

# The Chicago Seminary News

THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

MOVEMENT FOR RELIGIOUS RENEWAL

SPRING SEMESTER 2010

## *Dear Readers and Friends of the Seminary!*

Is it possible to have a semester with no students physically present in the seminary building?

Yes, we did, and it turned out to be an exciting 'all over the map' winter - spring semester. The content of this newsletter will give you a taste of the variety of events and activities the seminary directors, students and guest students, friends and members were involved in. It may read like a logbook. In February and March, Richard Dancey and Gisela Wielki traveled to take the seminary to congregations, visiting Washington, Hillsdale and San Francisco with Workshops and Open Courses.

In May, Gisela traveled to Stuttgart to attend the ordinations. Hugh Thornton from the US was one of the ordained. Following the ordinations, Gisela and Georg Dreissig, one of the seminary directors of the Stuttgart seminary, conducted an English-speaking Open Week at the Stuttgart seminary, with 18 participants from 8 countries and 4 continents. From there it was off to Dortmund, Germany, for the international Whitsun congress, FutureNow2010. The seminary was represented in all places and on all occasions. There was joy in reconnecting with students from the Chicago seminary now in Stuttgart, and with students from the Stuttgart seminary who came for a semester to Chicago, with seminary directors from all three seminaries scanning at all times the horizon for future students.



From left: Liza Marcato, ordained in 2008 with Hugh Thornton, ordained Ascension 2010 and student Ann Burfeind. Liza and Hugh attended the same public high school outside of Boston and were introduced to anthroposophy at that time by a third friend.

The Stuttgart seminary choir sings during the afternoon celebrations.

## THE SEMINARY VISITS THE WASHINGTON COMMUNITY

May 5-7<sup>th</sup>, a workshop on the theme:  
“Christianity is a Body-Building Religion”.

- Lawrence Smiley, Chapel Hill, NC

Under the guiding presence of Rev. Gisela Wielki, we spent two very full days studying and experiencing body building from different perspectives. This workshop offered by the Chicago Seminary of the Christian Community and graciously hosted by the Washington-Baltimore Congregation of the Christian Community, often felt like an educational marathon, beginning early in the day with the Act of Consecration of Man and ending 12 hours later with a Gospel reading from the altar. Kindly interspersed twice a day were inspired, free flowing movement exercises led by Jeanne Feeney, movement specialist, that complemented and expanded on the topics of the study.

The body and the building of a body were subjects examined from many different points of view. These myriad points of view seemed to rotate around a topic--- sometimes a micro-zooming in, sometimes macrocosmically zooming out, but always moving. What is a body, what has a body, the creation of the human body, the body after the Fall, the body of Jesus of Nazareth, the light of the transfigured body, the Resurrection Body, the body of the future earth, how do we grow into these bodies? were only touched upon the skin of the body of this class.



## FROM WISDOM TO LOVE

- Ann Burfeind, student

During the Winter Trimester at the Seminary in Stuttgart, I did my first year in Chicago, my fellow students and I studied the letters of Paul in the New Testament. Together we read and studied one of the letters written to the early Christian communities and tried to form a clear picture of what it would mean to write and receive a letter of this kind from a man like Paul. What do these letters mean for us today? How can we receive them?

My task was to read the First letter to the Corinthians and to choose a theme that I could present to the group for discussion. In chapter 13 is the Hymn of Love, which is a description of love that is poetic and moving. Love in all its glory is outlined by Paul. My question was; where is this love in our lives, how can we ever hope to share and experience something so mighty and pure?

By looking into how Rudolf Steiner described love I began to form a picture of how this high ideal can be understood in our lives, I saw a way to continue to cultivate a sense of hopefulness that it is possible to comprehend this love of which Paul writes and experiences.

Steiner describes that Christ, the being of love, having made a free decision to unite with humanity, to sacrifice himself so that mankind could continue to develop. The Christ did not need to do this for his own development, but it was a free deed made out of love. This description of love as being completely selfless, having no need to receive anything in return, is mighty. How far is that from our daily experience of love when we truly examine ourselves?

The hopefulness for me comes from the reality that we are always developing when we choose to. Steiner describes the development of humanity having been infused with wisdom in the Lemurian epoch. This wisdom has saturated every aspect of our physical nature. Every morsel of the material world has the reality of this wisdom in it. From the working of our physical bodies, to the delicate design of the leaves, to the wisdom-filled movement of the stars, wisdom is the ground of existence. This can also be called The Father Ground of Existence. We know that that is pretty smart. Nature works well. So, now that the Christ fulfilled the deed on Golgotha we have the possibility to grow towards this love that Paul describes in Chapter 13. We know it now in varying degrees, but the possibility is there that it will grow to be the ground of existence, as

wisdom is today. As sure as we are that the ground is under our feet, so too can we cultivate the knowledge, that love now can grow to become the new ground of existence, supporting us, encouraging us, selflessly giving, helping us to develop. (editor: Ann just finished her second year of priest training, having done her first year in Chicago, and is getting ready for a practicum in a congregation)

## THE SEMINARY VISITS THE HILLSDALE, TACONIC/BERKSHIRE CONGREGATION

Rev. Gisela Wielki, co-director of the Christian Community seminary offered a workshop March 12-14<sup>th</sup> on the theme: **“The Trinity: Light, Life and Love”**

-Margaretha Kress-Hertle, Harlemville, NY

A group of about 25 individuals took part in a full and inspiring two and a half days that began with the Act of Consecration each morning, followed by sessions on the theme, balanced by artistic work interspersed into each day.

The sessions on the theme consisted of stimulating presentations and discussions of Light, Life, Love, and the Trinity. We explored the character and relation of each aspect of the theme as we worked to come to a closer understanding of the essence of these imponderables. The topics were explored with beautiful, flowing, interrelated series of thoughts, or pearls, to ponder on and shape our approach to the theme. The “thesis” was a deeper understanding of these complex and profound realities attained through the different explorations and comparisons.

In the interposed artistic explorations, there were two groups. One explored the qualities of the theme through movement (e.g. acting out different qualities of light or life). The other group explored through the written word, attempting to go out to nature, observe, contemplate and distill an experience of light, life or love into a few concise words which in the reading can awaken in the listener the fullness of the picture portrayed and the parable it represents.

Can we make the picture transparent for what it says to us?

We were all deeply moved and came away with a rich and lustrous chain of pearls, not for adornment, but to spark ever more and deeper insights into parts of the world that do not tend to demand so much attention as we travel our individual paths and work to deepen our relationship to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit - as Three in One, and One in Three. We looked at the trinity of Light, Life and Love as a way to make these abstract concepts more alive - to bring us closer to this profound reality through our very real and tangible living experiences.



## WHY DO PRIESTS GIVE SERMONS?

- Darryl Coonan, student

There is a singular opportunity available in the Act of Consecration of Man for the Priest to communicate with the people in the congregation, as they come with a real willingness to hear a message. They are open to meet with the power of the word to inform; to clarify; to connect to something greater; to reveal; to move. Through a sermon a person can feel met, understood and have hope renewed.

The sermon often takes a theme that comes from the world we live in and connects it to the Christ, or takes a message from the gospel and relates it to our present reality. The priest has a message, a proclamation from Christ, and wants to bring this message into our awareness to be a source of strength in our lives so we can become more fully human. Often the priest makes use of a picture which can open the soul to hear the proclamation. Through a picture there can be an experience that goes beyond mere thinking to a felt emotional experience. The picture leads us to an awareness of something within us

that needs to be changed, and the proclamation points us to the element that can bring about such a change – a deeper relationship to the being of Christ.

In the sermon the priest gives the people a message of hope, that they are not alone, that the Christ is risen and we can approach him.

The part of the person that meets the sermon is their individual “I”, and it is discriminating: it will feel confirmed when met with the truth, with a reality, but it will equally turn away from that which does not have the ring of truth or feels incongruent or inauthentic. The Priest will only reach the other when he has truly worked through the picture he uses and expresses his real authentic inner experience and from there presents a Christ proclamation that offers a source of strength and hope.

When we hear a sermon that really speaks to us it can often seem like we have been reminded of a truth that we once knew but somehow it got forgotten. We are led back to an inner experience of being connected to something beyond ourselves. The priest strives to take the congregation to a connection with the Christ and to experience the prospect of change that such a relationship makes available.

The sermon has the potential to not only bring about a connection to ones “I” and to Christ, but then also to one another. We have shared a universal experience and this can reduce our feelings of being alone. We can grow together in the community of Christians through feeling our common humanity. Each week we are beset with the power of the outer world to obscure our real spiritual nature as we are taken deeply into the material world and we can be left with a sense of isolation from our true selves and also from the people around us. The sacrament and the sermon can soothe our suffering hearts and lift us beyond the daily pressures of life to see a bigger vision, a new perspective. The word of Christ is a living reality and the Priest uses this reality to open human souls to their higher nature and to find within a source of strength for the advancement of themselves and for others. The priest seeks to remind us that the Christ Impulse is within and that Christ is there when we seek him.

(editor: Darryl just finished his second year of priest training in Stuttgart, having done his first year in Chicago, and is getting ready for a practicum in a congregation)



### FOR WALKING WITH CHRIST

A two-day conference, "The Sacraments as a Path: Priesthood and Membership Today," was held in San Francisco March 26 and 27 by Rev. Richard Dancey, visiting from Chicago, and Rev. Oliver Steinrueck.

- Melissa Kay, San Francisco

In every Act of Consecration of Man we pray these words. The conference brought these words, this reality, to life in rich and varied ways. Richard Dancey and Oliver Steinrueck led us into deep contemplations of three themes: “The Human Being as Priest,” “The Sacraments as a Path,” and “Priesthood and Membership Today.”

Drawing on an essay by Rudolf Frieling, Rev. Dancey described human-priestly activity as “bringing the breath of another world” into the natural course of earthly events. The question is: how do we become accessible to the guidance of spiritual beings, and thus bearers of this “breath,” in our time, which is ordained by the spiritual world to be as it is — a time of materialistic darkness and human self-centeredness? Rev. Steinrueck opened his presentation with the observation that the desire to be a worker with the spiritual world is akin to the desire to experience initiation—a desire he believes slumbers in many people today, manifesting initially in a longing to break through to a deeper level of existence than is experienced in normal daily life. It had been asked, how can we experience again and more often the momentary experiences of the spiritual world we have all had? How do we tend this openness to the spiritual world?

These questions, Rev. Dancey said, we do not have to answer, but to live with — to keep asking, in a continuous activity of opening ourselves to the “breath” of the spiritual beings. The first Christians called themselves “followers of the way.” For us today, Rev. Dancey concluded, we are constructing “the way” as we walk it in freedom, with Christ as our helping guide.



## Holy Week Retreat at the seminary: The Living Cross

- Janice Mulder, Winnipeg, Manitoba

I was not sure what to expect as I arrived for the Easter Week Retreat. It took a couple of days to settle into the rhythm of the week. We had an opportunity to meet people from different parts of the country and various walks of life. There were even two of us from Canada. It was wonderful to spend a week with other people who were also searching for a deeper understanding of the Christ Impulse. Each of us had our own experience of the week that we could share with others as we journeyed together.

Richard and Gisela spent the week developing their topics. Each session seemed to bring forward a number of teachings that awakened a new awareness of what Christ really accomplished at Golgotha. I know that it will take time to fully incorporate these into my inner life.

It was wonderful to be able to live at the seminary. There was time for us to share but I was also able to find my own quiet space, which allowed me to

reflect daily on what I had been learning. It was a great opportunity to explore the library, full of Steiner’s books. I also found the books by Emil Bock, which have enriched my understanding of Christianity.

This was my second week at the Seminary and I know that I have found my spiritual home. I would encourage anyone who hears the call (or even a faint whisper) to attend a retreat at the seminary.

## AMERICANS IN STUTTGART

- Darryl Coonan, student

It is astounding to me just how many connections I have with the Christian Community in North America, and how often I think about the Chicago seminary. Since I left Chicago in spring 2009 to continue my studies at the Stuttgart seminary, I have seen Nora Minassian, Richard Dancey, Liza Marcato, Jonah Evans, Ben Black, Marcus Knausenberger and Oliver Steinruck who came to stay at the seminary to meet up with the American students there, on his way to a Lenker’s meeting. Then last summer I spent some wonderful days in Vienna staying with Margit Gratzl from NC, and soon after Margaret Shipman from LA paid us a visit at the seminary (I met both of these women at the Chicago seminary).

I am studying here in my second year together with Ann Burfeind, with whom I previously studied for two semesters at the seminary in Chicago. At the same time Hugh Thornton from Boston was completing his final semester and then going through his ordination at Ascension 2010. I have met and continue to study with other students from the Chicago seminary who have come from countries such as Argentina and Finland.

Gisela Wielki has kept up email contact with us former Chicago students, and one feels her ongoing support and interest, which has been incredibly reassuring. She was here in Stuttgart for the ordinations, Ascension 2010, and afterwards ran an English-speaking open week at the Stuttgart seminary. I met a number of people from North America who attended the ordinations and the open week.

I am the only Australian here at the Stuttgart seminary and often get mistakenly introduced as an American due to my Chicago studies, but this does not unduly concern me as the students and teachers here in Stuttgart seem to be genuinely fascinated and beguiled by America and the people from that part of the world. It is not so bad being

mistaken for an American unless the discussion turns to politics, McDonalds, Starbucks or the collapse of the world banking system! Then I find it best to declare my nationality!

The Chicago seminary was an important part of my journey and I experience how its good work have far reaching effects that not only benefit the North American region but has at the same time enabled a cross-pollination of ideas and impulses from the English speaking world to fructify the work of the Christian Community in Germany. I hope to keep a long connection with what happens there and in the rest of North America.

## “THE CHURCH IS OPEN” – and in Movement!

- Paul Newton, student



As I write, I am in my tenth month as “priest trainee” in the Forest Row congregation, after two semesters at the seminary in Chicago. I spent most of this morning chairing a meeting of the newly-formed fundraising group. The congregation experienced a deficit last year, primarily due to a fall in regular contributions and steps are now being taken both to broaden the base of financial supporters and to hold specific fundraising activities.

A key element that came through in our meeting was the congregation’s relationship with the wider community. If we hold a silent auction in the church foyer will people who don’t come to church here feel comfortable crossing the

threshold of the building? If we have a stall at the village fête what sort of face do we want to show to the world?

Before coming here, I had been prejudiced against The Christian Community in Forest Row. The Christian Community as the quasi-secret society “church of the anthroposophists” — Forest Row, a major center of English anthroposophy, I suspected, would have a congregation tending in that direction. Before I arrived my fears began to subside: Nicholas Wijnberg — one of the two congregational priests and the one I have tended to think of as my boss — told me that the church was kept open during the week by a team of volunteer receptionists. Now that didn’t sound like a secret society! As the community helper I joined that team of receptionists. Of course, most of the time we are not flooded with visitors but they certainly do come — to visit this month’s exhibition; to have some quiet time in the sanctuary; to bring donations of clothes or to peruse the used book stall. Interesting conversations often ensue.

Probably my principle area of work here connects to this openness: publicity. Creating posters for talks, concerts, conferences and festivals; organizing there; helping Nicholas put together the congregational program; getting the program up on the congregation’s website, as well as making sure that all events are included on the forestrow.org website and in the weekly “What’s On in Forest Row”.

One of the questions I have had for Nicholas is: shouldn’t publicity be one of the congregation’s care groups? But what are the care groups, you ask. The diverse spheres of congregational activity (e.g. serving, music, ushering, garden care, development, etc.) are organized into groups with named coordinators and deputy coordinators. The coordinators meet together along with the priests and a representative from the finance group. This is intended to be a central organ of the life of the community. Some groups work better than others. There is still a lot that lands with the priests (or their proxy — me!) that probably shouldn’t. It’s a work in progress.

It’s *all* a work in progress! Our individual relations to the sacraments (explored this year in a series of members’ meetings)... Who will carry the festival celebrations in the congregation? Should the Maundy Thursday Supper be a silent supper next year? What if it didn’t happen at all? ... Will the computer software that I’ve been busy trying out meet the needs of the finance group? ... Someone said to me last week that I must feel that I’ve learned all I need to learn here and be ready to move on. I said that wasn’t the

case. I am certainly ready to go back home for the summer to be with my family and see dear friends again, and I am certainly ready to head to Stuttgart in September to continue with seminary. But I am *so* interested to see how things develop here! And I know that every day here has brought opportunities to learn — about myself (strengths, weaknesses, tendencies); about life with the sacraments; about community building, priest-congregation dynamics, the relation with the wider community (including other churches), and much more. I am so grateful to have been able to spend a year of my life here.

### Ordinations, English speaking Open week at the seminary in Stuttgart, international Whitsun Congress in Dortmund

- Elizabeth Kuriakose, India

Attending the English-speaking Open Week, organized by **The seminaries of The Christian Community – Stuttgart and Chicago**, has brought to me a new meaning of the Ascension/Whitsun festival season this year. It was a multicultural meeting with eighteen participants from Australia, Canada, Chile, Estonia, France, India, Israel, the Philippines and USA in attendance. (See photo) It was organized and coordinated perfectly enough to render an incomparable learning experience to all of us alike.

Before the course started, we had the privilege to attend the ordinations of ten seminarians, who were consecrated to become priests. The large sign of the cross, drawn in front of the one being ordained, circled with the Holy Spirit and the anointing, seemed to say that they knew the full mystery of their Being and the sacrament of the Ordination. It was a moment of ultimate commitment, and the earnestness reflected in their eyes.

This was followed by the Open Week introductory course in English led by **Gisela Wielki, Georg Dreißig and Anand Mandaiker**, all veteran faculty members and

priests. They gave us more insight into our existence than we thought we could have.



It was an experience of self-realization to many of us in the group - encountering the self 'I' and taking time out of chores of life to elevate our thinking to a more supreme purpose. To know one's being as eternal is to know the truth and it is the truth that sets us free. The awareness that we can transform this 'I' as a vessel to connect vertically to the Supreme Being and to deliver horizontally to human beings is priestly for sure. Evoking this thought would also mean becoming aware of the Spirit that works in present times who needs human beings to fulfill this task. When I heard this, I thought of the verse from the letter of Paul to the Romans: *“Christ has brought us into this place of highest privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory. 5:2”* Another word from the ordinations still echoes in the depths of my soul: *Keep always the feeling of CHRIST and do nothing without this feeling.*

Now we should be turning the spotlight to the International **FutureNow2010** conference at Whitsun in Dortmund. This was truly unique. There were people from 41 countries, speaking 27 different languages, coming together in a beautiful harmonious unity in the Christ Being. The welcoming music of the cellists, the impact of the lectures and the multilingual celebration of The Act of Consecration of Man each morning, were powerful and transformative.

The sun shone brightly throughout the conference and our living in the wholeness of the Christ Impulse from May 21<sup>st</sup>-25<sup>th</sup>, 2010. As we carry these impressions and experiences back to our own homes and countries, we can think back and relive these days with **awareness and light.**

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Or current occupant

**"WONDERFUL BEING HERE"**

- Janice Morgante, Canada

Just as we had begun our week at the Stuttgart seminary, twenty of us gathered together in a circle in the classroom that was home base for our studies during the Open Week; this time, rather than to introduce our little international group, we gathered to share our thoughts and reflect on the week just concluded. All but three of us would continue on, this same day, to the International Congress in Dortmund. In the afternoon, Erzoberlenker Vicke von Behr welcomed close to 1,500 individuals from over 40 countries to the congress and shared with us how the Circle of Seven strives to work in harmony with the Being of the Christian Community.

I experienced the warmth of Being in this community as we met one another, both in the seminary and at the congress, celebrating the Act of Consecration of Man each day, striving together in our study groups, participating in activities such as folk dancing (at the congress) and Bothmer gymnastics, eurythmy and

singing (at the seminary); being with one another during meals; sharing each other's destinies for the time we were together and consciously choosing to continue to do so after we had parted. The experience of being with like hearts and like minds touched us all deeply. I can say from my own experience at the congress and at the seminary, it was wonderful being here -there is, indeed, A Wonderful Being here.

Congress visitors at the Chicago seminary-stand.

