

# THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

MOVEMENT FOR RELIGIOUS RENEWAL

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## Advent ~ Christmas ~ Epiphany 2002 ~ 2003



*The Flight Into Egypt* by Gislebertus, 12th century

## PEOPLE LOOK EAST

*“Angels announce to man and beast,  
him who cometh from the East.  
Set every peak and valley humming  
with the word the Lord is coming.  
People look East, and sing today:  
Love, the Lord, is on the way.”*

*Carol of the Advent*

The sun can be counted on to always be there. But for a rainbow to appear, the right conditions must prevail. There must be rain and sun at the same time. And even then we must be facing the right direction. We may have to do some searching. But the amazing thing about the rainbow is that it arises in the space between rain and light on the one hand, and the human gaze on the other. The sun is always out there in the sky for everyone. But the rainbow requires the eye's seeing.

The same is true with regard to Christ. He is there, as eternally reliable as the sun. But seeing him, finding him, is often a matter of conditions, of choices and paying attention, of our orientation. Looking for him is like looking for the rainbow.

It is often easiest to find him in our own personal storms. After a while we may even begin to know to look for him just after things are at their worst. With a little practice we learn how to orient ourselves to catch a glimpse of his color between the light and the tears. Sometimes we search and can't find him. But like the sun, he is there, no matter how obscured. For he is both the ever-present sun and the ephemeral bow of color, both the light and its effect. He is always there, but perceiving him, like perceiving the rainbow, partially depends on us, on where or how we look.

The altar is one place where we find him. His colors appear there through the arc of the year like the slow turning of a prism; first Advent blue, then palest lilac at Christmas, magenta at Epiphany, Trinity orange, the red and green of Easter, St. Johnstide gold, and even black and white. For he spans and

inhabits both the living white light of the spirit and the deathly darkness of our world. And he is the color of everything in between.

*“People, look East, and sing today, Love, the Lord, is on the way.”*

At the altar we face the east, hoping for the coming of the light of him who weaves in the breadths of space and through the arc of time. We look for his light threading itself into our otherwise darkened daylight. And at the altar we watch his slow weaving of the bow of color as it arises through time. He is the Love weaving in the bow of color spanning heaven and earth.

Cynthia Hinder  
*Los Angeles*

## “MAKING MEETINGS BETTER”

The Chicago Delegates Conference

Some 30 representatives from congregations around the continent met in Chicago in early November for the Sixth Annual Delegates Meeting. The weekend conference was highlighted by an inspiring workshop that taught participants to reach group decisions through consensus rather than by voting. The conference included an address by Rev. Erk Ludwig on “The Nature of Sacramental Community,” which emphasized the flexible thinking that contemporary religious experience requires; a report by Dagmar Brockstedt from Stuttgart detailing how the Foundation International monitors a special fund established for the needs of the worldwide movement as a whole; an update by Rev. Gisela Wielki on the preparations for the new Seminary opening in Chicago next fall; and reports by delegates from congregations around North America. Morning and evening services and a closing program of music, poetry, storytelling, and eurythmy provided a

welcome chance to meet more of the local congregation.

The conference workshop was presented by Caroline Estes, a group-process facilitator from the Quaker tradition who has also assimilated features of Native American tribal practices and has consulted for many Waldorf Schools. Soft-spokenly persuasive, our speaker built her presentation around the plentiful questions she encouraged, which she insisted on fielding the moment they arose in our minds.

Compressing her normally five-day workshop into four intensive sessions on one day, Caroline observed that a tendency toward “group deafness” concerning dissenting opinions tends to arise whenever a collective decision is sought, to the detriment of all concerned. But on the Quaker understanding, “everyone has a piece of the truth,” and to balance the need for collective action with a respect for individual conscience, the Society of Friends has developed a social technique to forestall both majority tyranny and minority manipulation. On the belief that factions arise and people manipulate only when they “feel they are not being heard,” Consensus Decision Making aims to eliminate such frustrating usurpations of individual integrity and group dynamics: In the procedure outlined, *every* participant who has attended the relevant meetings holds power to block a decision—but only if he or she feels it would be “disastrous” to those whom it affects, including the group itself. Upon confronting such a gesture of conscience, the dissenter’s colleagues are enjoined to counter the natural tendency to overpower or withdraw from the opposition and instead are encouraged to “embrace” the one who has radical reservations about the decision, and for example literally to “take him out for dinner” and enter sympathetically into the expressed concerns. Under this system, veto power is to be used very sparingly, with an informal cap of six “blocks” per person *per lifetime*. Caroline related a dramatic instance of attending meeting in which one lone protester blocked the decision of 499 initially committed (and impatient) colleagues, who all turned out in the end to be wrong; for the “blocker” was the first to recognize that the group

would have inadvertently jeopardized the interests of those it represented by their idealistic willingness to effect a vicarious sacrifice.

A less drastic procedural safeguard of individual conscience is each participant’s option to “stand (or step) aside” from subscribing to a decision that one “can live with” but does not endorse. Two or more stand-asides in a meeting indicate the need for further review before the decision is implemented; here too, providing all participants with the feeling that they are being heard is the key to broad satisfaction with the process.

In our exploration of tools supporting consensus-building, we learned of the imperative courtesy to distribute a written agenda with relevant documentation well prior to each meeting; separating the roles of Chair (content) and Facilitator (process); entering participants’ names in the Minutes only to record those attending, those approving decisions, and those wishing to be recognized as “standing aside” (but not those “blocking”); and conducting a formal process of reviewing the strengths and weaknesses of each meeting for future improvement. A workshop synopsis and bibliography were distributed and topical books available for purchase.

Board decisions may well be enhanced by adopting the method Caroline offered, which she suggested we approach as an experiment to “make meetings better”—a goal likely to win consent without controversy wherever in the world it is proposed.

Michael Ronall  
*New York*

## THE ENSOULING OF A NEW CHURCH

In the middle of a suburban neighborhood, raised up on a hillside bedecked with liriopse, stands a beautiful new church of the Christian Community.

One year ago a copper dodecahedron was set into the foundation of the building, filled with our



hopes, inspirational readings and wishes for the future. By June the chapel was completed and Oliver Steinrueck came to consecrate it: the spiritual dedication. The summer was spent completing the rest of the building and the landscaping.

Now one year after the foundation stone celebration, on Michaelmas 2002, we were able to welcome Rev. Gisela Wielki back to see the finished work which she had begun and worked toward for so many years.

On Saturday afternoon, Sept. 28th we gathered in the new church for music and welcoming. In the background stood a watercolor mural of Michael and the dragon painted by the 7th grade Religious Instruction students. Gisela Wielki spoke about the long journey, the generosity, legacies, grace, disappointments and hard work which went into the project. It had clearly been a work of love and endurance for many years before the groundbreaking ever began.

There have been many challenges along the way, great and small. The world does not simply “step aside” and make way for a new church. Yet, the boulders were moved .... and moved again! We can literally say that here stands a church around which no stone has been left unturned (we are, after all, in Rockland County!).

The chapel was filled with light from its high windows and with the warmth of so many people who came bringing their good wishes. There was an air of gratitude and of pride that such a beautiful

space, a permanent home for the celebration of the sacraments and the fostering of community life could come into existence. We are glad to be one of the many new growing points in the Christian Community as a whole. Come and visit when you can!



Carol Kelly  
*Spring Valley, NY*

## **SEMINARY UPDATE**

In nine months the seminary will open and we are hard at work to bring this about. Inquiries already show that the seminary will be international. People from nine different countries have contacted us. We are now working on the next brochure with detailed information regarding curriculum, faculty and general information. You should be receiving it in the mail before Christmas.

At the Trustees meeting in Chicago, November 7-10, representatives from the boards of our congregations saw the apartment building, a short block away from the church, that we hope to buy as a student and faculty residence, office, classroom and library. The delegates experienced first hand how the close proximity of the two buildings would allow for an optimal use of both buildings for seminary events, congregational events, and for smaller conferences. The delegates were very supportive

and strongly encouraged us to move ahead in our pursuit to buy the building.

We are negotiating with the owner in an attempt to bring the price of the building down, but real estate value in the area is still rising. We continue to believe in our ability to raise the \$1,100,000 with the help of all our members and friends and some help from overseas. Major donors have so far given a total of \$200,000 dollars in amounts between \$5,000 and 38,000. An additional \$40,000 more are pledged.

We are still receiving donations in response to our general appeal. Of the 3500 households that received the general appeal in North America, 225 households have so far responded with amounts between \$5 and \$500. If 1000 more households would respond, we would have a show of support for the project of one third of our households at the grassroots level—a true vote of confidence. Heartfelt thanks to all who have already responded!

**Perhaps the donation envelope is still on your desk. Otherwise here is the information again: Please make your check payable to:**

**The Seminary of the Christian Community,  
P.O. Box 25603, Chicago, IL 60625.**

Regards,

*Gisela Wielki, Richard Dancey and Erk Ludwig*

## **THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN BOTUCATÚ SP, BRAZIL**

A year ago in our Advent-Epiphany issue, Martin de Gans wrote about church building plans in Cali (Colombia) and Botucatú, which is located some 150 miles from Sao Paulo with its 18 million inhabitants. In Sao Paulo, our congregation has been established for more than forty years.



Martin de Gans wrote that the plans for Cali would receive priority; but they have been bogged down in the local bureaucracy. Botocatú has been able to move forward, and has recently consecrated its church on Sunday, November 17. This year in July Renato Gomes, a Brazilian, moved there with his family to be the resident priest. He came from Buenos Aires, where he has worked since 1992 after a time in Germany, following his 1991 ordination.

He writes:

Often one finds gruesome figures, hewn in stone, on the roofs of Gothic cathedrals: gargoyles. Out of their snouts they spit out the water which had fallen on the roof. Quite a few explanations for those figures can be found. One of them says that the terrifying sight of those water spitting figures shows the power and fury at work of the processes in nature, which with all might are being flung outward.

In this way, the roof truss is being protected from being destroyed by wind and weather. At the same time, this 'detour' creates an inner space in which the unruly forces of nature make room for the powers of devotion of the human being, who earnestly strives to unite with the divine world – irrespective of what happens outside.

In our Botucatú church, for the woodwork of the roof to be put in place, in the nave scaffolding had to be erected in order to lift the heavy main beams some 10 to 11 yards – which happened only by us-



ing man power, backed up by ropes and block and tackles. Those looking on could feel themselves to be transported to the centuries in which the big cathedrals were built, imagining how at that time they went up. There are quite some similarities.

Yet the design of our church differs greatly from medieval engineering principles. No gargoyles are being added. Gutters, invisible from the ground, collect the rain which especially during the hot summer months falls abundantly, to lead it gently into the ground through pipes inserted into the walls. This architectural design offers a transformation of the past, appropriate to modern consciousness: the power and the fury of nature's elements are not anymore being spit forcefully outwards but are being taken within and calmly transported to the earth. In a corresponding way, human beings look within this church for a place of devotion. Yet they know that it is their duty to accompany and to direct nature's processes with their consciousness, taking pains to spiritualize them and to transform them. This is what is meant by the Gospel's 'metanoia' – the ability to change heart and mind.

Historically, the community which has settled here in Botucatu's Demetria area grew in setting up a protecting ring around 'Demetria', the bio-dynamic farm which came into being in 1974. Several Sao Paulo families bought the sites adjoining the farm in order to prevent contamination of water and grounds by the farming neighbors. Young families moving in, it became necessary to establish a kindergarten,

followed some time later by the Waldorf School 'Aitiara' (Nest of Light), which now has about 200 students.

At the moment, about a hundred families live here, mostly drawn by the school but very interested in what has grown out of anthroposophy, in ecology and social initiatives. One of the leading principles of this Waldorf School is to have a part of the students come from simple blue collar families who are not able to pay tuition. Thus this pedagogical impulse benefits a section of Brazilian society which out of its own resources would hardly have access to it. For the school, it is not easy to fulfil this social obligation as it does not receive any state subsidies, but this constitutes one of the challenges of daily life over here.

The same gesture found in the architecture of our church roof has from the beginning been seen in many of the local initiatives: receiving and taking in what comes from outside, guarding it, creating an inner space, working on it and transforming it for the future. This basic law in reality may govern all work here in Brazil. With a decidedly young population and great shortcomings in many ways of life, yet each really social, spiritual and religious impulse may find a rich field of activity. In this ambience this new congregation here in Botucatu has been founded.

Renato Gomes  
*Botucatu*

## **OUR YOUNG PEOPLE IN BUENOS AIRES**

Given what is generally known about the present situation in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and what over the years I have told you about our congregation over here, this time I'd like to tell you something about our young people.

Of course, everywhere in the world it is difficult to be young. Even when in the meantime the old myth that children and young people should be

full of happiness seems to me to have been overcome, in a country like Argentina this will be especially difficult – as there seems to be no future. To be young actually means to be on one's way to maturity, wanting to do something worthwhile in life, finding the tasks one will fulfil. It is not that difficult to see what necessarily has to be done, but it is much more difficult to see how, given the needs all around, this can be done in a worthwhile way. Mostly, there is far too much to be done in the world around you. There are not so many people who have the same inner strength as for instance Teresa of Calcutta who tirelessly rolled up her sleeves, without letting oneself be paralyzed by circumstances. - This attitude is beautifully illustrated by the following anecdote. Years ago a not too subtle journalist asked her: 'What is the sense of doing something for twenty lepers in a town with two hundred thousand lepers?' Her answer: 'Please be so kind to show me your own twenty lepers!'

Here, everyone knows about Dario Santillan, who with his barely twenty years was beginning to be a shining example in Buenos Aires, in humanity and social energy, who half a year ago during a protest action purposely was killed by an 'accidental' police bullet. Certain circles, possibly rightly so, must have feared that in him a new Che Guevara was about to arise.

These last years, in our youth group of about thirty participants, and in those young people on the fringe of this group, mostly I have felt something of an inner fragility. Quite purposeful, they seek each other's company, loving each other strongly, and they can talk for hours on many subjects. One of them said: 'In my whole school there is nobody with whom I can have a real talk. This is only possible with the other members of our youth group...' Satisfied with little in the way of material resources, they are for instance very willing to be counsellors in children's camps. Now they are preparing 'dinner-shows' in the congregation, with music, song and dance, thus hoping to make enough money at the end of January, 2003, to travel to a Brazilian youth conference. There, the Brazilians will pay everything for their poor brothers from Argentina, Peru and Colombia,

who thus will only have to scrape together their own fares.

Not all of them are interested in spiritual matters. Often social contact is of more importance, but his year there happened to be some among those confirmed who took the initiative for a gospel study group. This already had happened five years ago, as there are such who are interested in spiritual subjects and want to work on them, to do more than would be possible in a regular youth group. As they were interested in life after death, I suggested to work with them on the story of the rich man and poor Lazarus from Luke 16. In the course of our studies, a fifteen year old participant made the following remark. Not so long ago he had been present at the wake for the grandfather of a friend. There he saw that 'a second body rose up out of the body of the deceased'. Nobody in this group found this strange; carefully, this can be discussed in peace and quiet. To none of them it would be a question that the spiritual world exists.

But how difficult is it, in our everyday reality, to lead such opportunities in a good direction!

Martin de Gans  
*Buenos Aires*

## CONFERENCE OF THE AMERICAS, 2003

PLEASE MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

The third Christian Community Conference of the Americas will be held July 26 – August 1, 2003 on the campus of St. Mary's College in Moraga, California, located across the bay from San Francisco, just east of Berkeley. This beautiful campus is easily accessible from both the San Francisco and the Oakland airports by Bay Area Rapid Transit rail service, and will provide a welcoming and comfortable setting for our conference.

**The Way of the West: Rise Out of the Fall / El Camino del Occidente: Renacer en el Ocaso** is the title of the conference, which will bring together

speakers from Brazil, Peru, Canada, the United States, and Germany. (Once again, to our great joy, Rev. Lothar Reubke will join us!) Workshops and artistic offerings are also being planned. A poster, with original artwork by Agamemnon Otero, will be available very soon, and a brochure will follow shortly.

This is the first time the conference will not be held at a Waldorf School facility. Although the East Bay Waldorf School did very generously offer us their site, it was decided, after much investigation, that it would be too difficult to house the conference there. The decision to move it to St. Mary's College will add to everyone's comfort, but it will also add to the costs. In order to keep it affordable for participants, the fee that has been agreed upon (\$375 per person, including room and board) will not cover all the costs of the conference. We also want to be able to offer scholarships, especially to our South American guests. The board of the San Francisco Bay Area congregation has decided to donate \$5,000 to the conference. At the recent meeting in Chicago of delegates from all the North American boards of trustees, the hope was expressed that every congregation might donate approximately \$400 to the conference. Fund raising events would also help to publicize the event among our members and friends.

**All gifts will be most welcome** and should be sent to The Christian Community in San Francisco, 906 Divisadero Street, San Francisco CA 94115 (checks payable to "The Christian Community," annotated "Americas Conference").

Those who have experienced the previous Conferences of the Americas (in Kimberton, PA, 1995, and Lima, Peru, 1999) know how joyous and enlivening it is to meet with our South American friends, who bring such warm-hearted enthusiasm to these events. Let us welcome them with equal warmth and enthusiasm!

Melissa Kay  
*San Francisco*

## A CONFERENCE FOR TEENAGERS

will take place December 27-30 at Fairview Lake YMCA Camp in Newton, NJ. The theme will be announced on a flyer that will be available at the end of November.

For further information, contact Erk Ludwig, 309 West 74th Street, New York, NY 10023, or call him at (212) 877-3577.

## A CONFERENCE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE, 18-28 years,

will take place January 2-4 in the New York-Spring Valley area. Participating priests: Richard Dancey, Carol Kelly and Gisela Wielki. For further information call Carol Kelly, 66 Ackertown Rd, Monsey, NY 10977, phone 845-426-3144.

Please send letters and literary contributions to Jim Hides, P.O. Box 100517, Denver, CO 80250-0517, Phone/Fax (303)282-6424 (E-mail: [jhides@earthlink.net](mailto:jhides@earthlink.net)). Due date for the next issue is February 15, 2003.

At the beginning of our eleventh year, Jim Hides will take over from Arie Boogert, who, with Dale Brunsvold, started this newsletter at the end of 1992. Now Jim and Dale will once more work out of Denver, where it all began.

**On the Web:**

[www.thechristiancommunity.org](http://www.thechristiancommunity.org)