

THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

MOVEMENT FOR RELIGIOUS RENEWAL

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Advent ~ Christmas ~ Epiphany 2003 ~ 2004



Adoration of the Magi by Rubens

Mary and Elizabeth: Youth and Old Age

by Cynthia Hindes

It can be a comfort to realize that each life runs its unique, individual course. For some, significant events happen early in life. God's working in the almost too young soul of Mary is fruitful even before she is aware of it. The coming of Christ breaks upon her innocence in surprise.

At the other end of the spectrum, and at some distance is Elizabeth, someone who had longed for a child in the hope of the Messiah. For most of her life she had borne the shame of barrenness; in old age she must have long since resigned herself to a life which bore no apparent fruit. For her, surprise arrives late. She bears John the Baptist, the angel sent ahead of the Lord to prepare his coming. Both Mary and Elizabeth serve Christ in their own way, in their own time. But, in addition, they are unexpectedly connected. Suddenly two lives are entwined through the nearness of Christ. Mary hastens to visit.

Each life runs its individual course. We too are called upon to work for Christ and his angels. And there are still innocent souls and weary souls. Some of us, at some early point in life, are young souls surprised by Christ's nearness. And some of us experience long periods of barrenness, when we diligently pray and work for the Messiah, but nothing seems to be coming of it.

In addition, there is within each human soul an innocent, still-fresh corner, which can open and be willing to serve Christ. Likewise, all of our suffering and shame can serve to create a place in our soul for his angel to work to prepare for his coming. And at some point, all of us working toward his coming will find ourselves surprised by an unexpected connection, by destinies that suddenly intertwine.

Mary and Elizabeth need each other. The freshness of life that Mary and her child radiate enlivens and supports the older woman heavy with her child. And Elizabeth too can in a womanly way act as a forerunner for the young girl in the ways of giving birth. Brought together by Christ's nearness, their lives complement and sustain each other. In a way they form one of the first Christ communities.

May we who work toward Christ's nearness also recognize how our lives are intertwined. May our lives enliven and support, sustain and complement each other's, so that together we too may be the community of the Christ.

DELEGATES MEETING REPORT

by Chuck Duquette

The seventh annual Trustees Delegates Conference of the Christian Community was held October 30 through November 1, 2003 in Chicago. Chuck Duquette went as a representative for the Washington DC – Baltimore congregation.

The Board of Trustees of the Christian Community of North America, headquartered in Chicago, is the administrative body that supports our community, as well as congregations throughout the United States and Canada. The Christian Community in North America began in New York City in 1948, and has grown to twelve independent communities with resident priests, and nearly twice that number of affiliate communities, of which ours is one, that hold services regularly throughout the year.

More than 350 independent Christian Community congregations exist worldwide, counting the twelve in North America. Certainly many communities exist in Germany and Europe, but congregations, many of them small and

intimate, hold services throughout the world. A “Circle of Seven” priests is at the center of the internal organization of the worldwide circle of priests, while regional boards attend to the needs of their regions. The meeting in Chicago was a meeting of the board of trustees for the North American region.

One of the principal tasks of these trustees is to administer the Central Fund, a pool of monies gathered from all the congregations to meet the needs of the community throughout North America, and the world. Such needs included, originally, the support of retired priests or their widows, but have come to include coordination of work in North America, the furtherance of priest training, and the support of individual communities in their development.

The coordinators of this year’s conference chose the theme “Generating Abundance,” in part to help us confront our deep-seated ideas of “not having enough.” Organizations and individuals often find themselves in this corner, especially with regard to money. But often our greatest obstacle is ignorance. Our notions of money cannot help but influence our dealings with it. Hence, by developing truer pictures of money, how it is created, how it expires, how it works in the world, we get closer to experiencing the fact of its abundance all around us. A welcome alternative to the experience of “not having enough.”

Toward this goal, Taco Bay began the conference with a talk on “The Religious Use of Money.” Rev. Bay is a senior priest in the Christian Community, having served a number of years as the leader of the Circle of Seven. Flying to the conference, Taco had been reading a newly published book, *The Future of Money*, by Benjamin Cohen, a professor of political economics at the University of California. A widely-respected scholar, Cohen addresses in this work the political economy

of international monetary affairs with ideas that were already familiar to Taco, a fact that enthused him no end. It bears taking close note that a leading scholar, wrestling with the question of how to build a more stable international monetary system that could prevent worldwide monetary collapse and anarchy, would come to insights and conclusions that a senior priest in the Christian Community has been living with for years. [*Senior* connotes age; all priests are equal in rank.]

The scholar develops a compelling case for a single global currency, arguing that leading economic powers would benefit greatly by relinquishing sovereignty over their national currencies, a deed that would require tremendous overcoming of short-term self-interests for the sake of a better world. The priest sees the same challenge in the management of our own economic life in the Christian Community. He has been a leading advocate for many years of an ideal akin to Rudolf Steiner’s social motto, “that the motivation for receiving money is that we should give it to our brother who needs it.” The sense here is clear—were this idea to live in our society, none would ever despair from need. But we can all recognize the obstacles to this altruistic spirit.

So it came as a welcome insight when a fortuitous guest to the conference, a Wealth Management Specialist from Legg-Mason who was tapped as a substitute for a speaker who took ill, helped us see that Taco’s ideal is not only practical, but one that ably guides distribution of both gift and investment capital. Ben Bingham gave us the idea of money as “the blood of the social life,” and asked us to consider whether money did not belong rightly in the social sphere, rather than the economic.

In this vein, Kathryn Vander Berk, an attorney who focuses on work with non-profits, gave a presentation on charitable gifts, speaking about the various vehicles available for bequests and legacies

but emphasizing the importance of strong relations between giving individuals and the charitable organizations they support. Each of the congregations attending had been asked to write up their own experiences with legacies. Our community has received one legacy, the Hodnett Trust, and our experiences, including the events of the last two years with Chestnut Lodge, drew considerable interest and conversation. It is encouraging to reflect that learning opportunities always present themselves, and often most openly when we face failure.

Revs. Gisela Wielki and Richard Dancey spoke on the current status of the Seminary in Chicago. The building originally selected for the Seminary and student residences did not pass due diligence, and the Seminary board declined to take on the costs and risks associated with the property. Instead, the board has scaled down its search and is looking for properties that will require minimal financing. International and national support for the Seminary in Chicago has been strong, and though the inauguration class has only three students, the commitment is in place to develop and grow the Seminary.

The size of the seminary class contrasts with another fact brought forth at the conference. Over the next eight to ten years, eighteen of the priests in North America will be retiring. This includes our beloved Richard Dancey. At this date, the Central Fund is looking at a shortfall of nearly \$100,000 a year to support these priests. In the spirit of Taco Bay's talk, we could see how support for retiring priests would communicate as encouragement to prospective seminary students, and similarly, how a failure to support priests in their old age would have the opposite effect.

The conference concluded with our determination to hold these considerations in mind

and to bring them back to our respective communities.

A Report from Cali, Columbia

by Emilia Hosmann

At last...at long last...we have the permit to start building! So many years have gone by (yes years...two? three?) where we were sure it would come out any moment. Maybe some of you remember we had made a Financial Appeal for the church in Cali, but because we were not able to report enough activity here in Columbia it seems there was little interest and less money came in. Now, of course, the building plans have been considerably reduced. However, this is not such a bad development because now we must begin modestly and grow from within...The most expensive part of the building, of course, will be the basement and underground parking lot, required by the City Council (we still don't have that many cars in our congregation...people take busses or cabs - but, who knows, in a few year's time?). Then, instead of a church (that part of the ground will remain free) we intend to build a cheaply made room for our rituals, which in due time can be torn down, a meeting room which we will share with the existing Branch of the Anthroposophical Society, bathrooms, community kitchen, and living quarters for the actual priest (me, that is), and a space for a caretaker (unfortunately, a must in this country).

So....exactly a year after we began to celebrate regularly in Cali, that is, the first Sunday of Advent, together with our anthroposophical friends we will celebrate the ground breaking beginning of construction. There will be two deeply planted columns, as we have to go underground, due to the earthquakes and parking facilities....Please join

us in our happiness and feel our gratitude to all who have made this step possible! If you care to send a message to us, you can send it to me at emiliahosmann@telesat.com.co.

THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Practicing Religion with Our Children

By Cindy Hindes

Religion is an activity, something we do. It is the part of our lives that we devote to God. It is not limited to, but is greatly supported and enhanced by our worshipping with others. That is why we come to church—to join hands with others to make our prayer strong, and to provide a place for Christ to enter into our lives together.

Children have a natural, evolving relationship to God. At birth they come to us from another home, a home with God; they hope to find with us on earth a memory and a reflection of the home from which they have come. The purpose of religion is to nourish the child's inborn **reverence** for the divine. We adults try to activate in the child a heartfelt awareness of God's working here on earth, seen through the lens of that reverence, and to develop the healthy habit of strengthening that reverence through worshipping with others.

For these reasons The Christian Community offers several activities for children. These activities are seen as a nourishing, supportive extension of family life and are possible at all because adults create religious substance through their own participation in the adult communion service, The Act of Consecration of Man.

For children there is first of all **Baptism**. In The Christian Community Baptism is a children's baptism. It does not make the child a member of the church, for membership will be his or her free

choice as an adult. But Baptism receives the child like a seed into the community of those who are aware of the working of Christ, and promises to carry this child within itself and to nourish the child's relationship with God.

For the pre-school child, the practice of religion takes place mostly within the family—prayers at bedtime, grace before meals, age-appropriate fairy-tales and stories which nurture the child's natural openness and reverence, mostly by avoiding precocious intellectualism. Young children are always welcome to attend the Baptism of other children, which helps strengthen their connection with their own christening. Strong relationships cultivated with their godparents also strengthen their connection to the community. Small children are also warmly welcome to attend **festival gardens**, such as the Advent and Easter gardens for children. In addition, they may sit with their parents in The Sunday Service for Children, especially if older siblings are attending, or as their own participation approaches. Child care is provided during the adult service.

With their entry into first grade they step into the wider school community as a learner. This is also the case in religion. To the practice of religion at home and the festival gardens is now added the practice of religion together with other children at the **Sunday Service for Children**. It is worshipping the divine together. That is why there needs to be at least two children. Each child is greeted individually at the door. But the prayer the children speak is choral. The senses are gently addressed through the picture, the warmth and color, the flowers, and the words. By purposely not being dramatic or overwhelming, we encourage the child to look actively, to seek the divine. The content emphasizes the importance of learning the great lesson of earthly life: that Christ is love's teacher in the learning and work of life.

At age seven **religious instruction** also begins. In the early years it is given mostly in the form of stories, songs and verses. Approaching Confirmation at fourteen it more often takes the form of discussion. Ideally up to about the age of nine, the emphasis of instruction is on God the Father, as illustrated, through fairy-tales, legends, through stories that show the divine wisdom in nature and through the Old Testament history of the Hebrew people. For fifth graders the emphasis is on the Son and the New Testament. For grades eight and up the emphasis is on the Spirit, that is, how the divine works in individual destinies, in the biographies of those who are servants of the divine.

In the **Sunday Service for Children**, the heart gently awakens the will to worship God. In **religious instruction**, the heart gently awakens the head, the understanding of the working of God. They complement and balance one another, developing the child's religious life from both sides, in a way that enables him or her to make a free but informed choice about religion as an adult.

During the summer there are two-week **children's camps** and in some areas **family camps**. These constellations provide another level for the healthy weaving of the religious life into a communal life. Many children form friendships there beyond their own school setting. This special time of daily singing and stories, of making things, of outings and sleeping and eating together, of creating a life together, form a reservoir of inspiration for the young person for the rest of their lives.

Confirmation at age fourteen is both a culmination and a new beginning. The seed of the child's religious life, surrounded and nourished by the community, is released into life. For the first time the children attend The Act of Consecration of Man as independent adults, and receive their first Communion. After this, their attendance is their

choice. Many still attend with their families. Much depends on whether there is a group of people their own age. They may become **counselors** in the children's camps. They may attend our **youth conferences**, currently offered regionally twice a year for three or four days. There are also **international youth conferences** where older teens and those in their twenties find their own connections before settling down into the more local communities as young adults. Often it is the Baptism of their own children which stimulates their re-entry as active participants and creators of the life of The Christian Community.

A Note from the Editors:

We would just like to extend Season's Greetings to all and also mention that this very newsletter, and all back issues for the past ten years, can be downloaded at your convenience from the Christian Community Website below. Tell a Friend!

Contributions for the Easter 2004 Newsletter need to be in by March 15, 2004. Submissions should be sent to Jim Hindes at jhindes@earthlink.net (preferred method) or mailed to Jim Hindes, 1316 S. Pearl St., Denver, CO 80201

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