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# The Evidence of Christian Community.

*“And now faith, hope, and love remain, these three....” 1 Corinthians 13:13*

Dear Friends and Co-laborers:

Joe and I love maps! Yes, we do use Google Maps but we don't take off on a cross country trip without our atlas. It's good to see the big picture as we go and spot the rest areas. Signs help us plan and point us in the right direction.

On our recent road trip through the southeast, we stopped in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, to visit some long-time friends who took us to Old Salem to see the Moravian settlement from the eighteenth century. We walked the streets, going in and out of century-old buildings that served for homes, businesses, training, or places of worship. We strolled through the great expanse of the Moravian cemetery, with its identical markers in areas assigned to married women, married men, single women, single men, and children. Through all of these I was struck by the physical remains left of a community of Christians, years after they no longer are present.

We continued our travels and visited several current Christian communities: Grace and Main in Danville, Virginia, Jubilee Partners in Comer, Georgia, and Alterna in La Grange, Georgia. The question occurred to me, are there signs of kingdom values being created in their respective locations. Grace and Main has been around for 10 years, Jubilee Partners is celebrating 40 years and Alterna

has been around for several years. What will the evidence be of their time on earth after they are no longer around?

Josh and Jessica Hearne, part of Grace and Main, welcomed us warmly, and after a visit in their home took us on a tour of Danville and the five other Grace and Main households. They told us their story of how they grew out of a simple bible study in which people began asking honest questions about how to be disciples of Jesus in this out-of-the-way, economically depressed, small town. They were drawn to homeless folks, most of whom are the product of generational poverty.



They are currently nine leader-members with another 10 or more in their larger circle. Each of their six households welcomes one or two homeless people into their home to live with them. The new residents become part of the household; they set their goals and with their housemates' encouragement proceed to take the steps that can take them to stability.

One of the Grace and Main households is run by two-previous homeless men, now member-leaders of the community. Now, they in turn, are offering hospitality to others. Their creativity has led them to build a barn and establish a "tool library" for the neighborhood. Next to their home and abutting a wooded area, is a field where Jessica and others are experimenting in different methods of agriculture.

The people of Grace and Main worship together, though they are also involved in local churches. The community is active in efforts to help create equity and justice through city ordinances and policies.

The evidence of a Christ-centered community in Danville is visible in the warm hospitality that is offered to those who rarely receive a welcome, and endures over time in the stories that are told and passed on to others. Dan, one of the

formerly-homeless, gave testimony to me of the peace, and the sense of belonging and contribution he now has contrasted with his life of wandering and disconnectedness before Grace and Main.



Four days later in our travels, we arrived at [Jubilee Partners](#) in Comer, Georgia. Jubilee is familiar to us; in years gone by our older daughter served as a volunteer there for two years and the daughter of founders Don and Carolyn Mosely lived with us in Waco for a while.

We always feel warmly welcomed at Jubilee, even on busy weekends like this one when the community was transitioning from a board meeting to a two-day pastoral visit. Meals provided opportunities to reconnect with old and new friends such as Coffee Worth who is about to turn 100 years old this coming October!

It was a special pleasure to spend time with Brenda and Gladys from Guatemala, two single mothers who are exploring being novices at Jubilee. It is refreshing to see intentional community through their eyes as they wrestle with the commitment, the cultural challenges, and the calling to follow Jesus in this manner. A walk with Sue Byler-Ortman and a picnic with the Mosleys and friends were also wonderful times for renewing friendships and telling stories.

Though Jubilee's property is a lively and beautiful place—with scattered homes, gardens, pond, animals, a cemetery and a unique carousel—it's not these tangibles spaces that will endure after several seasons, but rather the stories of changed lives and a peculiar people who lived a life so generous and hospitable. Many of the people who originally came to Jubilee through their refugee resettlement program have returned to Comer to make it their home. Comer itself has become an open, welcoming and diverse corner in Georgia.

As Joe and I made our way home driving west, we stopped in La Grange, Georgia, where we stayed



with some relatives. We were greatly encouraged by a brief visit with Anton Flores and by the work of the [Alterna Community](#). They are a small Christian community that has endured tragedy over the recent years, and yet, has sought to hear God's leading through mourning and grief.



Alterna always has had a strong presence with immigrants from Mexico and Central America. Currently the community has its center on Mona Lane, an out-of-the-way street lined with duplexes. The development, which was originally built as housing for the service "help" of the wealthy, now primarily is the home of Guatemalan families. It also had become a dumping ground for discarded furniture and garbage. Over the past couple of years, Alterna has elicited the help of the city in removing the garbage and building a beautiful playground for the children of Mona Lane.



With the help of two Mission Year couples, Anton runs an after-school tutoring program for neighborhood children. We were privileged to be there when the school bus arrived after school. Several adults, neighbors as well as interns, walked together to meet the bus and welcome the students home with

hugs, cookies, and conversation about their day. As we all walked up the block to the Alterna duplex for the tutoring session, the adults engaged the children with questions about their day and their homework. Anton threw in a math problem or two to solve as they walked. As the children got settled into their tutoring work, Joe and I left this hive of activity with a sense of God's grace administered through Alterna.

Alterna's story is one of God's shalom, creativity and hospitality. As they continue to discern God's leading, we encourage you to hold them in prayer and gratitude. God continues to show up in all sort of places! The stories must be told to encourage faithfulness and awareness that this work is above all things, God's work. It goes beyond the buildings, programs, gardens and particular practices each of our communities may have. And the stories will endure as we continue to share them long after the tangible signs and evidence has disappeared. Indeed, there's evidence of God's work through Christian community in the southeast.

Scripture tells us that it is faith, hope and love that remain as evidence of God's presence. May these be front and center of our lives and communities, even as we still have the tangible structures around us.

Nancy Gatlin  
NCN leadership team  
Hope Fellowship, Waco, TX





## *Other Regional Gatherings....*

This past March, there was the first ever NCN Northwest gathering! It was hosted in Tacoma, WA (a central location) and was a delightful time of establishing relationships and getting to know each other better. We plan on meeting again in 2020.

Eight communities were present:

- Sojourners in San Francisco, CA
- Adsideo in Portland, OR

- Community of Pilgrims in Portland, OR
- Springwater in Portland, OR
- Refuge of Christ in Forest Grove, OR
- Co:Here Housing Community and Grandview Calvary Baptist Church in Vancouver, BC
- Kingfisher Farm in Surrey, BC
- Charles and Leslie Moore from the Bruderhof who are praying into starting a community on the west coast.

## *Trainings and Events in our NCN network....*



### **Underground Institute: Postcolonial Survey of the Bible**

June 3-18th  
Church of All Nations  
Minneapolis, MN

The Bible is really a chronicle of God's people struggling to come out of imperial idolatry to follow their true God Yahweh. How do we decolonize our understanding of the Bible, and through it decolonize Christian

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leadership itself, so that in Christ we can transform the world?

Visit [Underground Institute](#) to learn more about this two week intensive.



### ***One-Day Intentional Community Experience at Kingfisher Farm***

July 27th

South Surrey, British Columbia

Kingfisher Farm is an intentional community/CSA farm. Their community is hosting a one day immersion experience for folks seeking to learn more about intentional community. Spread the word!

[Click here](#) to Learn More

## **Remembering Jean Vanier**

Died May 7, 2019

The world has lost a true communitarian.

"Community is the place where are revealed all the darkness and anger, jealousies and rivalry hidden in our hearts. Community is a place of pain, because it is a place of loss, a place



of conflict, and a place of death. But it is also a place of resurrection.”

*Jean Vanier, Community and Growth*

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