

THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

MOVEMENT FOR RELIGIOUS RENEWAL

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In the 50th Year of The Christian Community in North America



The First Church built in Devon, Pennsylvania in 1976

The foundation of the New York congregation in Advent 1948 marked the beginning of the work of The Christian Community on the North American continent. On the occasion of this anniversary, we reprint excerpts of an article by Rev. Alfred Heidenreich written a few weeks after his return to England.

As the culmination of ten weeks of intense and concentrated activity, the foundation of The Christian Community in America took place during the weekend of December 11th and 12th.

It became clear within a few days, that we should never make more than a passing impression if we did not at once establish a visible permanent center, which meant a house where we could create our own atmosphere and where a permanent address would provide a firm anchorage amidst the rapids and whirlpools of the fast flowing river of American life.

Everyone of these three reasons was by itself strong enough to make us undertake the bold step. To start with, the holding of services and lectures in a hired hall was a great problem. Rev. Hegg had taken a room for Sunday mornings and Thursday evenings at the Steinway Hall. This building serves on the ground floor some 30 musical studios which are rented out by the hour for various purposes, mainly for musical practice. In spite of assurances that the Sunday mornings would be quiet, we were usually enveloped in a chaos of contending musical displays. Over our heads someone played the piano without intermission, to our left a soprano practiced scales, more or less successfully reaching out for the highest obtainable notes; to our right a tenor bellowed the prologue to *Pagliacci*; others could be heard further afield. On Thursday evenings musical events were less prominent, but street noises threatened to drown the voice of the lecturer, fleets of lustily hooting taxicabs, and police cars, ambulances or fire engines passing by at intervals with sirens roaring and screaming.

It was astonishing and moving to discover that in spite of all this distraction a varying and growing audience responded to the lectures, and in particular The Act of Consecration seemed to have no diffi-

culty at all in taking its place among the people, and indeed the whole atmosphere of New York. During 26 years I had never before witnessed anything like this gracious opening of souls, as if they were flowers, towards the sun of Christ. Of other impressions it is more difficult to speak, if one does not possess the faculty of exact spiritual observation. But so much may be said, that the flowing into the ritual of what appeared to be hosts of etheric beings was overwhelming. These impressions came fresh time and again, irrespective of who celebrated. The great American Continent, the New World, received the gifts of the new spring of Christianity. And the spirit of the Pilgrim Fathers, youthful and gracious, receptive and devout, with its sense for real values, was among us and recognized the newcomers.

Alfred Heidenreich

AS I REMEMBER IT

Advent of this year will mark 50 years since the founding of the first Christian Community Congregation in North America. What follows here is a kind of personal memoir, a selection of anecdotes from the two years before, and two years after this event. At the outset I should clear up two misconceptions, errors of facts, which have recently appeared in print: First, Verner Hegg did not found the Congregation in Chicago. I did. For more than two years I was alone, only aided by some visits of Dr. Rudolf Frieling, who was then working in New York. And then, as will be seen below, came Rosemarie Bergmann and Richard Lewis in the late summer of 1952. Second, my ordination was hastened by plans made by Dr. Alfred Heidenreich. They had nothing to do with the outbreak of the Korean War. By the time that war began I had been in Chicago for nearly two months.

I first heard of The Christian Community in the summer of 1946. Having returned from military service, I was again a student at Bowdoin College. The wife of my teacher, Professor Fritz Koelln, wrote to him from the Spring Valley Conference that Adam

Bittleston, priest in The Christian Community, was there, and was hoping to find some young person to go to England and train to become a priest. Bine Koelln thought that this might be something for me. Fritz then told me something of The Christian Community. Very interesting, I thought; but definitely, definitely not for me.

A year later, thinking myself headed for a career as a college teacher, I found myself with my friend, Richard Lewis, headed for Zurich, Switzerland. Richard had some different aspirations, which we need not go into here. Arrived in Zurich, we first went to the wrong office, and were directed how to walk throughout the city to where we could register at the Summer School of Foreign Study. About five minutes into our walk, as we passed down a narrow sidewalk on a narrow street, I noticed a bronze plaque with the inscription: "DIE CHRISTEN-GEMEINSCHAFT, Bewegung fuer religioese Erneuerung." Just a glance. I didn't even break my stride, nor say anything to Richard. But to myself I wondered: Is this the thing that Fritz and Bine were talking about last summer?

After the Summer School, Richard and I were to matriculate at the University of Zurich. We were already enrolled at the University of Maryland Graduate Year Abroad program. I don't remember a great deal about the Summer School. Not long after arrival in Zurich, I made a trip over to Dornach, where I met with Hans Pusch, the actor, who was a lifelong friend of Fritz Koelln. I had met Hans in New York not long after returning from the war. He encouraged me to come to Dornach in August for the Faust Performance. I was very impressed by those five days, and thought I might write a short dissertation on the history of the development of the Faust performance at the Goetheanum.

This project led me in November, back to that house of The Christian Community in the Untere Zaeune, which we had walked past a few minutes after our arrival in Zurich. I was looking for Rudolf Steiner's Faust lectures. Someone had told me that Rudolf Meyer, priest of the Christian Community would probably have the book, which was then out of print. So I rang his doorbell. His wife informed

me that he was away in Germany. The following Wednesday, after his return, he would tell of his experiences. This was his first trip to Germany since the war.

After the talk, I met him, and later his colleague, Robert Spoerri (who, it turned out, had the Faust lectures - Meyer didn't). Then, for the next few weeks I attended the regular lectures which Meyer and Spoerri were holding on Wednesday evenings. In the month of December (this was 1947) some important things happened: I was offered a graduate assistantship at Columbia University for the following academic year. On the basis of this I suggested to my fiancée, Natalie Robinson, that we might get married the following summer. Then I had a letter from Fritz Koelln, asking for help in finding him some sort of position in Zurich for the next academic year. It was not easy for foreigners to obtain permission to work in Switzerland. But I was able to bring it about that Fritz was offered the position of Resident Dean of the University of Maryland Graduate Year Abroad program in Zurich. So Fritz could bring his wife and three daughters to Zurich the next year.

And there was a third thing. Christmas Day in the afternoon, gray overcast skies, a lonely walk on the "Zueriberg" above and east of the city. In a flash it became clear to me that I should become a priest in the Christian Community. I rushed to the streetcar station, and rode down into the city, with the intent to share this revelation with Pfarrer Spoerri. By the time I reached the bottom, reason began taking over. This was so completely irrational. I hadn't even been to a service, only to the lectures. So I decided to start going to services. . But all that I experienced seemed to confirm what I had experienced up there on the "Zueriberg".

In that December something else important happened, but beyond the sphere of my awareness. Verner Hegg was ordained in London. It was he, not me, that Adam Bittleston had "brought back" with him to England in 1946. It was intended that he was to go in the coming year to New York and begin the work of the Christian Community in North America.

By the time, I guess it was about mid-January, Natalie had agreed to the idea of a summer wedding.

I hit her with this new thing. I wanted to become a priest. I suggested she go and visit the Koellns in Brunswick, Maine. Fritz told her all about everything (that was his way). After some weeks, filled with frantic letters and telegrams, things were decided. On August 6, 1948, the five Koellns and Natalie sailed from New York. I met Natalie in Basel on Friday, the 13th of August. Five days later in the house at Untere Zaeune 19 we were married. The fundamental plan was that Natalie would have a chance to see what the Christian Community was about, and see whether she could live with the idea that I should indeed become a priest. After two semesters in Zurich, Natalie would go back and finish her last year at the University of New Hampshire. And I, it was to be hoped, by then would be able to get into Germany to go to the seminary in Stuttgart.

So after six weeks in the mountains of the Berner Oberland, it was back to the University for the Winter Semester. Natalie did not matriculate, but enrolled as an auditor in lectures on English literature. And we involved ourselves in the life of the Zurich congregation.

Now, during that summer, Richard Lewis had had his adventures. First he decided that his European experience ought not to end yet. At the encouragement of Rudolf Meyer he obtained a transit visa to Norway, through Germany. He only got as far as Stuttgart, where it was his intention to attend the *Anthroposophische Hochschulwochen*, a students conference. By a strange coincidence, just about the first person he met was a priest from Norway, the very one who, according to his papers, he was supposed to be going to visit. It seems that the priests were at the same time having a Synod. He also had the opportunity to be present at an ordination. He interrupted his time in Stuttgart to come to Zurich for our marriage. He was the server. Then he was able to talk his way over the border to get back to Stuttgart, in spite of the fact that his visa was for only one trip (to and from Norway). By the time the Winter Semester began he was wrestling with the question of whether he might become a priest, too. I am not sure just when this became a solid decision; but it was certainly long before the visit of Emil Bock just after

Christmas. Bock told us that we should apply for papers to enter Germany. He said it would probably take a few months. It did.

So April 2, 1949 found Natalie, Richard and me on the train to Stuttgart. Bock's visit in December was not the only important thing to happen that December. By the time we boarded that train, Natalie was entering her fourth month of pregnancy. After my arrival in Stuttgart, a lot of things happened quickly. I can't go into all the details here; but at the time things did not seem to go all that quickly. The main things was that Dr. Heidenreich arrived on the scene, fresh from his conquest of New York City, that is the buying of the house at 309 West 74th Street and the founding of the New York Congregation. He began planning further campaigns. The plan was basically as follows: An experienced priest would go to New York to be with Verner Hegg. I would be prepared and quickly ordained and sent to Chicago, also with an experienced priest. (He was also thinking of San Francisco the following year.) He apparently sold the project to his fellow Oberlenkers, because I was included in a newly formed final preparation group. Dr. Rudolf Frieling left for New York in September. Dr. Rudolf Koehler went to London to perfect his skills in the English language, in preparation for coming to Chicago to be with me there.

But go to Chicago we did! All three Brewers. John Michael joined us on September 25th. Gottfried Husemann, who also baptized him, referred to him as the "first Seminar Baby." My ordination was on November 13th. We returned to the United States, via London, in early 1950. Dr. Heidenrich and I met in Chicago in April. With the help of several Chicago people who loaned us money, we bought the rather tired house at 1409 North Dearborn Parkway. I went back east to collect Natalie and John Michael from where they had been staying with relatives.

It was in May of 1950 that we three first set up camp in the house at 1409. We couldn't do anything to prepare the house for its intended activity until after the transfer of title on the first of August. There followed a frantic two months of tearing out walls, patching plaster, scraping off old wallpaper, painting and other things. It was a great letdown that Dr.

Rudolf Koehler, for reasons too complicated to go into here, was prevented from coming. We did open the second Sunday after Michaelmas. Dr. Alfred Heidenreich was here for the event. But he soon went back to England and then there was only just “we”.

Early in March of 1951 “we” were joined by another co-worker, Susan Ellen (8 pounds, 6 ounces). It was about that time that a Mrs. Ulrich, who lived next door to Grant Hospital (Susan’s port of entry), and who had connections with Chicago’s German-speaking population, told me that she had been told by one of her German-speaking friends that one Rosemarie Bergmann, a priest, was coming to “assist” me in Chicago. I remember exclaiming to the lady: “Rosemarie Bergmann is not even a priest!” We had known Rosemarie slightly at the Seminar in Stuttgart, and to be honest, we hadn’t particularly liked her. Within a few weeks I was enlightened of facts that not even Mrs. Ulrich knew (she knew a lot). Again, for reasons too complicated to detail, Rosemarie had been awarded an immigration visa to enter the United States. And the same month she was being ordained. And she was indeed being sent to Chicago! This set of facts did not particularly please me. So I wrote a rather sharp letter to Emil Bock. The tone of Bock’s reply was, in view of the tone of mine to him, remarkably calm and kind. In effect he said: “Calm yourself, if you can’t get on with her, send her back. “ (At the same time Bock was telling her something like: “If you can’t stand it over there, come back. We’ll find a place for you.”) Of course, by the time she was on the Atlantic, some rumors of my earlier disapprobation had reached her ears, which did nothing to raise her expectations. I, however, by then was not only resigned; but even somewhat enthusiastic that *someone* was coming.

But by the time Rosemarie arrived, Brewers (all four of them) had fled the scene. After two years and a little bit alone, struggling with the old house, trying to build up something of a congregation; (only two years and a quarter, but it seemed like forever!) we had boarded the New York Central New England States Express, and went for a month to visit our ancestors.

So Rosemarie’s welcome to Chicago was a note

from me: “ *Welcome to Chicago. Verner Hegg, on his way to and from Minneapolis, will hold the Act of Consecration here on the 9th and the 23rd. If you feel you can do it in English, please hold the Act of Consecration on the 16th and the 30th. We will be back on September 1.* “

By the time we got back, Rosemarie had secured a place working for a family in one of the wealthier suburbs north of Chicago. This not only secured her financially, but gave her an opportunity to develop English language skills. She came to 1409 on weekends. It wasn’t long before Richard and Tamara Lewis joined up. They also went out to work. We had only the income we could ourselves produce. There was no subsidy from England nor from Germany. We lived on the edge of poverty. But this did not chill us. We were fired with a warmth of enthusiasm of “the cause”.

So, by the end of 1950, we had a strange, but miraculous, situation: Three young priests, very different personalities, who yet could teach each other, learn from each other. Motivated by what seems now an unbelievable confidence and hope for the future of the work for which we had dedicated ourselves, anything seemed possible. And we came not only to like each other; we *loved* each other. In the next four years we conducted our own “post-ordination Seminar”. But that is another chapter in another book.

Gregg C. Brewer
Falmouth, MA

TWENTY FIVE YEARS OF THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY CAMP

This year, The Christian Community on the East Coast is looking back on 25 years of summer camp with approximately 100 children ages 8-13 attending. Fifteen years ago, it became the jumping-off point for our youth work in the Northeast, for 14 to 18 year olds. The 13-year-old boys and girls at camp are al-

ways looking forward to attending one or both of the Youth Conferences, held in late summer and in winter.

Another popular prospect for our one-time campers is to return to camp as junior staff at age 16 and later as counselors (18 or older). They are eager to help the children have the same fun-filled and memorable summers they enjoyed and in the process form strong bonds among themselves. It is a joy to watch the young staff “age” with the responsibility they bear and to see the children grow more cheerful and “younger” with every passing day of camp life.

About 50 years ago, two priests of The Christian Community in Germany conceived the idea of starting a camp. Now every country in the world in which The Christian Community is active also has its Camp. On this continent there are camp activities in the East, West, Midwest, and in Canada. The camps may differ in style but all share in the same impulse and are guided by the same goal: To slow down today’s child’s hurried departure from childhood and his/her spiritual past, while at the same time planting the seeds for the child’s own free enactment of religion in the future.

There are today many priests working in The Christian Community who can recall their own formative encounters with the life of The Christian Community as one-time campers or staff members, often contributing to the resolve to take up the vocation of the priesthood.

Will there be Christian Community Summer Camps 25 years from now? Yes, if young people on this continent find their way not only to the camps but also to the vocation of the priesthood. For without priests, there will be no Christian Community.

Gisela Wielki
New York

A MESSAGE FROM THE STILL-LIVING

In November 1997 our Los Angeles community held a memorial gathering for the dead. At that moment we stood between two anniversaries: in 1996 the LA community was 40 years old. In 1998, The Christian Community in North America will be 50 years old. And, in between, the founder of both the LA community and the work in North America, Verner Hegg, passed over the threshold at the age of 90. In honor of these events, we read aloud the names of all who had died in our LA community in the last 40 years. Our remembering was intended to prepare the ground for new seeds out of the future. And something new and unexpected did happen.

One of our members is a Hospice volunteer. She had invited to our gathering a Japanese woman with whom she was acquainted through Hospice, a mother who lost her four year-old son to an inherited disease last summer. The mother told how her son, who during his life had never learned to speak, after his death began to talk to her. Her deep and painful questions about the meaning of his illness and death created an opening, a quiet emptiness into which he could speak. She heard him calling “mother.” She was surprised to hear him speaking so clearly. He said that her care and concern for his well-being during his illness was a training for hearing wordless speech. She asked that he speak also to his aunt, her sister; but he said that his aunt is so preoccupied with repeating his name again and again that she can’t hear him. “When I see aunty from here I see lots of balloons from her shoulder. The balloons should be let go to the sky. But aunty is holding really tight to the strings of the balloons. Be free from balloons.”

The mother doesn’t quite understand about the balloons. “Aunty has heavy colored balloons. So when I come to her the balloons push me aside. So she cannot feel me right. When she is ready, try to let go of each balloon in the sky. And be free from it.” And the mother understands that the balloons are her sister’s feelings: her anger, her sadness, her upset confusion.

Her son's speaking brought healing of heart. Her son told her how children who have died are cared for by guardians who bring them to their parents, to comfort them. The mother feels that her son is her teacher.

On that Sunday, through her, that teacher also visited our community. Our preparatory work in honoring worked to prepare for an unexpected blossom: A message from the world of the still-living.

Cynthia Hindes
Los Angeles

SEMINARY RETREAT

May 10-29, Chicago

A three week program with morning courses by Werner Grimm (Christology and The Act of Consecration of Man), Susan Lowndes (Messengers of the Second Coming: Kierkegaard, Emerson, Nietzsche), and Erk Ludwig (Encountering and Transforming Evil); Eurythmy and Speech. Costs: \$650.00. A program will be available in the congregation. For more information, to enroll, contact Rev. Robert Patterson, 5236 N. Virginia Ave., Chicago, IL 60615, Phone (773) 334-7677.

Robert Patterson characterized last year's Seminary Retreat in Chicago as "A three week program oriented toward a deepening into the religious life of The Christian Community. While this conference has been designed to help further the development of our Movement for Religious Renewal in a broad sense, a more specific design comes from the hope that by way of this event individuals might be encouraged to consider preparing themselves to take on the life task of serving as priests.

We hope that those who present themselves as willing to undergo the process of becoming priests will have the resources, financially as well as constitutionally, to make it through the stages of preparation for ordination. And we hope that we will be able to support them along the way as may be needed.

If you would like to make a donation to The Christian Community Central Fund for student support to help us be prepared to offer financial help, you may send your contribution to the Central Fund, c/o Robert Patterson, at the address given above."

A STUDY COURSE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE from North America, Ages 18-28, at the Priest Seminary of The Christian Community, Stuttgart, Germany

THE TIME:

Three weeks in June 1998 (June 14-July 4)

A STUDY COURSES

A Study Course for young people, age 18-28 at the priest Seminary in Stuttgart, Germany, will be held from June 14 through July 4, 1998.

THE PURPOSE:

An intensive study to allow young people to broaden the perspective on their current endeavors and life circumstances from a unique point of view.

THE STUDY:

Course will be given in English. There will be three one-week long Main Courses taught by Seminary faculty. Topics are still under consideration, but each week will address one of the following three subjects: Art, Science and Religion. For some activities the participants will join the international student body at the seminary and for others they will be among themselves. There will also be Eurythmy, Speech Formation, Gospel Study, Sculpture (and German for those who want it).

REQUIREMENTS:

An open mind and enthusiasm for new ideas and experiences.

ENCOUNTER:

A group of South Africans will join the Young Americans for the Course.

COST:

The Seminary will carry the course expenses and will provide room and board. Participants will have to provide for: evening meal, (light supper), pocket money for excursions, cultural activities, and airfare. Total cost estimated to be around \$800. Eighteen

young people have already signed up. Anyone interested please contact Gisela Wielki immediately, as space is limited. Rev. Sanford Miller and Rev. Gisela Wielki will accompany the group. Anyone who is interested or wants more information can contact

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North American synod at Copake, NY in 1978. *Standing:* Diethart Jaehnig, Gisela Wielki, James Langbecker, John Hunter, Ita Bay (visiting), Gregg Brewer, Werner Grimm, Hartmut Junge, Rosemarie Bergmann, Erk Ludwig. *Seated:* Taco Bay (visiting), Richard Lewis, Robert Patterson, Phillip Nusbaum, Walter Brecker, James Hindses. (Verner Hegg and Carl Stegmann were not present)

