

March 2007 Issue Number 3

# COMMON LIFE NEWSLETTER



## Stewardship of Resources

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*Tent Dwellers' Eleanor Brent (left) and Celia Orth (right) with Brenda Simpson (director of Francis Sandy) with piles of donated books. ~5~*



## Common Words

This newsletter was prepared during the season of Lent. One of my childhood memories of the Lenten season was the saving of pennies or nickels or dimes (as the value of money inflated) in special money banks or coin cards provided by the national church. In Explorers or Church school, our leaders, church school papers or mission magazines described the projects our money would support. As I recall, they always related to

something that might change people's lives for the better such as providing seeds for indigenous farmers, or equipment and materials to dig and construct a well. The money might have come from a portion of our allowance, or from savings we collected from "giving up" something like candy for Lent, or from a fund-raising project of my own or the group's initiative.

We children discussed the amount of our allowances openly and unhesitatingly reported on the amount of our givings. We celebrated the total amount we were able to give through our joint efforts. We felt joy in our ability to give. We were thrilled to be asked. We felt that we had something to contribute. We were making a difference in our world. The concrete nature of the Lenten project was particularly appealing to us children (as I think it still is to adults). Nevertheless, we also contributed faithfully to the weekly "collection" that we knew went generally to our local church or mission work.

Stewardship of resources, including money, is part of our Common Life discipline of community. These childhood memories provide an image for me about how we members of Common Life Communities might practice – with openness, with enthusiasm, with generosity, and with gratitude that we have been "given" money to give. The articles, *Money Talk* and *Just Stewardship?* by Pam Byers encourage reflection on our Common Life practice of stewardship of money. The item, *Being Accountable*, describes a process used by two Common Life groups to help them make their concrete financial commitments. It is offered as a possible resource for other groups.

Information about poverty issues is included again in this issue for your consideration and possible action. Kairos was delighted to share their material with Common Life. We would appreciate material related to some of the issues your groups are dealing with.

Thank you to the groups who made submissions to this issue. It's good to know what is going on in your life together and to learn from you new ways in which we might contribute to God's healing action in the world. Special thanks to members of the New Group for introducing themselves to our whole community. We will now feel more related to these folk as we pray for them each Friday. The new Prayer Cycle which includes their names is in the *Resources* section. We are pleased that a new Halifax group has begun. And delighted to receive a helpful listening process from Prairie Spirit.

The theme for the next issue may be spiritual practices. Contributions and suggestions are most welcome.

Blessings for the Easter season. May we experience God's transforming power that leads to new life in our personal lives, in our Common Life groups, and in our world.

Yvonne Stewart

*Stewardship ...how do I choose to use "my" money, my time? Do these actions bring me into closer conscious awareness of my relationship with earth? with human community here and afar? with self? with the sacred? Something as simple as my morning cup of coffee raises so many questions: organic shade-grown fair-trade or name brand? purchased locally or from the city an hour away? savored or "used" to get a push start on the day? Do I awaken to the mystery of life or see the day as a long list of "to do's" waiting to be conquered?*



*My choices affect people, soil, ecosystems and climate around the world. The implications can be overwhelming. Articles in this newsletter raise related questions and encourage me to engage the questions and not "go back to sleep".*

**Debra Brown**, Communications Coordinator at Calling Lakes Centre and "formatter" of this newsletter.

## Word from the Common Life Groups

### Tatamagouche

#### Moncton Area

**Group members:** Janice Maclean, Marilyn Burrell, Charlotte Campbell, Bob Childs, Shirley Childs, Linda Foy, Shawn Redden.

#### Tatamagouche Area

**Group members:** Pam Swainson, Kathryn Anderson, Wilf Bean, Mary Corbett, Wayne Edgar, Jan Haynes, Linda Stumpf, (Av Singh and Karen Sheppard on a year's leave from the group.)

# Word from the Common Life Groups

## Halifax Group

In the “good news” department, we have started a group in Halifax. (The former one disbanded for a variety of reasons in the spring of '06.) We have had one formation gathering and our second one is slated for March 26th. We are definitely underway but will have no specifics to report for a month or two. We are still “feeling our way.”

## Calling Lakes

### Prairie Spirit

**Group members:** Linda Anderson, Kim Antosh, Peter Calhoun, Jo Ann Carles, Marg Janick-Grayston, Holly Schick, Jim Von Riesen.

We have been using a resource that we would like to pass on to other “Common Lifers.” The resource, *Holy Listening*, is a way of listening deeply to someone in the group who wishes to explore some aspect of their life and receive gentle feedback from the group. The feedback is only about what the others heard. There is no probing and no solving in this process.

The process was one used in an Enneagram event led by Carol Ann Gotch and David Walsh from Winnipeg. They stated that it was a process they had discovered, but did not say where it originated.

### Group Holy Listening

Members agree to: commit themselves to one another and to seeking God’s presence in each other’s lives. Intervals of silence are integral and to be deeply respected. We rely primarily on the deep Wisdom of the Spirit. Since the Spirit often speaks in our silences, each section of the process begins with silence and reflection.

### The Process

#### Centering

Silence (about 3 minutes). We center in the quiet presence of our own being and remind ourselves that we are seeking deep Wisdom.

#### Sharing by the Seeker (about 10 minutes)

The seeker shares experiences, questions, possibilities, dreams, concerns and hope currently present in his or her life.

#### Silence (about 3-4 minutes)

This silence is simply a time for making space for the Spirit to cut through our accustomed responses so that individuals might respond to the Seeker from a place of freedom.

#### Response of Group (about 10 minutes)

Now there is a period of offering the responses that have come up from the silence. The main focus is on the presence, the activity and the guidance of the Spirit in the Seeker’s life. This trust is honored when individuals listen and move with the flow of the group instead of holding on to a personal agenda. Members ask searching, genuine and non-manipulative questions which

may enlighten. Similarly, comments on possible direction and meaning are invited. Members may share ideas, themes, images, specific scriptures, stories or other material that seems connected to the Seeker’s story. Images or metaphors that might have meaning can be submitted for consideration. Since this is about listening to the Spirit, excessive advice-giving is to be avoided. If the facilitator senses the group is getting off-track with this or other agendas, he or she should make a gentle intervention and suggest a brief return to silence.

### Silence and then Ending

## “Our Small Group”

**Group Members:** Barbara Shourounis, Gail Wartman, Lanceen Tomlinson, Linda Pratt, Virginia McKenzie.

We have not really chosen a name for our group over the long term – “Our Small Group” seems the most common name for us.

### Attending to Spirit ~ Gail Wartman

The opportunity to be part of a Common Life Group came at a time when I was looking for further development of my spiritual life beyond that in my local congregation. I was attracted by the components of the program, and by the chance to get to know people from all over the province as we shared our faith journey.

All the elements of Common Life were significant to me as we pursued them, but of most importance to me were those of Attendance to the Spirit, and Retreat. I have for many years been caught up in a task-oriented existence of trying to do more, better, all the time – in my career, in keeping a household going, and in my volunteer work, including at the church. I have always equated busy-ness with holiness, and I think that is quite common for many of us. “Idle hands are the devil’s tool” and similar sayings and teachings are steeped into our consciousness. Sometime during my Common Life experience I came to understand that slowing down, or completely stopping, and being quietly open to God’s presence is also a state of being that can be pleasing to God. “Be still, and know that I am God” became a new and important message. The setting at Calling Lakes Centre, with its natural beauty, and the program format, with plenty of time for individual and small group reflection, helped me to become centred and worshipful. I learned some new tools for worship and meditation, including Praying the Scriptures, which I use often to assist me in my individual times of prayer and reflection.

The Small Group I became part of during the Common Life program has become a supportive, key group of friends in my life. We meet regularly for study and fellowship, and they have listened, encouraged me and given me great ideas for many of the challenges in my life. They are very dear to me and important in my life, and we have great laughter and sometimes tears together.

Common Life has been a wonderfully worthwhile and enjoyable opportunity for growth and enrichment in my faith journey.



# Word from the Common Life Groups

## Five Oaks

### Free Spirits

**Group members:** Yvonne Stewart, Mary Joan Bradley, Michele Braniff, Lilojean Frid, Nancy Hardy, Valerie Carson Kirkpatrick, Marion Kirkwood, John Klassen, BJ Klassen.

Our group used the process outlined below in our study of the first two sections of the United Church's new statement of faith – We Sing of God the Creator and We Sing of Grace. For the morning, we used worksheets like the sample given for section one here and three different coloured pencils each. (The material for the second section is available if anyone would like to use it.) In the afternoon, after discussion of our observations, and using journals and coloured markers given to each of us, we reflected on the questions provided.

This comparison filled us with awe for the people who developed the new statement. We recognized the tremendous challenge the writers undertook to integrate the dramatic changes in theology, understanding of human nature, society and creation since 1940 and yet satisfy a church of diverse faith positions. We so appreciated the poetic form, which seemed to us to speak to the whole person – heart, head and soul. We hope as you read through this material you will share our feelings.

For the next sections (which we plan to complete at our two-day meeting in April), we used the following process.

- Read the section out loud together and experience the Song of Faith.
- Discuss:
  - What excites you?
  - Does this section provide for you (your congregation and the whole denomination) a verbal picture of what the United Church understands its faith to be in the current political, social and theological context? If so, why? If not, why not?

### WE SING OF THE CREATOR

#### MORNING

#### Comparison of Three Statements of Faith

##### A Song of Faith (2006)

Finding ourselves in a world of beauty and mystery,  
of living things, diverse and interdependent,  
of complex patterns of growth and evolution,  
of subatomic particles and cosmic swirls,  
we sing of God the Creator,  
the Maker and Source of all that is.

Each part of creation reveals unique aspects of God, the Creator,  
who is both in creation and beyond it.

All parts of creation, animate and inanimate, are related.

All creation is good.

We sing of the Creator,

who made humans to live and move

and have their being in God.

In and with God,

we can direct our lives toward right relationship  
with each other and with God.

We can discover our place as one strand in the web of life.

We can grow in wisdom and compassion.

We can recognize all people as kin.

We can accept our mortality and finitude, not as a curse,  
but as a challenge to make our lives and choices matter.

#### Doctrine Section of the Basis of Union (1925)

2.1 Article I. *Of God.* We believe in the one only living and true God, a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in His being and perfections; the Lord Almighty, who is love, most just in all His ways, most glorious in holiness, unsearchable in wisdom, plenteous in mercy, full of compassion, and abundant in goodness and truth. ....

2.2 Article II. *Of Revelation.* We believe that God has revealed Himself in nature, in history, and in the heart of man; that He has been graciously pleased to make clearer revelation of Himself to men of God who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit; and that in the fullness of time He has perfectly revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, who is the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person.....

2.3 Article III. *Of the Divine Purpose.* We believe that the eternal, wise, holy, and loving purpose of God so embraces all events that, while the freedom of man is not taken away, nor is God the author of sin, yet in His providence He makes all thing work together in the fulfillment of His sovereign design and the manifestation of His glory,

2.4 Article IV. *Of the Creation and Providence.* We believe that God is the creator, upholder, and governor of all things; that He is above all His works and in them all; and that He made man in His own image, meet for fellowship with Him, free and able to choose between good and evil, and responsible to his Maker and Lord.

#### Statement of Faith (1940)

##### I. God

We believe in God, the eternal personal Spirit, Creator and Upholder of all things.

We believe that God, as sovereign Lord exalted above the world, orders and overrules all things in it to the accomplishment of His holy, wise and good purposes.

We believe that God made man to love and serve Him; that He cares for him as righteous and compassionate Father; and that nothing can either quench His love or finally defeat His gracious purpose for man. So we acknowledge God as Creator, Upholder, and Sovereign Lord of all things, and the righteous and loving Father of men.

#### Questions for Consideration

Are there any similar concepts in the three statements? Mark with one colour or note them here.

# Word from the Common Life Groups

What new concepts are introduced in *A Song of Faith*? Mark them with another colour or note them here.

What concepts from the two earlier statements have been left out in *A Song of Faith*? Mark them with a third colour or note them here.

Does this section of *A Song of Faith* provide for you (your congregation and our whole denomination) “a verbal picture of what The United Church of Canada understands its faith to be in its current historical, political, social, and theological context at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century”? If so, why? If not, why?

What are your general impressions and reactions to this section?

## AFTERNOON

How might this section of **A Song of Faith** influence (or not)

- your own faith,
- your practice of the disciplines of Common Life,
  - attending to the Spirit
  - engagement for justice
  - accountability of resources
  - dedication to learning
  - commitment to community
- and the general living of your life?

Draw, write, meditate.....

## Shekhinah Seekers

**Group members:** Pam Byers, Barb Bitzer, Peg Earle, Jane Entiknap, Carol Gierak, Lloyd Smith.

We chose to meet for a day at Five Oaks in January. Unfortunately only 4 of the 6 of us were able to make it thanks to a snow storm. We four had a good long check-in (something that seems to be becoming important for us) and then a look at Ched Myers book *The Biblical Vision of Sabbath Economics*. What he says resonated with us and we felt his challenge. We will be gathering at Five Oaks in March with the “New Group” at the end of our (first?) two years.

See article, *Just Stewardship?* by Pam Byers on page 10.

## Sloe Jam

**Group members:** eight members including Janet Saunders, Thom Davies, Margaret Fisher, Lynn Godfrey, Deborah Hart, Jennie Jones, Louise Simms.

## Soul Friends

**Group members:** Gail Lucas-Roth, Bea Arnill, Ione Grover, Amy Hill, Des McCalmont, Joan McCalmont, Paul Roth, Trish Strung.

## Tent Dwellers

**Group members:** Joan Graham, Eleanor Brent, Henk Dykman, Lorraine Dykman, Joan Gugler, Ellice Oliver, Celia Orth, Doug Ross, Peg Simmons.

Members of the Tent Dwellers have been plagued with illness and surgery, but we have managed to get our projects with Francis Sandy Theological Centre off the ground. We have raised and donated \$700 to assist non-reserve aboriginal women to come to a summer program at Five Oaks. In addition, we have worked with the director and students for about 18 hours sorting and cataloguing books to improve the library at the Centre.

The cover photo shows Tent Dwellers’ Eleanor Brent (left) and Celia Orth (right) with Brenda Simpson (director of Francis Sandy) with some of the piles of donated books.



**Sharing Lunch at Francis Sandy (L to R):** Eleanor Brent, Wanda Montour, George Montour, Brenda Simpson, Celia Orth.

*Eleanor and Celia are members of Tent Dwellers. Wanda is the Administrative Assistant at FSTC. George has been involved in educational activities to help people understand historical land claims. Some of the Tent Dwellers attended one of his presentations at Five Oaks last year. Brenda is the director of Francis Sandy.*

While using the United Church Lenten resource, *Singing a Song of Faith*, it occurred to our group that **some of the CLC people might have copies of resources they have used in the past that they may not be planning to use in the future. If so, would they consider donating them to FSTC?** Their library needs more up to date material.

Any books could be dropped off at Five Oaks and staff would ensure that Brenda Simpson receives them.

## The New Group

**Group members:** Stephen Mabee, Allan Baker, Barbara Fullerton, Wayne Myhre, Betty Jean Page, Maggie Plant, Rafael Vallejo.

*In order that we might be introduced to our newest group, and have a better sense of who they are when we pray for them on Friday's, we invited members to tell us about themselves. They have graciously responded.*

**Allan Baker** is an Intentional Interim Minister. He feels that his calling in ministry is to journey with Christian congregations

# Word from the Common Life Groups

that are going through a time of transition. As such, Allan has had varied experiences in congregations both large and small. A native of Napanee, Ontario, Allan graduated from Queen's University and Emmanuel College. He has worked in both the private and public sector. Allan believes that God loves us all, and all of life on earth. This means that there is a green tint to his theology, and "living with respect in creation" is a part of his passion in life. He is an advocate for ecological justice. Allan is a volunteer editor with AfricaFiles (ecology section). In his spare time he is attempting to locate his sense of humour.

**Barbara Fullerton** loves seeing so much of Canada and meeting people across the country as she coordinates the General Council Office's Stewardship Development work. Executive meetings of the Ecumenical Stewardship Centre's board of directors, a Doctor of Ministry candidacy at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C., caring for her elderly mother in Pennsylvania and being "Grandma" to Claire in Seattle and "Nana" to Eldon in Vancouver keep her in the air, on the road, or on the phone much of the time. She is very grateful to share with partner Stephen the grounding, sense of connection, and shared laughter of "The New Group."

**Stephen Mabee** has been ministering in one capacity or another in the United Church since 1962 mostly as a congregational minister. He has also served the church in a number of ways including Theological Educator, Chair of Presbytery, President of Conference and being a member or chair of various church corporations. In all this he has frequently found a need to find time for his own soul and finds the Common Life group is a place to explore and to be in a more intimate and supported way.

**Wayne Myhre** Marilyn, my wife of 48 years, and I have two children of our own and many foster children. Some have lived with us for a few years, some until they grew up and married, and others only a short time – mostly for support, so they could go to school or university. One family from Haiti of two boys and five girls has been in our lives for over thirty years. I met the family on a mission trip. One by one we got the whole family out, even the parents. I'm supposed to be a retired United Church minister, but I've still got extended family in university (grandchildren now) so I'll have to keep going for a few more years.

**Margaret Ann (Maggie) Plant** has been serving as Lay Pastoral Minister in Training at the Bright-Chesterfield Pastoral Charge, London Conference, since 2002. Maggie has successfully completed her LPMiT studies in Montreal and her Presbytery and Conference final interviews. She is to be recognized as a Lay Pastoral Minister at the rise of London Conference in May.

**Betty Jean Page:** I grew up in rural Essex County where I attended the Olinda United Church, and became Choir Director there at the age of twelve. Since that time, it seems that I have always been involved in ministry, primarily in the music of the church and was at Trinity United in Windsor for twenty plus years. I am currently a Lay Pastoral Minister in Training, and am recommended for designation at London Conference in May. I am currently serving on the Hickson-Hebron Pastoral Charge, just outside Woodstock, Ontario.

**Rafael Vallejo** is doing his Masters of Divinity at Heritage Theological Seminary in Cambridge. He has spent the last twenty-five years working with food service organizations around the world. He is as fascinated by the diversity of faiths as he is with diversity in cuisine and cultures. Rafael's passion is cooking and he brings with him much kitchen table wisdom.



*The New Group (L to R): Wayne Myhre, Allan Baker, Maggie Plant, Rafael Vallejo, Barb Fullerton, Betty Jean Page, Stephen Mabee.*

## Tilted to the Centre

**Group members:** Don Robinson, Jan Aylward, Ted Black, Barbara Buttars, Ruth Ferguson.

We met on January 31 and started reflecting on "A Song of Faith," the recently approved United Church Statement of Faith. We will continue to do so throughout Lent. Our next meeting is March 21 at Five Oaks. Ted Black is slowly recovering from a broken ankle. We were grateful that he was able to join us at our January gathering since the injury had just happened.

See the review of Jane Vennard's book, *Embracing the World*, by Barbara Buttars on page 11.



*Tilted to the Centre (L to R): Barbara Buttars, Ted Black, Jan Aylward, Ruth Ferguson, Don Robinson.*





## Stewardship of Resources

### Money Talk

By Yvonne Stewart

When the subject of money is raised, emotions are raised as well. That has been my experience whenever I have been involved in stewardship education and stewardship campaigns. In one small rural congregation, people were upset that the annual report no longer listed the name of every member and their annual contributions to the church. “How am I supposed to know what to give if I don’t know what David Smith gives?” asked an agitated farmer. In a wealthy congregation, I’ve heard stewards say with frustration, “We know from company annual reports that the CEO of that company earns at least \$1.5 million, but we can’t convince her to increase her givings to the congregation and the Mission & Service Fund to an amount more appropriate to her income!” In more middle class congregations, I’ve observed stewardship committees fielding complaints from annoyed congregational members who don’t want money discussed at all if possible – or, requests that if it must be discussed, the subject be couched within a presentation about use of time and talents as well. The explanation is often “We don’t want to offend people who can’t give much money.” Does any of this ring true to your experience?

As part of our Common Life discipline of commitment to community, we are encouraged to be accountable for our use of resources – the most significant of which in our society is money.

This article reflects on three writers whose thoughts about the power of money in our lives, the transforming nature of grateful giving and the need for community support may inspire your personal reaction and contribute to discussion in your Common Life group.

#### **Reliance on God’s grace more than money enables us to share**

William Stringfellow, a great lay Christian said,

“The issue for the Christian (and ultimately, for everyone) is whether a person trusts money more than God and comes to rely on money rather than on grace for the assurance of moral significance, both as an individual and in relationship with the whole of humanity.”<sup>1</sup>

What does this sentence say to you? It makes me recognize that in our society, we are sometimes tempted to believe that holding on tightly to money will give us more security than being open-handed with it: that keeping the amount we have secret, will

prevent the loss of what gives us value. It challenges me to remember that I, and all members of humanity, are valued simply because God, that great mystery, loves us. It reminds me that we do not receive our moral worth because we have money no matter how hard we might have worked to obtain it. It inspires me to ask, If our value and status does not come from money in God’s realm, why not be generous with our financial resources? Why not support government, corporate and community policies that reduce the gap between rich and poor?

#### **Acknowledging our gifts with gratitude transforms us into generous givers**

I bought *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* by Lewis Hyde, after hearing Margaret Atwood recommend it for its thoughtful discussion of the place of “gifts” (particularly works of art for her) in a market economy. My interest was related to the role of money and financial prosperity.

Hyde writes, “Every culture offers its citizens an image of what it is to be a man or woman of substance. There have been times and places in which a person came into his or her social being through the dispersal of his gifts, the “big man” or “big woman” being that one through whom the most gifts flowed. The mythology of a market society reverses the picture: getting rather than giving is the mark of a substantial person, and the hero is “self-possessed,” “self-made.”<sup>2</sup>

This statement and Hyde’s elaboration of it helps me recognize again the reality Stringfellow alludes to. We, as Christians live in two economies – that of today’s global market and that of God’s realm – both significant for our lives. And encourages me to think that the two can be brought together through the practice of generosity. He particularly uses examples of the positive aspects of gift exchange in First Nations cultures.

Most meaningful was Hyde’s explanation of transformative gift giving using the fairy tale, “The Shoemaker and the Elves.” The shoemaker starts out being very cautious of his gift for cobbling because he and his wife are very poor. They are given “gifts” by elves who, at night, make beautiful shoes out of his few pieces of leather that quickly sell for a good price. It takes a while before the shoemaker and his wife acknowledge that they are no longer poor; they are now prosperous. Once admitting this, they decide to wait up at night to discover the source of their now abundant life. Upon seeing the elves’ nakedness, they decide to

# Articles

make clothes and shoes for them to express their gratitude. The elves accept the gifts offered which liberate them from their nightly chores. They never return but the shoemaker continues to make beautiful shoes.

This interpretation emphasizes the importance of acknowledging that we have gifts of money and prosperity (and talents). By not speaking out and owning up to what we have, we can't use them for the benefit of ourselves and others. It is as if as long as we don't admit to ourselves or others that we have money (or talent), we don't have to give. Yet, we don't seem to be able to come to this recognition of gift alone. An "elf-like" someone or a mysterious "something" invites us to see what we have been given and to respond with gratitude. The other mysterious dimension is that once we have been transformed to see ourselves as grateful receivers of gifts, the gift doesn't stop with us. It goes through us to others for their liberation and transformation. This thinking applies to our market-oriented society as well. A nation or corporation acknowledges the gifts/prosperity it has been given and received and then in gratefulness gives some away for the liberation of the gifts of others. As Hyde says ..a gift that cannot be given away ceases to be a gift. The spirit of a gift is kept alive by its constant donation.<sup>3</sup>

## Community supports a new way of organizing our finances and possessions

Sondra Ely Wheeler elaborates on Hyde's suggestion that we need "something" to help us recognize that we have been given gifts and move us towards generosity. She suggests that the "something" for us today is committed community. I don't agree with her that "only the church" can provide the moral and practical support to enable us to reorder our financial and material lives. Many of us know people of no formal faith who have chosen to live simply to let others simply live. Christian community does however enable us to learn and reflect on "kingdom" values regarding money and possessions; make commitments for action and hold one another to account in faith.

Here is what Wheeler says about the role of committed community in the organizing of our finances and possessions. I might have wanted this to be worded more simply but the points are there. The underlining is mine.

...the 'social' character of economic ethics is central because money (or its cultural equivalents) is a medium of human relationship. It is a means and an expression of the complexity of our existence, both over against and in dependence upon one another. To change one's mind about money is less to change a set of ideas than to adopt a new pattern of social life. It is to embrace a new way of being together, and a new way of ordering and assessing our lives. This can only be the activity of a group, especially when the pattern and understanding it adopts is not only distinct from, but substantially opposed to, the one advocated and assumed by the surrounding dominant culture. In such a situation, only the church as a gathered community can provide the moral and practical support necessary for its

members to live out an ethic of property notably at odds with that of the surrounding society. This support includes practical help for those whose generosity has left them in material want, but even more centrally it is a matter of providing a context of intelligibility for decisions that would otherwise seem irrational. Such a context must be sustained by ongoing community activities of reflection and critique, of remembrance and hope.

The idea that moral reflection and moral re-formation about the status of possessions must take place in communities of discernment and mutual accountability entails a number of things about the nature of the groups that might find the New Testament's moral instruction usable. One is that it presupposes a high level of commitment to the shared life of the group. On the most practical level, this commitment is needed because any such process is necessarily long-term; it must be pursued consistently over time by a group of people who remain engaged with one another and with the (decidedly uncomfortable) task of reassessing and reordering their material existence. More deeply, commitment is required because any serious consideration of the spiritual peril of wealth will involve a degree of honesty and self-disclosure that can be sustained only in an atmosphere of genuine care and trust. This is not a subject for a two-week annual stewardship campaign or the instant intimacy of a weekend retreat; the courage to achieve honesty must be developed, and the right to expect it must be earned. Finally, holding one another accountable to a moral tradition is hard work, requiring both humility and stubbornness, both practice and daring. To undertake it requires a high stake in the vitality and fidelity of the community's enactment of Christian faith."<sup>4</sup>

Wheeler doesn't describe here what the reordering of "our material existence" might look like practically. She implies an order that takes the principle of Acts 2 into consideration by which there were no poor among the community.

The discussion of money and the giving of it can indeed raise emotions. Such conversations may challenge us to recognize how much more than necessary we rely on having money for our identity and security. Or, realize that we are ultimately vulnerable and dependent on gifts given to us throughout our lives – we are not self made or self sufficient without them. Or, change our identity from people who have to hold on to what we have in order to be respectable and safe – to people who have to give generously to others so they too can have respect and abundant life. They may help us remember with joy gifts given to us, favours done, actions taken on our behalf, care given. We relive the joy we felt in passing on the gift and feel inspired to keep on giving generously.

### (Footnotes)

<sup>1</sup> p.40, *Dissenter in a Great Society*, William Stringfellow, Harcourt Brace & Co., 1966.

<sup>2</sup> p. xiii, *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property*, Lewis Hyde, Vintage Books, Random House New York, 1979, 1980, 1983.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.xiv.

<sup>4</sup> p.145, *Wealth as Peril and Obligation: The New Testament on Possessions*, Sondra Ely Wheeler, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995.



## Being Accountable for Our Money

*Free Spirits (and possibly Soul Friends) used this process to decide on their financial commitments.*

**Scripture:** Reflect on 2 Corinthians 8:1 – 15

### Iona Community

This is how the Iona Community asks its members to be accountable for their money:

1. They look at their own income, personal expenses and special circumstances.
2. Each person calculates a personal disposable income figure and what is to be given away.
3. The amount to be given is usually a tithe (10%), and is divided as follows:
  - a) The wider work of the church, especially the promoting of peace and justice – 60%
  - b) The work of the Iona Community – 20%
  - c) Special concerns of the family group – 10%
  - d) Special work decided by the trustees of the Iona Community – 5%
  - e) The travel pool – 5%

The year of accounting is from January 1 to December 31.

### Our Common Life Community Decision-Making Process

#### In total group:

- How would each of the above categories translate into the life of our Common Life Community? (local church, Five Oaks, planned gifts, etc.)
- Is there anything you would add (or subtract?)
- Formulate a list of how we would divide the money each of us would give away.

#### Categories We Decided Upon

1. **Church:** local, M & S, planned giving, faith-based groups
2. **(Church) Education:** Five Oaks, theological colleges
3. **Community and Global:** secular education, United Way, community based projects, social justice and development, global concerns
4. **Political:** parties, public justice
5. **Common Life Community:** accessibility fund (for members' subsidy); special projects.

#### As individuals:

- Spend a few moments in silence, thinking about God's generosity and how you are able to respond. Give thanks for the ability to give.
- Figure out what will be your giving base as a percentage of your income (gross or net) – 5%, 10%, ??- Call it something (tithe? donation base? gift to God?)
- Fill in percentages for the giving you intend to do (e.g. you may decide to give your local church 80% of your tithe/donation base, and Five Oaks 5%)
- Now, do the math: what \$ will you be giving each of the categories for 2007?

#### In small groups:

- Discuss your decisions as generally or specifically as you wish.

#### In total group:

- Agree to discuss with the group in a year's time, how we have managed with our commitments and how we might change them.

## Just Stewardship?

By Pam Byers, *member of Shekhinah Seekers*

On my recent trip to Guatemala I took about \$200 in spending money for souvenirs and Christmas gifts. The currency there is in Quetzales with about seven Q's equalling one Canadian dollar. Only in Antigua, the tourist city of the country, were items for sale at roughly the same cost as they would be in Canada. Everywhere else things were a fraction of the cost as we often bought directly from the people who made the goods. I paid 40 Quetzals or about \$6 for a beautiful hand woven liturgical stole. That would pay for meat for two meals for a Guatemalan family. When I came home a minister friend showed me a similar one he had bought, that had been imported from Guatemala, and said with delight that it had only cost him \$40 (a real bargain). I know of course that the person who made the stole would not have seen any of the extra \$34. I also could picture the kind of home she might live in. This is the front of Louisa's home.



And this is Louisa working inside that shack. My friends and I bought coin purses from her spending in total 340 Q and she kissed each of us as we left. I know what we spent would buy a lot of groceries but it still doesn't seem right. I was able to buy so many gifts with my \$200 – not food – just gifts! I am careful with my money, not much of a consumerist and I give what I think is a good amount away. But Louisa will continue to live and work in her shack by the road watching over her little sisters as the rest of her family works for extremely low wages elsewhere. The way of selling and buying in Guatemala seemed normal and fair at the time. I now ask myself if I took advantage of Louisa and the weaver of my stole.

I often buy gifts through Ten Thousand villages because I know the money for the products pays a better wage to the crafter. A coin purse through them would cost \$14 Canadian not the \$3.50 I paid. And my stole, can I wear it now knowing a more just price for it would have been closer to 160 Q not 40Q? I will of course because I need to tell the story of the people of Guatemala.

Is caring for the financial resources I am given just good stewardship or do I also need to practice a stewardship that is just?



[www.tenthousandvillages.ca](http://www.tenthousandvillages.ca)



## Embracing the World: Praying for Justice and Peace

Jane E. Vennard, 2003, Jossey-Bass

Book Review by Barbara Buttars

This book came out of a request made to Jane Vennard to design and teach a course connecting spirituality with the work of justice and peace by the chair of Justice and Peace Studies at a theological school

in Denver where Jane is senior faculty in prayer and spirituality. She comments in her afterward that world events since 9/11 “intensified and deepened my writing process and my earlier desire to write this book became a need.”

However, in her preface she confesses that she had doubts about her credibility to design and teach such a course because of her guilt over not being involved in the U.S. civil rights movement and her lack of mission experience domestically and overseas. In the course of wrestling with these inadequacies, she realized that she had been involved in peace and justice issues that had come into her particular life but more as a quiet activist.

In response to the challenge she was given “to articulate specific methods of praying for justice and peace,” she came up with an interconnected circular paradigm of prayers for others and the world: praying with our actions, praying for renewal, praying to be transformed, and praying for discernment (with the latter in the centre of the circle). Initially she had the first four numbered in linear order, but realized they needed to be in a circle. In the process of presenting that model to various groups, she was challenged to remove the numbers and make the different ways of praying interconnected and interdependent to acknowledge the reality that different people would begin in different places in the circle and move in different directions around and across the circle. Placing discernment at the central heart of the circle was also a result of her consultation process.

In the book she spends a chapter on each of the five ways of praying and bookends these chapters with a beginning one on *Grounding Ourselves in God* and an ending one on *Trusting the Mercy of God*. At the end of each of the five chapters she includes a concrete invitation to prayer focused on that particular way of prayer. She makes a point of saying that she writes from her own Christian perspective but draws from the wisdom of other faith traditions.

There were some issues and concepts in the book that spoke to me.

- In the chapter on *Grounding Ourselves in God*, she deals with the issues of fairness, justice and mercy using a biblical parable, a Shakespearean play and current life situations.

- In *Praying for Others and the World*, she raises up praying for those who persecute you, our perceived enemies and the issue of answered and unanswered prayer.
- In *Praying with Our Actions*, I was struck by her phrase, “letting go and staying engaged” as another way of naming the way of nonattachment which is between the poles of attachment and detachment.
- In *Praying for Renewal*, I was helped by her notion of ourselves as “reservoirs of God’s love, allowing ourselves to be filled and then sharing it with others from our abundance.” She prefers the image of living from our overflow in contrast to being channels of God’s love.
- In *Praying to be Transformed*, she looks at the connection of our own inner transformation to the change we hope to see in the world, including finding the seeds of violence within and contemplative prayer.
- In *Praying for Discernment*, she makes the point that we are trying to choose our life, not simply a good life, let alone between good and bad and we need to enter the mystery of not knowing.
- Finally, in *Trusting the Mercy of God*, she places questions about the mercy of God beside questions about the power and justice of God and what it means to pray to a merciful God. She also clarifies that hoping is not the same as wishing.

Although we haven’t used this book in our group, I thought of it for this newsletter because it seems to touch on and bring together most if not all of the CLC disciplines and practices. I am always on the lookout for books and writers that try to bring together and integrate what seem like opposites. I particularly appreciated her acknowledging the unique ways each of us are called to pray and work for justice.



For those of you interested in resources for teaching prayer in a congregational context, my partner John recommends Jane’s book *A Praying Congregation: The Art of Teaching Spiritual Practice*, 2005, Alban Institute. She also led a workshop at Five Oaks in 2006 based on another of her books, *Be Still: Designing and Leading Contemplative Retreats*, 2000, Alban Institute.

**Barb Buttars** (pictured) is a member of *Tilted to the Centre*.



# General News from the Centres

*This news from Kairos is included here for any Common Life members or groups who are interested in taking action on poverty issues. We welcome material related to other justice issues in which your group members are involved.*

## Kairos Poverty E-Update

February 2007 (Volume 3, Issue 1)

### ACTIONS

#### Take Action for Living Wages

There is a growing movement for living wages across Canada. Minimum wages are creeping up – but not enough. Groups such as Campaign 2000, Make Poverty History and NAPO are calling for a \$10 minimum wage, federally and in all provinces, indexed to inflation. Take action by linking up with and supporting action by the following coalitions working on this issue:

**Manitoba** – Just Income Coalition [www.just-income.ca](http://www.just-income.ca)

**Ontario** – Ontario Needs a Raise [www.ocsj.ca/campaigns; Million reasons campaign](http://www.ocsj.ca/campaigns;Million%20reasons%20campaign) <http://www.labourcouncil.ca/index.htm>

**New Brunswick** – New Brunswick Common Front for Social Justice. [www.frontnb.ca](http://www.frontnb.ca)

KAIROS is a partner in a **Campaign 2000**-led project to build capacity for action to improve the income and wages of young families and their children. Parent workshops have been held in Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto and St. John's, and multi-stakeholder workshops in these sites are forthcoming. A national symposium will be held in the fall of 2008. A particularly emphasis is being placed on engaging the business community. For more information, and to view a copy of a new report on the need for living wages, please visit [www.fallingfortunes.ca](http://www.fallingfortunes.ca).

#### Support the National Minimum Wage Bill

NDP MP Peggy Nash has introduced a National Minimum Wage Bill, C-375, seeking to re-establish a federal minimum wage of \$10 per hour. The Bill would apply to all workers in the federal jurisdiction – like banking, telecommunications, inter-provincial transportation and railways. The impact of a federal minimum wage will extend far beyond these workers, and will set a higher standard for wages and employment across the country. Please call your MP and encourage him or her to support the bill.

#### Make Poverty History Pre-Election Training Workshops

Make Poverty History is planning to hold a series of training workshops in key swing ridings with the aim of organizing riding level local groups that would be able to help make poverty a key issue in the next federal election. The workshop will cover how to organize an all candidates meeting, distribute Make Poverty History posters and brochures and get media coverage. During the election over 170,000 people on the MPH e-mail list will be informed which candidates have endorsed the MPH platform. If you live in one of the following communities – Stephenville, Antigonish, Yarmouth, Fredericton, Edmonston or Campbellton, Miramichi, Saint John, Orleans/Rockland, Peterborough, Oshawa, Mississauga, Burlington, Kitchener, St. Catharines, Orillia or Barrie, Newmarket or Markham,

Goderich, London, Sarnia, Winnipeg, Meadow Lake, Saskatoon, Regina, Edmonton, Kamloops, Surry, Nanaimo, Vancouver – and can help to organize a Make Poverty History training workshop, please contact Dennis Howlett at 613-241-5293 or [dhowlett@makepovertyhistory.ca](mailto:dhowlett@makepovertyhistory.ca).

## Five Oaks



### Notes from Mardi

**Our Common/Uncommon Five Oaks CLC Retreat**  
*Sunday May 6<sup>th</sup> (4:30 pm) until after supper, Monday, May 7<sup>th</sup> (6:30 pm)*

Memories of **Alexandra Caverly-Lowery's** leadership at last year's retreat have stayed with me all year long, as I hope they have with you. I am grateful for those of you who suggested that we approach our common, annual CLC retreat in this way, inviting supportive leadership from outside of our Common Life Community to lead and care for us throughout, enabling all of us to sink more deeply into a retreat experience as we listen to and share with one another across this stimulating community.

The definition of retreat as *pattern breaking* has resonated in my soul since the early days of Common Life. It's liberating to see the great variety of ways in which each of us as individuals, and as groups, practice retreat – or pattern breaking – as one of our shared disciplines/practices. It is also inspiring to come together across our individual groups annually, to retreat together in this particular way. Faithfully pursuing our five disciplines is challenging, and when I see and hear how others of you are doing this, I feel inspired to keep recommittting myself *to discern and do God's healing work* through our shared rule of life.

**Nancy Reeves** will lead us this year, accompanied by **Linnea Good**. We will begin at 4:30 pm on Sunday afternoon, allowing us to have our fist session together before supper. Nancy has

# General News from the Centres



*Nancy and Linnea*

planned a significant time for us, mindful of our practices, and using insights in her soon-to-be-published book, *Match Made in Heaven: A Bible-based guide for deepening your relationship with God*. Linnea has created gentle, simple responses to the

psalms which Nancy will use in worship. As in the past, there will be opportunities for personal reflective time and 'joyful activities' as well as for time in groups. If the weather is good, you might choose to rake leaves or do something else outside after lunch on Monday, so come dressed for these possibilities.

Nancy is a clinical psychologist and spiritual director, in demand throughout North America and beyond. She is the author of several books including *I'd Say Yes God, If I Knew What You Wanted*. Linnea is a singer-songwriter whose primary work is to help individuals and churches express their souls through music. She and Nancy frequently travel and work together.

Thanks to special donations made to support Common Life, we are able to offer this program for a subsidized room and board rate only (we enjoy exceptional leadership without a tuition fee). The cost is, therefore, \$100 per person and \$160 per couple including applicable retail sales tax.

Please register with Jenny Rypma by phone (519-442-3212) or email: [registrar@fiveoaks.on.ca](mailto:registrar@fiveoaks.on.ca) as soon as possible

## Resource Materials - Prayer Cycle from Five Oaks

### Phase 1

#### Sunday

**Tent dwellers**  
**Joan Graham**  
 Celia Orth  
 Doug Ross  
 Eleanor Brent  
 Ellice Oliver  
 Henk Dykman  
 Joan Gugeler  
 Lorraine Dykman  
 Peg Simmons  
 TATAMAGOUCHE CTR

#### Monday

**Centre**  
**Don Robinson**  
 Barbara Buttars  
 Jan Aylward  
 Ruth Ferguson  
 Ted Black  
 Five Oaks CLC  
 Leadership Team

#### Tuesday

**Free Spirits**  
**Yvonne Stewart**  
 Betty Jean Klassen  
 John Klassen  
 Lilojean Frid  
 Marion Kirkwood  
 Mary Joan Bradley  
 Michele Braniff  
 Nancy Hardy  
 Valerie Carson Kipatrnick  
 FIVE OAKS CTR

#### Wednesday

**Sloe Jam**  
*8 people including:*  
**Janet Saunders**  
 Deborah Hart  
 Jennie Keating  
 Lynn Godfrey  
 Margaret Fisher  
 Sims, Louise  
 Thom Davies  
 CALLING LAKES CTR (PCTC)

### Phase 2

#### Saturday

**Soul Friends**  
**Gayle Lucas-Roth**  
 Bea Arnill  
 Amy Hill  
 Des MacCalmont  
 Gayle Lucas-Roth  
 Ione Grover  
 Paul Roth  
 Trish Strung  
 NATIONAL CL GRP

### Phase 3

#### Thursday

**Shekhinah Seekers**  
**Peg Earle**  
 Barbara Bitzer  
 Carol Gierak  
 Jane Enticknapp  
 Lloyd Smith  
 Pam Byers  
 NARAMATA CTR

### Phase 4

#### Friday

**New Group**  
**Stephen Mabee**  
 Barbara Fullerton  
 Betty Jean Page  
 Maggie Plant  
 Rafael Vallejo  
 Allan Baker  
 Wayne Myhre

### CL Associates

#### Friday

**Formerly Hearth Dancers**  
 Catharine MacDonald  
 June Anderson  
 Elaine Beattie  
 Mary Beer  
 Mary McHarg