

# East Coast Regional NCN Gathering

Oct 14 – 15 2023 at Spring Valley Bruderhof



**NURTURING  
COMMUNITIES  
NETWORK**

In alternate years, between international gatherings of 200+ people, NCN holds regional meet-ups designed for those who can drive in for a 1 or 2 day event. Originally planned at a campground nearby, forecasts for a cold, rainy weekend prompted us to move it to the School building at Spring Valley Bruderhof, and find a room for everyone there.

## Who came?

Seven families with children: from Harrisonburg & Louisa, VA, Pittsburgh and north, Lancaster & eastern PA, and Meyersdale PA, nearby.

Five single people: from NYC, Ellenville NY, Somerset, Pittsburgh and Harrisonburg.

## What happened?

Volunteer cooks grilled burgers for a running lunch as everyone arrived. The 23 kids made one big happy group to trike, bike, build castles, and run off energy outside in the drizzle, or indoors.



brings new tasks in starting a family. Ecumenical community of some kind is still their longing.

Another family with 2 children have spent months at a time in a number of communities around the USA over 6 years, looking for one they can call home.

“What can hold a community together?” Each of us had some insight to share from our experience up till now... and we’ll keep looking for common goals and vision that can unite us.

We circled up to hear from each one of their journey: how they found a faith, and their search for community. All of us were touched by God’s stirrings in leading every one of us in different ways. For this sharing alone, it’s so worth coming together.

Add some pizza, a barn dance, horse-wagon rides and campfires till late in the drizzle... and we all felt that once in a year or two is far too scarce for these gatherings.

One family anchored a Catholic Worker house in Lancaster, which closed last year as life







Make-your-own pizza dinner gave us lots of time to visit and hear more from each other ... while we waited for our pizzas to bake in the brick oven.

Some version of this might be a great evening program for the large [“Y’all Come” International NCN Gathering](#) we’re planning for next October at Camp Loucon, KY. Children get involved, it’s fun and delicious, and lends itself to informal sharing around a long-running mealtime event.

Sister Lysanne of [Chemin Neuf Community](#) came from NY City. We were fascinated to learn of this communal movement [originating 50 years ago in France](#). (more at those links.)

Other Catholics at the gathering were thrilled to connect with Lysanne and everyone else: a core purpose of NCN. The harmony we sensed in this gathering (as in last year’s larger one) among believers of many traditions is a gift only God can give.



### **What’s a barn dance?? Is everyone good with dancing?**

Start with drop-the-hanky, teddy-bear polka, move on to Gustav Skol—whatever 4-year-olds can do...

Anything generating this much joy with the kids is good for a conference. Spring Valley children and their parents joined the fun.

Around the edges, lively conversation continued among dance-weary adults until an hour had passed, and it was time for children to bed down.



Around the School building-turned-conference-center, campfires soon blazed and small circles re-grouped for late-night banter, then deeper reflection: So, what can we do in response to war in the Middle East? One young father said: Pray, yes... but I’m going to keep raising my 3 children to love the Lord and care for other people. Others agreed: small acts of love to one another are important, perhaps our best response.





Steady drizzle made us thankful we weren't out camping by the stream as we'd long planned. Everyone found a room and a bed, with neighbors to help find it in the dark.

Sunday morning: Grilling fires blazed in front of the School, for bacon and bagel-toasting. New friends swapped stories and became old friends...

Breakfast was festive with animated conversations at a dozen tables in the gym.



Our morning meeting gave a final chance to share our longings, insights, and prayers for each other's journeys.

"How great thou art" and "This is my Father's world" were known to us all: another expression of harmony among us in singing.

Everyone drifted into a 'family meeting' of the Spring Valley household, unperturbed by schedules—there's so much to talk about with each other. One of the Spring Valley dads read of some biblical examples of nurturing community, among songs of autumn bears, pumpkins and 'bringing in the sheaves' – harvest of souls as well as grain.



Fellowship continued in a farewell brunch, and then it was time for farewells.

Grandpa Pedro's horse-wagon offered rides around the grounds and out to the cars in the lot.

Godspeed, dear friends, children—We will meet again. Next year in Kentucky!

Or next summer in your backyard for a barbecue? We'd come.



**Help needed for next NCN gathering**

Children's care and programming is among our top needs as we start to plan the big gathering next October at Camp Loucon in KY.

If you or someone you know is interested, [contact one of us on the NCN leadership team](#) for more information.

report by Toby Mommsen