

Celebration LINK

September 2002

Much to be thankful for

This has been an encouraging year for us so far. Several developments are taking place, and we are still in the midst of them.

First, of course, there is the chapel project. This inevitably has taken up a great deal of time, especially for James who has been overseeing it from the Community's point of view. It was James's concerns which finally led to meetings with the architect and contractor which exposed serious flaws in the construction.

Thankfully, the contractor accepted full responsibility for the errors and agreed to put them right. He was still optimistic about meeting the end August deadline, but in the end had to agree that the building could not be completed in time. For our part, we by far preferred that the chapel should be constructed to our satisfaction than that it be rushed through for the sake of the ceremony. As soon as we knew of the likelihood of a delay, we decided to postpone the Dedication.

Although this was disappointing in some ways, we nevertheless had a wonderful weekend with the first gathering in the US of 'Partners in Ministry' (see inside). Many ideas were shared which we hope will bear fruit for years to come. As for the chapel, work is now proceeding normally and revised dates for the Dedication will be issued in due course.

Another encouraging feature this year has been our involvement in the UK. We have spoken in previous newsletters about the launch of the Partners in Ministry scheme, which had a good response in the UK. At the same time we have also been developing the links between the US Community and Phil and Margaret Bradshaw, who are Community members living in the UK. One result of all this is the visit of the Community to Britain in October, reported on page 3.

We are looking at ways of combining the US and UK newsletters, a task which is also part of a wider rationalisation of our current publications – pruning our mailing list, reducing the number of letters serving different constituencies, looking ahead to the production of new publications. Phil is contributing writing, design and editorial skills to this process. With digital photography now being used on both sides of the Atlantic for website purposes, the use of colour in newsletter photography becomes ever more



'Partners in Ministry' conference group

attractive. It has already been used with success in the UK newsletter, and we hope to make it a standard feature in our future combined printed letter as well as in the online version.

The websites have proved themselves to be an important part of our resources for communicating with the public. The web is a primary source of orders for Celebration products, and for attracting enquiries about the Community. The UK site, which is less directly focused on the Community and features history and articles, attracts more than 7,000 hits a month with enquiries on a wide range of topics.

The intern program has now been running for several years. Gradually it is building up a group of young people who are connected to the Community on both sides of the Atlantic. We are especially pleased that the visit of a youth group this year (see centre pages) caused some to think about returning as interns. This was something of an experiment for us, but we hope to repeat it with other groups. The Community needs such connections with young people as we look to the future.

Finally, we must not forget the town of Aliquippa itself. Various initiatives are taking place to bring about renewal in the town, in which we also take part. In addition, this year we have seen the acquisition of a building on Franklin Avenue (see inside) which will eventually be used as a coffee bar and local community centre, plus the gift of a local property for use as a half way house. Although the Community's involvement in these projects has yet to be determined, taken together with all the other developments it gives us much cause for encouragement. We continue to seek your prayers for us as we move forward.



Wiley Beveridge, Betty Pulkingham, Diane Davis Andrew

First US 'Partners in Ministry' gathering

On the last weekend of August 'Partners in Ministry' (US) was officially launched. A good number attended, all of whom were accommodated on site. The weather was perfect, and a marquee in the garden made it possible for us to have lunch and evening meal together each day.

Of course, one element was reunion. As old friends came together, some of whom had not seen each other for 25 years, many things were shared, stories told and vision renewed. Our worship felt like the Fisherfolk resurrected, with the same energy flowing!

But the weekend was not simply about reunion. There was much work to do as we broke into groups to look at key areas of ministry: hospitality, ministry of presence and in the town, interns and youth programs, publications and the Partners network. Maggie Durran guided us through a process from ideas to focusing on practical possibilities.

A fuller report will be included in our next issue later this year, together with news of the 'Partners' event in London in October.

Youth Pilgrimage

A group of young people from a church in Michigan spent five days in the Community during July. The pilgrimage was part of a program to give their youth a wider experience of Christian discipleship.

Apart from their own leaders, members of the Community involved with the group together with Companions Barb Gessner and Peggy Campbell, Mary von Minden and John and Alison Stanley.

Steven McKeown, who is a chaplain attached to the local Police Department and



FBI, gave them a tour of Aliquippa including the Police Station, City Hall and Fire Station. The local paper ran an article with a photo.

As well as their own activities, the group took part in the life of the Community through daily prayers and an evening Taize service. A marquee was set up in the garden for common meals and fellowship (above).

The visit proved to be a significant time both for the young people and for those leading and helping. Several of the youngsters are thinking about returning as an intern, and the Rector of the church discussed the possibility of the Community going to Michigan next year, together with Church Army Captain John Stanley, to do some form of ministry in the parish.



'Loving Enemies': June conference theme

Freud thought loving enemies would cause more misery than not doing so. But Christians differ. If they suffer, for them it is not pointless but a sign of hope

for a better world. We see our enemy as the other person, but the real battle is a spiritual one between good and evil. Freud actually made no distinction between

loving enemies and loving neighbours. Often our 'enemy' is someone close to us. By naming our enemies and seeing things from their point of view, we hold up a mirror to ourselves. Our enemy thus becomes the key to our own happiness.

The Rev. Susan Eastman guided us through this theme by means of talks, journaling, sharing, lively discussion and prayer. Capt. John Stanley of the Church Army led a workshop on the 'Violence Tree', a powerful interactive tool showing how violence begets violence. The Rev. Daphne Grimes spoke on the reconciling work of the Anglican Church in Africa and Israel. At the final Eucharist, the Rev. Phil Bradshaw preached on the sending out of the Apostles. All this and much more made for a memorable conference.



On 10th July Abbot Basil Matthews of Elmore Abbey, near Reading, England, was ordained priest. Basil had always preferred to remain a layman in recognition of the fact that the Order of St. Benedict is, in its origins, a lay order. However, like all orders in the Anglican Church (including Celebration!), it needs an ordained priest for certain functions. Basil felt it was now appropriate for him to take up this role, and the ceremony took place at a very joyful service at the Abbey. Celebration was represented by Phil and Margaret Bradshaw (Margaret with Basil in photo). Former members Penny and Martin Sherrington were also present.

News

October event in the UK

As reported in the last issue, members of the Community will be travelling to the UK in October. A day long event on 12th October (see ad on this page) has been planned in response to ideas generated by 'Partners in Ministry' in the UK. We are hoping that a good number will attend this event, helping to build the Celebration network. It is open to the public, and extra brochures are available on request.

Meanwhile, in another development, the Community have been invited to lead a service at **Phil and Margaret Bradshaw's** church, St John's Redhill. We hope that this will help to introduce the church to Phil and Margaret's 'other life' as Community members and lead to further contact.

Susan Abbott

In answer to much prayer, we are happy to report that Susan's house has now been sold, subject to contract (see feature in last issue). We continue in prayer that Susan will soon be relocated in a property more suitable for her needs.

Health problems

There has been a spate of health issues recently, affecting some Community members and friends. In June, **Bill Farra** had surgery on shoulder. Shortly after, **Mimi Farra** had an operation to replace her right knee. Both operations went well. We also hear that **Arabella Kohnahrens** contracted cancer in her jaw (surgeons believe

they have removed all the cancer). Also, **Jodi Page-Clark** has developed a condition requiring some very debilitating drug treatment. We seek your prayers for all these problems.

More ordinations

Several friends have been ordained recently. **Dennis Wilson**, who works in the Aliquippa office, was ordained deacon on 15th June. At Petertide (29th July), **Martyn Hawkes** was ordained deacon. Martyn, who is mar-



Martyn Hawkes on his ordination day in London

ried to **Jen**, is serving his curacy in the Isle of Dogs, east London. Jen's brother, **Phil Dinwiddie**, was also ordained this summer in the USA. He, Jen and Martyn are all former interns with the Community. We also hear news that **Stephen Ball** has been accepted for ordination training. Stephen is a former member of the Fisherfolk who, together with **Lorna**, lived in community for many years at Post Green in Dorset and latterly in the Community of Celebration which was based at Bletchingley, near London.

What's happening in Aliquippa



Since the closure of All Saints Church in Aliquippa the focus for the Community has shifted towards the need for a ministry within the town. The Church Army has now acquired a building for this purpose in the centre of Franklin Avenue, and we hope to give it our support. Here, Capt John Stanley shows a group of 'Partners' the premises.

The Community has also been given a residential property close by for use as a half way house. Joe Beckey has a special interest in that ministry, as have several of those attending the 'Partners' weekend.

'A Day in the Life of Prayer'

Saturday 12th October, 2002
10.00am - 4.00pm

at
St. Michael's Church Camden

(Camden Road, London NW1 close to Camden Town Underground station)

Members of the Community of Celebration, both USA and UK, past and present, will be there. It will be a chance to share and learn together about prayer. A CD of the day's worship will be on sale.

Speaker: The Rev. Abbot Basil Matthews OSB (Elmore Abbey)

Drinks provided. BYOL or eat out (lots of eating places locally)

Space for youngsters, with some table-top activities, under their own parental supervision

Cost: £5 to cover expenses. Bring your friends! For leaflets or an email brochure contact us at the UK address

CelebrationUSA:

PO Box 309, 809 Franklin Avenue,
Aliquippa PA 15001, USA.
Email: mail@communityofcelebration.com

Website:

www.communityofcelebration.com

Celebration UK:

35 Cavendish Road, Redhill,
Surrey RH14AL.

Tel. (01737) 778760

Email: celebration@ccct.co.uk

Website: www.ccct.co.uk

Phil Bradshaw

On being passionate about religion

The anniversary of September 11th caused me to reflect, amongst other things, on why religion generates so much passion. For some, it's as if the fate of the world is at stake, or if not that, then at least their own personal identity.

This is not something confined to the fundamental wing of the church either. The arguments rage with passion and plenty of ill will at all points of the Christian spectrum, especially where human rights issues are involved. Why is this? After all, it's not as though anybody actually *knows* anything about God in any 'objective' sense. Or do they? Clearly, many people are sure they do.

Paying for belief in God with one's life is as old as Jesus himself in Christianity, although it would be as well to be clear about what he was doing – and indeed about what many of the early church martyrs believed they were doing. Jesus did not go to the cross to defend a doctrine about the Sabbath or even to protect the rights of unborn children. The cross was a natural consequence of living in the freedom of the Spirit of God, which in turn was threatening to the powers that be. By simply accepting it, Jesus demonstrated his trust in the aliveness of God and his disregard of death and its importance.

Many early martyrs died in the same spirit. In a way, this had little to do with religious belief as such. It had more to do with humanity. Religious belief tends to focus on rules and laws, all in the name of God. The spirit of Jesus has more to do with what kind of a human being you are, and in fact Jesus was always being taken to task for his supposed irreverence.

What is it, then, that makes people so passionate about their beliefs? Given the example of Jesus, does it really *matter* what anybody believes – within pretty broad limits? Why do people feel their very identity is at stake, if challenged?

The answer probably lies in the question. We all experience God at a profound personal level. God is so close to us that we cannot distinguish 'him' from our own being. That is the character of God: to be part and parcel of the creation. Jesus once said the glory of God in the flowers was finer than all the robes of Solomon. Just by being what they are, they mirror God.

The same is true of human beings. God is revealed in our humanity, not in our beliefs and dogmas. There is a sense in which God and we are one, just as Jesus said about himself. This is probably why we feel so personally attacked, whenever anyone criticises our picture of God. There is a sense in which 'God' is a projection of our own selves – and indeed it could hardly be otherwise, when you think about it. Flowers would do the same if they could think.

Where Christians differ from secularists, of course, is that we do not think God is 'only' or 'merely' a projection. For us, God has a real existence that is revealed in the humanity of Jesus. But the trouble is, we often behave just like the secularist's view of things. We project 'God' to be a person over against us who

requires everyone to conform to whatever we think is important. Hence religious passion and intolerance.

One non-religious definition of God is 'what is over us'. In other words, God is that to which we give our spiritual allegiance. It seems that everyone does this. We give our spiritual allegiance to something, even if it is not the God of Jesus Christ. That is why we have to be very careful about projection. It is very easy to confuse the God of Jesus with what is in *fact* 'over us'.

It makes little difference whether we do this unconsciously, or whether we make a virtue out of it, by, say, parading our faithfulness to a God who, at best, bears only a passing resemblance to the God whom Jesus worshipped. The end result is much the same: a form of humanity that is less than the humanity of Jesus, and which reflects the glory of God to a lesser degree than the humble flower.

We acknowledge the fact that God is not merely a projection by addressing our prayers to a person who stands separate from us, whose aid we seek. Yet that does not alter the fact that, for Jesus, 'I and the Father are one', and therefore for all human beings God can only be known in the kind of humanity taught and shown to us by Jesus. Religious beliefs and convictions are relevant only in so far as they describe, elucidate and enhance our understanding of that humanity – which, like the glory of the flowers in Jesus' illustration, is self-evidently God.

Perhaps this sounds too dismissive of religious belief and practice. Perhaps we feel that however important it may be to be a good person, it is even more important to combine that with saying and believing the right (i.e. divinely appointed) religious things. But this takes us back to the secularist's view of God as a projection of our own inner needs and confusions. Jesus was at home with religion but didn't live by it, as his clashes with authority show. God in Christ – God as the projection of *Jesus'* humanity, so to speak – does not use religion in ways that limit human possibilities.

Which kind of behaviour most reflects the glory of God – lying and cheating, or honesty and straight dealing? Not much contest there, perhaps. But the possibilities in Jesus' imagination are limitless, going far beyond codes of behaviour. In fact, when we imagine God as primarily or exclusively separate from us, *that* is when we tend to limit the notion of God in us to laws and codes. God is alive and has nothing to do with death. When such a God is translated into human behaviour, the results cannot be contained within rules. They can be seen in human beings en masse as much as in any individual. They are both public and private.

If we are going to be passionate about our religion, maybe that is what we need to be passionate about: using our imagination to stretch the boundaries of understanding about what it means for God-in-Christ to be God in us too. If Jesus is anything to go by, it may lead us into new ways of living, but it will not make us defend our dogmas. ■