

A Corrupt Generation	A Context
1. A religious establishment that crucified Jesus and accommodated itself to the Roman empire.	a. Southwest Georgia in 1942 (and it really could have been anywhere, USA).
2. Christian acceptance and even promotion of greed and profit, racism and prejudice, war and militarism.	b. The world, at least the First World, of the 21st century.
3. Support of Protestants and Catholics for a colonial economy that subjugated and exploited its agricultural workers.	c. First-century Jerusalem, the site of Peter's Pentecost sermon in Acts 2.
4. The enthusiastic adoption by most Christian institutions of a technological society's spiritless collection of communication, marketing, and measurement tools.	d. El Salvador in the 1980's and 1990's.

The specifics of depravity for each age vary, but the themes—godlessness, hubris, domination of others—are the same. And the results—division, destruction, and death—are universal.

How can we possibly extract ourselves from the quicksand of conformity with the society surrounding us? We're born into it; we are engulfed by it. We pull one foot out of it, only to have the other leg sink deeper. We flail away as we are sucked ever further downward.

Peter's exhortation, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation!" could lead us to despair. How can we possibly save ourselves? Practicality aside, it's not even theologically acceptable.

For Peter, though, the escape plan was fairly simple.

According to the rest of Acts 2, escaping corruption meant meeting with the other Christians, listening to the teaching of the apostles, praying, breaking bread, sharing with each other, and eating with a glad and generous heart.

In this newsletter, I want to share with you a few snapshots of communities I've visited... in some very far-flung settings, I've seen how this very basic "escape" plan gets contextualized.

We also want to share with you news from our network, reports from regional gatherings and let you know of upcoming opportunities. Our hope with these emails is to strengthen connections with each other and keep building a sense of imagination for God's Kingdom that calls us away from the corrupting ways of our world to a new way of living!



"Koinonia Farm" in Southwest Georgia

Seventeen promises, at least by my count. Steve had made 17 promises by the time the ceremony for becoming a covenanted member of Koinonia Farm was completed. He had committed himself to:

1. Ongoing conversion
2. Stability
3. Interdependence
4. Total, unconditional commitment to seek, express, and expand the Kingdom of God as revealed in Jesus the Christ
5. Enter into a love union with the Koinonia and gladly submit himself to it
6. Love through service to others
7. Joy through generous hospitality
8. Peace through reconciliation
9. Carry out the mission statement
10. Pray with the community
11. Work the number of hours and days necessary to support the community

economically and to build a way of life with the other members

12. Study with the other members
13. Serve the community's neighbors
14. Fellowship with the other members
15. Participate in community and team meetings
16. Serve as a team leader or a member of the board of directors if called upon
17. Engage with fellow community members in a spirit of reconciliation- avoiding gossip within and without the community at every turn

For many of us, we're challenged just by reading a list of 17 of anything. Imagine committing to 17 promises! It is extraordinary.

I was at Koinonia as a new member of their board of directors. The community had scheduled the ceremony on Tuesday afternoon to coincide with the two-day meeting.

It had been some years since I had visited the farm, and I wondered if director Bren Dubai had been successful in her aim to steer the Koinonia ship back towards being a community. In the early 1990s they had consciously chosen to organize itself as a not-for-profit ministry focused on job development rather than the *koinonia* of Christian fellowship.

My question was answered, not so much by the ceremony, as moving and meaningful as it was, but by experiencing the common life of the community in worship, in shared meals, in their affection and consideration for each other, in their hospitality, in their mutual discernment of the Spirit's desire, and in their commitment to justice.

If you are not familiar with Koinonia of the present day and its history of inspiring generations of Christian communitarians since 1942, please check out its [website](#) and some of the writings of co-founder Clarence Jordan.

Koinonia will be hosting a southeast regional meeting for the Nurturing Communities Network, October 11-13.



Clarence's Writing Shack



"Community First" in 21st Century Austin

In 2013 David Janzen in one of his Nurturing Communities missives reported on his visits with several Texas communities. Steven Hebbard, a young, “energetic and creative community organizer,” had taken him outside of Austin and showed him plans for a new, model community for more than 200 formerly homeless people and volunteers. The next year Steven and his wife Bethany were the first ones to move on to the land.

This last April, Nancy and I drove to the outskirts of Austin for a Good Friday lunch with Bethany, Steve, and their three-month-old daughter Pearl. As we drove into the general area, I understood why David had called the acreage “scrub land.” In 2013 only eyes full of faith could have imagined replacing the tumbleweeds that were blowing across the dry, bleak landscape with a thriving, diverse community of people.

A few minutes further down the road [Community First Village](#), now in 2019, appeared as a garden spot. Steven met us in the parking lot and walked us up a path through a beehive maze of tiny trailers and people at work on gardens, growing seedlings, and small construction projects. Everyone paused to greet us. When we got to the Hebbard home, another very tiny trailer, he had to excuse himself for a short bit to wrap up some other business.

We offered to help Bethany finish lunch preparation, but actually there was room for only

one person to move at a time in their very small home. We watched while she stirred a pot of rice and beans in “the kitchen” and then turned with one step to the far side of the “the living room” to fold diapers. We listened, and she began to catch us up on the phenomenal growth and development of the village.

Community First Village was the vision of Alan Graham, founder and CEO of Mobile Loaves and Fishes. His story of moving from riches to a 400 sq. ft. tiny home in the village has been told in a number of places, including [an article](#) (check the link) that has run in a number of newspapers across the country.



The plan is impressive and beautiful. Even more impressive and beautiful is the reality of 170 formerly homeless Austinites living in tiny homes made affordable through jobs they now have on the campus of Community First. Living side-by-side with them are dozens of “missionals,” singles and families who have been attracted to the community as an alternative to urban or suburban Austin living).

After lunch the five of us climbed in a golf cart and took a tour to see the campus including parks, a prayer labyrinth, several well-equipped outdoor kitchens, laundromats, a meeting hall, and on and on.

Most impressive for Nancy and me is Bethany’s and Steven’s commitment to continue pursuing Jesus’ call in their life to live and share in community. Steven has resigned his position and Bethany has gone to part-time position with Mobile Loaves and Fishes.

Later this year they will be moving to a farm south of Austin with another couple. Together they will be creating a different kind of Community First vision with the poor, centered in the prayers and rhythms of their Anglican tradition. They will pursue organic food production, sustainable energy use, common work, and an apprenticeship program in theology, ecology, and Christian homemaking as they work alongside homeless street youth, newly arrived immigrants, and any others that God brings.



"Valle Nuevo" in El Salvador

Just how difficult can it be to transition leadership of a community from one generation to the next? Some think of it as the relational equivalent of rocket science.

Pastor (that is his Spanish name, not his title) is always respectful of the youth who have begun to emerge as leaders in this rural community of *campesinos* in northern El Salvador who had to flee their country in front of government death squads during the civil war.

“They’re young, and they work hard,” he reflects about their enthusiasm for resolving the problem of the garbage in the community. He thinks about it more, then shakes his head in sympathy, “It’s hard to lead the people.”

Pastor and other elders were young when they began to take leadership roles as young adults during their eight years in Honduran refugee camps. With little to no formal education themselves they served as teachers and community organizers, and once the community returned to El Salvador in 1989 they led the effort to carve out a new home in the jungle, establishing productive fields and putting the organization infrastructure into place for their new home.

Shalom Mission Communities (SMC) and Valle Nuevo have had a fraternal/sororal relationship since 1992. Nancy and I have been visiting Valle Nuevo every year and sometimes twice for the last 17 years, enjoying and helping to carry on this important

relationship. Nancy, for a number of years now, has been co-organizing the annual SMC delegation visit to the community.

Last year after a fifteen-year project of securing land titles for 171 families was completed and a new well was dug that provided a potable water source for the community, the older group almost en masse stepped off of the *directiva*, the governing board, and a group almost 30-40 years younger stepped in. During our 2018 SMC delegation visit, we heard some criticisms from the new leaders of the old: they were ineffective, they were out-of-date, and “Now we’ll show what can really be done!”

Nancy and I visited again this May. One year later it was a different story. The new leaders had discovered the difficulty of getting people to meetings, the frustration when people do not follow through, the disappointment and defensiveness that arises when others were projecting selfish motives onto the leadership group, and the other classic problems leaders everywhere face.

We were inspired by Pastor’s unceasing graciousness in supporting the new leaders. He was well aware of the criticisms that had been made of him and others, but he was always ready to assist and affirm when approached for help. And we were encouraged to see that several of the young people were seeking out Pastor for his help.

The SMC-Valle Nuevo relationship is a story of forgiveness. Those of us from the United States are complicit in the history of colonialism that subjugated the campesinos and the civil war that took the lives of many of them and left the others injured and traumatized. It is also a story that brings affirmation and meaning to a people who have been marginalized and treated as less than human.

We have so many stories from this almost 27 year relationship that we could write a book. Well, actually we have. [Compañeros, Two Communities in a Transnational Communion](#), is a collection of our stories and theological reflections by both SMC and Valle Nuevo.



The mutual submission of Koinonia members, the commitment to the poor of Community First and now its progeny, the humility and courage of a generation of leaders of Valle

Nuevo—these practices help us hear the voice of God and open ourselves to the power of the Holy Spirit.

The first Christians, in order to save themselves from their corrupt generation joined the life of that early Jerusalem church. Their experience and practices of community led not only to the spread of the gospel across Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth, but also became the outline for the classic spiritual disciplines that have blessed our communities

Peace and grace,

Joe Gatlin

Answers to the quiz: 1-c; 2-a; 3-d; 4-b

Inspiration Corner...



Kingship of Yahweh Day

Debbie from Church of the Sojourners writes about their community's July 4th tradition of

celebrating the **Kingship of Yahweh Day**....

"On July 4th we acknowledge our longing and celebrate our citizenship. We are citizens of a country without national borders, without language requirements, without ethnic distinction, without a human army to defend it. We are neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female. We are not citizens in a democracy; we are citizens of a theocracy. We have a king, the triune God, and we are His subjects. We are fellow heirs and citizens of the Kingdom of God.

But where's the rub? Why choose the 4th of July to have this celebration?

Because in this kingdom, we are not permitted dual citizenship. By accepting the invitation to nationalize into the kingdom of God, we are renouncing all other loyalties. By choosing this day to celebrate Yahweh's kingship, we are symbolically and concretely declaring our ultimate allegiance. It may appear to be a statement "against" the United States, but in fact it is a statement "for" the Kingdom of God."

[Read Blog Post](#)

More News from our NCN Network....



Blog Post about Midwest Catholic Worker Gathering....

Debbie Baumgartner here: What a rich time of fellowship was had at the Ohio River Valley Catholic Worker & Christian Intentional Community Gathering hosted by Ross Eiler of the Bloomington Catholic Worker.

[Read More](#)



Minnesota Regional Gathering....

The Nurturing Community Network in Minnesota hosted its annual gathering mid-June. They have been meeting for many years now. They had a great showing with 40 folks with 13 different communities represented.



Save the Date and spread the word!

There is a Southeast Nurturing Communities Network gathering at Koinonia in Americus, GA on OCT. 11-13, 2019

It is primarily for those in the southeast, but not exclusively.

Cost: \$70-100 (includes food and lodging for 2 nights)

Maximum: 36 participants



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