

North American Seminary News

THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY—MOVEMENT FOR RELIGIOUS RENEWAL
SPRING NEWSLETTER 2011

Dear Friends of the Seminary!

We have moved and are well into making a home for ourselves in Spring Valley/Chestnut Ridge. After having become a well-established institution in Chicago, we will face the challenge of living “out of a suitcase” and trying to squeeze into an already very limited congregation space. For classes we may well be sitting in the foyer of the church. Eurythmy will definitely require the moving of all church chairs twice a week. Maybe that is why so far a rather young group of students has applied for the Fall of 2011 and for the young life is all about winging it. But with the church also in dire need of more social space and the congregation’s generosity to share the land with us, we have begun conversations with an architect’s group with the intention of building a structure on the grounds that will help the congregation and serve the Seminary. This will be made possible to a certain extent through the sale of the building in Chicago. We will not build any dorm space, since the Threefold Community agreed to rent to us student rooms at Holder House. It has already been heard that some eurythmy students are looking forward to the arrival of the “priesties.”

Many young people, over the course of attending children’s and youth camps and young-adult conferences, form strong connections with The Christian Community. The vocation of priesthood may well have crossed their mind while taking part in a youth or young-adult conference or while working at camp as a counselor, immersed in caring for the “child” they had themselves only recently left behind. Or maybe it happened at a Close-of-Day service, a moment of quiet in candlelight, or while standing under the night sky singing with others:

*As the highest stars all circle full of eternal harmony,
so the course of our lives should follow...*

Some young people need encouragement in words. The thought of exploring the vocation of priesthood can be too daunting. Others need financial aid. Having studied for a bachelor degree they are often left with large student loans and have no longer the means to pursue what truly speaks in their hearts. We would like to help. But to do this we need your support. We would like to see the financial base of the Seminary grow broader and deeper, so it reaches beyond the 150 or so regular donors from across North America. For this we need grassroots help. This newsletter is sent to about 2200 members and friends. It is important for our few major donors to see that the financial base of the Seminary is healthily expanding. We need many more ten- and twenty-dollar donors. With any amount, you can express your wish to support the future of The Christian Com-



"Penny Pot: Re-imagining the Discarded"
by Gisela Wielki

munity worldwide.

We thank you for helping to fill the students' "Penny-Pot."

In this newsletter you will find contributions by a few of the people who have already committed to studying at the Seminary in the Fall of 2011 or who, having already completed a training and even worked in a profession, realized that more is asked for, that something else still needs to be addressed in the world and in themselves.

—*Gisela Wielki, Director*

I Am Preparing for Battle

My name is Abigail Dancey and I have grown up in The Christian Community. I grew up going to Christian Community Camp. I grew up with Christian Community festivals and celebrations. I grew up surrounded by conferences and synods filled with Christian Community priests. I have had a childhood in The Christian Community. Now I am an adult, and I am steeped in something I didn't come to on my own. I want to come to The Christian Community and its spirituality on my own. It sleeps and works in me but I don't even see it! I want to see it! I am equipped with a shield and sword that are hovering at the tips of my fingers. The tips of my fingers buzz with the anticipation of grabbing hold. I am ready and unready for the weight of this armor. I don't know what I will use it for—but I know it's there and I know that it's mine. I also know that using violent imagery in my reasons for attending the Seminary is somewhat shocking, but there are ways in which I really do feel like I am preparing for battle.



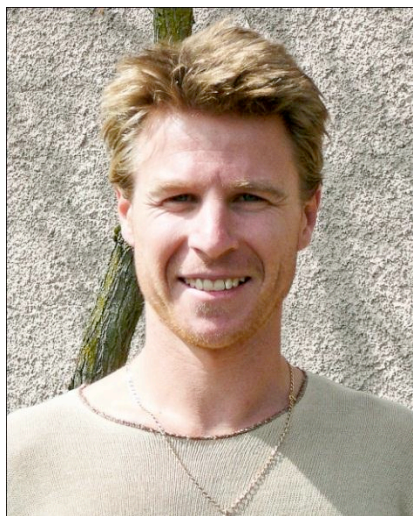
I know that most of my reasons for going to the Seminary all stand in place of one that I cannot yet pronounce. I am embarrassed in front of the immensity of the bigger reason. I still cower in front of my relationship to the spiritual world. And sometimes I even explain my decision to go to the first year of the Seminary as something more practical. But I

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don't want a practical training. I don't want to learn how to make my physical life easier. I want to learn how to make my spiritual life harder. I want to challenge the things that I feel ready and unready for. Now. Somehow, I can't do this on my own. So I am going to the Seminary in the Fall.

—Abigail Dancey, United States

The Art of Remembering



At the tender age of 32 I have set off on a journey, a journey home. It is time. The seeds for this journey were planted by an impulse for inner renewal, some five years ago. I have found that impulses from the spirit world can take some time to manifest into external events, into form, to “catch up.” After running a chiropractic business in Sydney, Australia, I noticed that most of the people presenting at my clinic were not in need of physical remedy, but rather were in need of some sort of remedy for the soul. This raised the critical question, “Is there more to the story of being human?” I recognized that without a proper understanding of ourselves, or development of our inner faculties, our own relation with, and purpose in, the greater world suffers greatly. Thus a breakdown with many manifestations. I left chiropractic to enter the unknown, to understand and to develop. So off I waltzed into the world of plants, breathing in and out with their seasonal cycles, planting and weeding with a “bush regeneration” team. After some time the workings of an art-form of eurythmy happened to enter into a conversation. Intrigued, yes. Curious, you bet! I volunteered at my local Waldorf School and soon found a form that had been given life through the spirit, through an understanding of the world and our place in it. For me, it was

*“... I chose to act on the renewed spiritual impulse of
The Christian Community.”*

an act of remembering. Now the question arose of how I could confirm the reality of this form for myself. Could this form survive questions and new energy? For this, I qualified as a Steiner teacher soon after, in 2008, and worked both casually and full-time as a Class Teacher until I had confirmed the path of Anthroposophy in my personal and professional life. This “confirmation” for me came through the fact that Anthroposophy asked the questions, and asked of me to take an active role in revealing the answers. So now comes a question of where am I needed socially, and what is in me that enables me to fulfill that role. After spending summer in the Central-Australian desert town of Alice Springs, surrounded by indigenous culture, and the might of eternity in

both space and time, I chose to act on the renewed spiritual impulse of The Christian Community. Thus this impulse prepares me to take the first steps into the form of religious renewal. Through further developing my own inner connection, especially with Christ, I can hopefully be offered to accept a supportive, educative spiritual role in the wider community. Whatever comes on this path of education in the Seminary of The Christian Community in New York, it will be met with great pleasure and reverence, for this unknown is actually familiar. It is my path home.

“...this unknown is actually familiar. It is my path home.”

I have just arrived in Stuttgart, the growing point of The Christian Community to learn the German language and their way of thinking. I have been motivated by the youth who have embarked on a journey in priest training here. I feel the energy and willingness of these individuals to bring the gifts of the spiritual world into the present and future, and look forward to being part of a similar vibe in the Seminary this September.

Every now and then a “youthful voice” asks questions of itself and of the social form in which it lives. Many questions arise with this consciousness, some are asked for clarification, others to test the form’s adaptability to change. I feel that within The Christian Community’s movement for religious renewal, both the individual and the collective ask these questions. And in this community I see the willingness to step into the unknown, on an open-ended road, for answers.

Approaching the unknown, in freedom, this is what makes my embarkation so essential.

—Ben Horsington, Australia

DONATIONS ARE VERY WELCOME!

Please make your check payable to “Seminary of The Christian Community” and mail it to the address printed on the last page.

Beyond This Circle



Many of my 26 years have been spent in Maryland, in the house my father built. The roots in our community here, as well as the adventures I've had beyond this circle, have played a determining role in my decision to attend The Christian Community Seminary. My journey through the Washington Waldorf School, Kenyon College and study abroad in Santiago, Chile, prepared me for my life's biggest challenge (so far): living and working in Santiago, where I supported myself by leading wine tours outside of the city and teaching English in both a Waldorf high school and multiple businesses.

Two and a half years ago I began my journey back to the U.S. and to The Christian Community. After living in Chile for two years, although I did not know it at the time, I returned to Maryland on a specific quest. I was in search of community. My journey so far had led to encounters with a constellation of individuals; I yearned for a tapestry of colleagues woven together by work. Since that time, I have been working with the Youth Group of The Christian Community here, an experience that has confirmed my hopes: this is a community of colleagues. The Christian Community Seminary is where I want and need to learn. Together—priests, students and community—I hope to work with intention this coming Fall.

—Emma Heirman, United States

Apology—Sorry, we rely on the mailing lists provided by each congregation and do not currently have a way of cross-referencing these lists. If you receive more than one copy, you may be able to pass one on to another interested person. Thank you!

Whether I Would Do It or Not

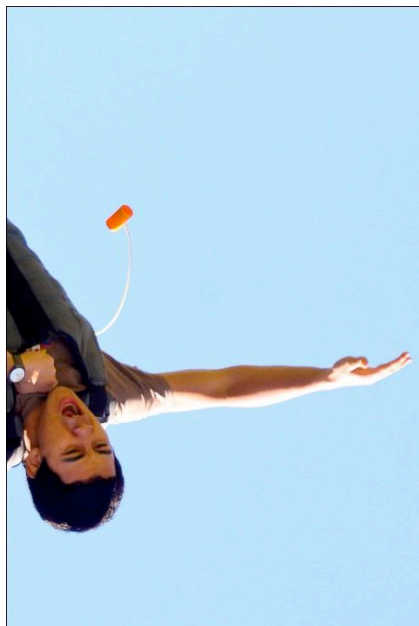
[Editor's Note: Last year Paolo Belmonte took part in an introductory English-speaking week at the seminary in Stuttgart, co-sponsored by the North American seminary. He was also one of first three young people confirmed in the Philippines in 2005.]

When I traveled with my family from the Philippines to New Zealand, I jumped at the opportunity to visit Queenstown, the most prominent adventure-sports hotspot in New Zealand. One thing immediately came into mind: bungee jumping. Bungee jumping has its origin in local New Zealand culture, and Queenstown is the birthplace of commercial bungee. I had never done anything like it before, mostly due to the following fact: I am deathly afraid of heights. The world tilts in the direction where there is a possibility of falling, my knees become weak, and I do not feel to be at my best. When I was fifteen, I could only enjoy the Eiffel Tower from the ground. By the time I had gotten to the first floor, I was no longer enjoying it. I declined to go to the top. However, that was then, this is now, and bungee jumping seemed like the perfect activity to symbolize outgrowing my youth and all its accompanying fears in anticipation of my upcoming 21st birthday. So I booked a jump on the highest bungee in New Zealand: a platform suspended by wires in the middle of the Nevis Bluffs. This could be the only time in my life I would ever go bungee jumping, I reasoned to myself, so why do a 43-meter bungee when I could do a 134-meter bungee instead?

My family was dumbfounded. No one expected that I, with my well-

“What if I died, and my mission on Earth was left undone?”

known fear of heights, would voluntarily choose to undertake such a tribulation. That was precisely why I wanted to do it. I wanted to see if I could bring myself to do something I found utterly terrifying through sheer force of will. It felt good thinking about it. However, these pleasant thoughts went away the night before the jump. Suddenly, I was aware of my own mortality. What if I died, and my mission on Earth was left undone? Was it not incredibly selfish of me to risk my life for the sake of overcoming a childhood fear simply to prove to myself that I could do it? I thought of many other clever objections that sought to dissuade me from the task I had set before me, but they faded into obscurity after I asked myself the question that I



have tried to make central in my life: What is my karma asking of me? Then, upon further reflection, I decided that all the signs were telling me that I should do it, and I would be foolish to surrender in the face of this challenge. I realized that if I chose not to do the jump after already having come to a definite decision to do it, I would deeply regret it. I ended the night with Adam Bittleston's prayer "Against Fear," and I would repeat the first two lines in my head countless times on the day of the jump.

When I woke up the following morning, I no longer harbored any doubt as to whether I would do it or not. I knew that I had set my resolve strongly enough that the deed itself would no longer be in question. A lean, tough-looking middle-aged man with white hair and biceps offered me words of encouragement. It was his turn before mine and I watched him jump like a professional. Eventually one of the jump supervisors called my name, and he harnessed me to the bungee cord. I was given a few safety reminders and I got up to get into the jump position. Suddenly I saw the drop as if I was seeing it for the first time, and my fear smashed into me like an angry hurri-

"I realized I couldn't look down and simultaneously remain sane."

cane. It is funny how a number is only a number on the Internet, but in person, there is a considerable difference between 43 meters and 134 meters. The ground never looked farther away.

"Hold on," I told the jump supervisor. I closed my eyes and inwardly crossed myself. "The Father God be in me, the Son God create in me, the Spirit God enlighten me."

"You praying?" asked the supervisor. "You better," he said, "only He can save you now."

I declined to speak further and inched my way to the edge. The view was sickening. I realized I couldn't look down and simultaneously remain sane, so I kept my eyes fixed on the horizon. It was a beautiful day, and the sun was out. My knees were shaking. I thought that standing on the very edge, waiting to jump, was the worst part of the whole experience. I jumped as soon as I heard the go signal. I was wrong! Falling was the worst part! I was finally experiencing what I

"I was wrong! Falling was the worst part!"

had been so fearful of my entire life. I heard myself screaming, then I nearly blacked out from the terror but managed to stay conscious, then I became aware of the feeling of being flattened by the air as I fell through it. I screamed until I had no more breath in my lungs, then I inhaled and screamed some more. Only after I came to the end of the bungee cord could I stop screaming. I bounced around for a while as my eyes watered and I felt the eeriest sense of detachment, and, as I was pulled back up to the platform, I admired the beauty of the plants that grew in the rocky face of the Nevis Bluffs.

Where are the challenges that come to meet us in our everyday lives? Sometimes they can be far more subtle than a bungee jump, but that takes nothing away from their importance. Big events demand attention, but what about the innumerable smaller trials that prefer to creep unnoticed? If I worked on my habits of thought, my idiosyncrasies of character, with the same dedication I devoted to my bungee jump, how much more would I be strengthened? Life presents me with numerous opportunities to polish away my imperfections on a daily basis if I only keep my eyes open and my mind aware as opposed to letting myself drift from experience to experience without any inner effort on my part. I am beginning to grasp that no moment is without meaning, no event without its significance, provided I am awake enough to perceive it. Such things are easier said than done, and I can do nothing more than hold it as an ideal and strive upwards to reach it as far as my puny human will permits. I can come closer to this ideal by planting, to the extent that I am capable, only pure and worthy thoughts, feelings, and resolves in the ground of my soul and tending to their growth and development as diligently as a biodynamic farmer, that they may bear fruit in the times to come. May I never neglect to eliminate the weed.

—Paolo Belmonte, Philippines

Light, Life, Love and the Trinity

Our Chapel Hill, North Carolina, affiliate is in its second decade as a pioneering congregation (the altar stored in five pieces in someone's basement; numerous bins of the sacred and secular patiently transported, unpacked and repacked every other month; the purple backdrop painstakingly suspended from a twenty-foot ceiling, the vestry assembled in a tiny kitchen). Many of us have had the wonderful opportunity to travel to the seminary in Chicago for a semester or even a week-long open course, but to have the newly relocated North American Seminary of The Christian Community come to us in the form of one of its directors, Rev. Gisela Wielki, was truly an honor and a joy!

“Light, Life, Love and the Trinity” was our topic for a Palm Sunday weekend workshop, a subject we explored in five lectures over two days, along with the artistic work of discovering light and dark through charcoal drawing and outdoor observations of trees (the first led by our member artists Carol Brick and Martha Kelder, the second by biology professor Bruce Kirchoff).

Little did we know when we began planning the workshop months ago how pertinent both the theme and our artistic work would be on that Saturday, April 16. While we were fortunate to experience an ever-changing array of cloud and shadow, torrential rain and bursting sun, thirty miles away a series of fatal and destructive tornadoes, originating earlier that week in the Midwest, tore through North Carolina on their way to the coast. It was moving to hold this tragedy in our thoughts during Sunday's Act of Consecration of Man, with the altar and vestments in black, hearing the somber yet hopeful words of the Passiontide epistle. To experience the service for Passiontide was yet another gift of the weekend, as our congregation only rarely gets to take in the words and colors of the yearly festivals.

Although Gisela suggested this short piece not be a summary of her talks, one must mention the breadth and depth and warmth of her five presentations and our discussions. Exploring the many aspects of threefoldness or trinity in *Light, Life and Love*, we looked, among other things, at aspects of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; thinking, feeling and willing; seeing, walking and becoming; transfiguration, transformation, transubstantiation. We were left with the task that is humanity's calling after Golgotha, to find the inner light of Christ in our hearts which will both transform the way we think and help lift the realm of earth and matter into the realm of the spirit.

—*Linda Finigan*

Open Courses and Week-Long Retreats—Fall 2011

Oct. 3–7, 9:30 am to 10:45 am

Christ and the Earth

The earth is a living organism, with soul moods, and even a self, all of which are undergoing a fundamental change since the Mystery of Golgotha. —*Rev. Daniel Hafner*

Oct. 17–21, 9:30 am to 10:45 am

Apostles of the Living Light: Paul—Mani—Rembrandt

With themes of reconciliation between light and darkness, good and evil, of serving and transforming. —*Rev. Gisela Wielki*

Oct. 31–Nov. 4

To be announced

Nov. 7–11, 9:30 am to 10:45 am

Christology

—*Rev. Erk Ludwig*

Nov. 14–Nov. 18, 7:30 pm to 8:45 pm

Traces of the Ancient Mysteries in Modern Life

The theme of this course will be the relationship between the ancient mysteries and spiritual experiences in our time, emphasizing the mystery motifs in modern life.—*Rev. Bastiaan Baan, The Netherlands*

Nov. 28 – Dec. 2, 9:30 am to 10:45 am

The Gospel According to John

This book of initiation is given to us to connect us with its Source, which is at the same time the source of esoteric Christianity. —*Rev. Daniel Hafner*

Cost:

Courses only, five sessions, suggested: \$50

Week-long retreats, with participation in Seminary life, includes all classes and breakfast (but not housing): \$200

For more information, the daily schedule, housing and to register, please contact: Rev. Gisela Wielki at the Seminary.



**15 Margetts Road
Chestnut Ridge, NY 10952
Telephone: 212-877-0208
Cell Phone: 773-472-7041
Email: info@christiancommunityseminary.org
www.christiancommunityseminary.org**