their lives to the calling. But with Rusty and Quinten, things were different. Pastor Chris recalled all the work days and common effort of the congregation to get the house, fix it up (beautifully, I would add), and offer their strong support as evidenced by the twenty-some people who showed up for the open house, filling the dining table with casseroles and other goodies for a feast. They had been feasting for a couple of hours before we showed up and ate well too.

The second part of the dedication service included Rusty Dahler's reading of Romans 12:14-21 as their community's mission statement, "Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. . . ."

I added a few remarks, welcoming Barnabas House folks and their friends into a network of extended



family they have inherited around the country and the world, a family of communities that gathers for mutual support as we had just done in the Nurturing Communities Network retreat at Englewood.

After others left, Rusty and I talked another hour about the issues facing their young community. It seems to me they are off to a good start with strong support. Sometimes new intentional Christian communities are perceived as a critique of the churches they attend. Not so with the Barnabas community which was birthed out of the clear support and blessing of the congregation and pastor at City Reformed Church in Milwaukee.

Rusty, in his 50's is something of a "Barnabas," a mentor to younger would-be apostles, so he is eager for the experience and wisdom to be gained from a wider movement of radically committed Christian communities. I want to commend Rusty and Barnabas House to you all in the Nurturing Communities Network.

In Conclusion:

I trust that in the coming weeks and years, you will get further reports and visits from the NCN leadership team -- Nancy, Joe and Elizabeth. In my commissioning talk I warned them that, if you all treat them the way you have treated me, they will be welcomed and loved far beyond what they deserve! May you all continue to receive the grace and power of the Holy Spirit to "keep up the good work."

