



## North American Seminary Newsletter Fall 2013

### **Tabula Rasa** —*Bastiaan Baan, Seminary Director*

The expression “Tabula Rasa” is used for a situation in which nothing is decided and everything is left open: a blank page of destiny.

The Seminary came into this situation when during the summer our two students left for their practicum in England and Germany, and when there appeared no new students. In such a case one either has to stop an initiative or begin with a blank page of unknown, uncertain possibilities.

In close contact with Gisela Wielki, who stepped back from her tasks as a Seminary Director, I chose to go into unexplored areas. Instead of the regular, daily work with the students that was done in the last semester, there began an irregular life of travelling through North America, visiting several congregations with lectures, conferences and orientation courses. This new situation brought me to places where I have never been before, giving the opportunity to get to know congregations in North America. During this work the students for next year appeared one by one, so that at this moment there are enough applications to begin September 2014 with a new semester.

To be honest, during these travels sometimes I had the image of being IN the eye of the needle instead of going THROUGH it – not knowing what the future would bring. But the result is that there appeared a new, blank page in the history of our Seminary, where the story goes on!

After Christmas there will be more courses, lectures and journeys to new places – according to the principle: If Mohammed does not get to the mountain, then the mountain will get to Mohammed.



*Open Course:  
“Seeing Water with  
New Eyes”*

## **Forward Return**—*Gisela Wielki*

As many of you already know, this past September I handed over the oar—or is it a shepherd's staff?—to my colleague Bastiaan Baan. He is by now well acquainted with the form and content of the seminary and its life and has already found himself left hanging by some bureaucratic obstacle or facing the challenge of seeing potential students evaporate into thin air. But, as we have experienced since our inception, obstacles are there simply to be overcome.

Richard Dancey, Erk Ludwig by long-distance, and I began with our first students in Chicago in the fall of 2003. These were brave pioneers: an American living in Norway, a stateside American, and an Australian. Oh, we were all so idealistic and full of goodwill, so ready to pull off this challenge placed into our hands by the gods and supported by donors who had the courage to believe, already in 2001/2002, in the yet-unseen. Since then, some five hundred individuals have contributed financially at least once, and some have become regular donors. Fortunately, over the years a few of these donations have been substantial, and a couple of them have come annually. When you read this, if you have never yet donated, would you please consider becoming one of the next five hundred new donors?

In the course of the past ten years, more than fifty students have entered the door to the seminary and stayed for a longer or shorter period. Eight have been ordained, five of whom now work in North America, and two more are on their way. The participation of every individual who has ever studied at the seminary, even if only in a one-week Open Course, has placed a building block in its strengthening foundation. And that number is large. We are well aware of this contribution. We are also always glad when we hear from former students just how rich and valuable their time at the seminary was.

For now I have moved to take up again what I would call the hands-on work of the priest, by serving the congregation in New York City. Erk Ludwig has retired and moved to San Francisco. With my well-worn shoes I have stepped onto his footprints into what feels like another life. Because I worked in this congregation from 1972 to 2002, I appreciate this forward return, which gives me a renewed opportunity to accompany individuals from before the cradle to beyond the grave.

I also appreciate having gotten to know so many of you, if not by face, than at least by name every time a seminary newsletter went into the mail. It has been a most valuable privilege and learning experience to serve as seminary director and to live so immediately with the growing points of the Christian Community in North America and in the world.

## Listening to What Wants to be Heard —Sophia Averbuj

It was recently brought to my attention that ten years have passed between now and the day that the first three seminarians were welcomed to the Chicago Seminary. I was one of those privileged three and my memories of the four months I attended are fond: much warmth and wisdom to say the least. We came from Seattle, Norway and Australia (I am the Aussie, known then as Sophia Pan). It was before a seminary building had been purchased and I still think inviting the community to the evening “main course” at the church was a stroke of genius: so inclusive!

While attending the Seminary was a life-changing event that brought much personal healing and a positive change of my “world view.” Life of course moves on for those who do not get ordained. For me, my destiny brought me a little daughter to take care of who is now two and a half. Now, in the mundane routine of caring for a small child I feel the same awe in the small details of my family life that I felt before the altar. I used to joke that the changing table was now my altar! It is a significant part of my biography that I spent so many years nurturing the question of priesthood. I continued my seminary studies in Stuttgart a couple of years after being in Chicago with a break in between during which I was married to Pablo Averbuj. I do not in any way regret the process, difficult though it was. In the end, I had to choose between my marriage, health and going further and it was clear to me that trying to support a church community at the expense of a community of marriage was like trying to learn how to run before you have learned to walk. The words “Mummy and Daddy” remind me that I made the right decision!

As an Aussie now living in Stuttgart, working part-time from home and being a full-time mum, I am very grateful for my membership to The Christian Community and for the privilege of “delving deeper” into the unlimited wisdom of every aspect, that the Seminaries offer. I still get to attend the Act of Consecration regularly and can't imagine living without it. Each day, I try to bring what I learnt into a practical application so that it doesn't just remain theory in my life. My hope is that Emma receives the benefits! I also look forward to the Children's Service in a couple of years.

Ten years ago in Chicago: words and images I still remember that describe how I felt: the winds (of destiny) blowing us together from all over; a caterpillar dissolving in its cocoon in order that something completely new can emerge; being kneaded in God's hands like bread. . . Ten years later in Stuttgart: a child unfolds before my eyes and I serve her development. Such a difference and yet the same principles: metamorphosis, listening to what wants to be heard, love and laughter, ritual and learning.



I send you all a warm Aussie greeting from Stuttgart and wish you all much happiness.

*From left to right: Sophia Pan-Averbuj, Asharaine Machala, Matthew Mazzoli*

## **Working in/on Community** —Emma Heirman

As a child, I had the privilege of growing up in the Christian Community. Although Washington, D.C., was an affiliate community at that time and we did not have services every week, I still felt the consistency of community life and sensed I was a part of it. For my first and second year at the Seminary I was lucky enough to be connected to the Spring Valley congregation. This was, however, an intense period of study so I did not get very involved with community work in the life of the congregation. Now I find myself four months into my internship in Überlingen, Germany, where I have the opportunity to work in the community every day and discover the ins and outs of the many layers and circles that move and work.

The community here in Überlingen is one of the larger ones in the Christian Community and it rests within a wider community filled with anthroposophical initiatives, including Waldorf schools, Camphills and biodynamic farms. In the midst of all of this, I am assisting wherever I can in the community, helping prepare festivals, sacraments, and meetings and I am observing Religious Instruction and Confirmation Classes, and occasionally teaching. I am like a sponge, absorbing as much as possible, trying to figure out the how, the why, the who, and the when, all the while doing my best to learn German.

I feel very lucky to be doing my internship in Überlingen not only because it is so beautiful here – it is in very southern Germany right on Lake Constance – but also because of the events in this particular year in the community. In September, one of the priests working here was sent to Paris to take up his work in the Christian Community there, and another priest came to take his place. Witnessing this transition has been a special opportunity for me to see how the priests lay the foundation for their working relationship and also how the community members respond and recognize the saying goodbye to one priest and welcoming another. This year also marks the 33<sup>rd</sup> year of the church, and it will be celebrated in April with the installation of a new organ, made by a community member. Throughout the course of the year, people are welcome to go the organ-builder's studio and watch the process.

My internship so far has also been a very active inward journey. The questions I am carrying are still deeply personal, but they have also found a much wider context. The question of “where am I needed and what are my own impulses?” remains strong throughout, but it is now richly colored by other questions that are now rising to the surface:

*What do we mean when we say “community”? What is community?*

*Do we still need priests? Why?*

*Do we pray in a specific language? If so, how does this impact our life?*

I will continue my work here in Überlingen until June 2014 and although I am sometimes lost in the German language and culture, I am grateful for the care and attention of so many people across the globe, and especially for the Stuttgart seminary leadership and students who have taken me under their wing and for the North American Seminary in Spring Valley, which continues to support me and remains my long-distance home.

## Stepping Out —Lisa Hildreth

It was late September. Autumn was arriving in New England and the Saturday came when for the past two years I have said my goodbyes to my family and began my Seminary studies. But this time it was different. This year I was packing my bags to fly to England and begin my third year of training with an Internship at the Christian Community Church in Forest Row. I was “stepping out” -- leaving the womb of the Seminary and exploring in the world.

Here in Forest Row, I awake in my room in Quince Cottage and walk to the church to begin the day with the Act of Consecration of Man. Study groups, singing, care of the church, serving, observing the priests, and even eurythmy classes are all part of the weekly rhythm.

The first weekend in October, I had the opportunity to accompany the Lenker of Great Britain, Tom Ravetz, to two Camphill Villages in Yorkshire. You can learn a lot about the priesthood and each other when you go on a journey with a priest and spend ten hours together in the car!

When we arrived at The Croft Camphill, I helped one of the co-workers set up the altar. The space we were using was a beautiful old stone building, and with the white-washed walls rising up to the peak above the altar we created, it was easy to imagine yourself in a quaint village chapel. We had a Saturday morning service here, before traveling on.



*Lisa Hildreth in England*

The second community we visited, Botton Village, is the first and the largest of the Camphills. It has its own church in the center of the settlement, a church much larger than any I have experienced in the USA. Botton is nestled in a valley of the Yorkshire Moors. The Moors are a unique landscape -- dramatic hills covered with heather, bracken (ferns), and grass. Sheep from many different farms graze freely on the moors and one must watch for them on the roadways. It must be quite a job to sort them all out on shearing day.

In Botton, I told the story for the children's Michaelmas celebration. Tom gave a talk to the community that night and of course there was the Act of Consecration of Man on Sunday morning. It was beautiful to see how what Tom offered as a priest could meet the needs of both the villagers and the co-workers; the villagers who live in a vivid soul world and retain a childlike innocence, and the co-workers who had not only soul but "I" and intellectual needs as well.

So far, my adventure of “stepping out” has been fruitful. I look forward to all that the priests here can share with me during my time in the UK.

## **Gestures of Openness** —*Lisa Hildreth*

How do you help people “find” the Christian Community? One way is by inviting the outside world into your church building. Here in Forest Row, England, where I am engaged in my practicum, I am experiencing this thought in action.

Interested in art? Come see the current art exhibition at the church. Interested in music or movement? Come see a concert or join one of the choir groups or eurythmy classes. Parent and child classes are offered at the church, as well as children’s festivals and monthly parenting afternoons, all designed to nourish the family soul.

There are six services a week, and the many study groups, talks, and conferences are widely advertised in the village and surrounding areas. The church is also involved in larger community events, such as a three-day music festival, locally sponsored walks, and joint conferences.

With all these events happening, the church is open almost every day. Each day smiling volunteers welcome guests into the space, guests who may awaken to what is truly being offered here. Open hearts and open doors -- gestures of openness towards a world that is seeking for more.



*The church in Forest Row, England*

## The Rooftop: Israel lends some perspective —Emma Heirman

When the Seminary Leadership suggested I go to Überlingen, Germany for my internship, I never expected it to include the opportunity to travel to Israel. It was a welcome surprise to learn that my mentor, Ilse Wellershoff-Shuur, one of the priests working in Überlingen, has strong connections to people in Israel. She has been particularly connected to Kibbutz Harduf for over twenty years, and travels there at least once a year with youth groups or adult study groups. And so it was that on August 22, 2013, only six weeks after I began my internship, I found myself on a plane with eighteen young people, mostly from Germany, headed to Israel.



*Emma Heirman with workers in Harduf*

We visited Israel for about two and a half weeks, where we lived and camped in the forest by Harduf, visited Jerusalem and then camped in the desert. The first week and a half was spent mostly in the forest in a place called Sha'ar laAdam-Bab l'lillinsan, a meeting grounds and now living place for people wishing to come together in community to work on peace-building through diverse faiths. While we were there, we helped to build a permanent structure for cooking, meeting and sleeping, while at the same time several of our young people were participating in a play production. The play was called the Middle East Side Story, an adaptation of *West Side Story* that deftly wove together three casts and three languages. The play was performed in Arabic, Hebrew and German on an outdoor stage right there in Sha'ar laAdam-Bab l'lillinsan for the entire community. It was the culmination of our time there, and together with cooking, eating, playing and even a bit of disagreeing, we were well on our way to becoming a group by the time we packed up our camp and boarded the bus for Jerusalem.

When we reached Jerusalem, the bus was not allowed to enter the walls of the Old City, so we took our suitcases and backpacks in hand and began our walk to our hostel on the Via Dolorosa in the Muslim Quarter. Our path took us through the bazaar, which is a maze of vendors selling everything from backgammon sets to falafel. We were surrounded by the brilliant colors of scarves and carpets, the smell of grilled meats and honey-sweet baklava and, of course, people. Snippets of several different languages hummed in my ears as I pushed my way down the street. All my senses were stimulated at once and staying together was not easy. Losing the group could happen in an instant, but the constant rattle of suitcase wheels on cobblestones could help us find each other again.

When we arrived at our hostel, we discovered it too was a maze; it required us to go up and down, through several halls and doors until we found our rooms. Once we were settled, there was only one thing to do next: go out on the roof. Unlike on the city streets down below where we could only see what was right in front of us and the sky was only visible by stopping and looking straight up, here we could simply look out and see Jerusalem's horizon, the tops of buildings touching the sky. Hills wrap almost all the way around Jerusalem, their continuity broken only by a view of the desert, which appears almost as a mirage. This rooftop was where we stood on our last morning in Jerusalem to watch the sunrise. By 5:30 am the sky was already brightening and we could see the horizon punctuated by church steeples, bell towers, and domes, each iconic according to the faith it stood for. With the light came colors, lavenders that shifted to pinks until rays of orange and gold broke through, until finally the sun appeared over the Mount of Olives, contrasted by the black silhouettes of olive trees. As we faced the sun, the buildings behind us began to gleam, the true gold of a rising sun, before the day turned to white heat.

After such an experience, I could not help but think about how every day we find ourselves taken in through our senses, becoming intimately acquainted with the world around us. We meet our fellow human beings and tread a path over the earth. Our perspective, however, comes through distance. We need a vantage point, like a rooftop, where we can look out and see the whole that the pieces make and discover where we are in relation to our surroundings. Jerusalem was filled with so much, but it is this picture that I most strongly carry with me. The rooftop asks me to find the place in me where I can see the horizon, the place where heaven and earth meet. And it tells me: don't be fooled into thinking that you are there alone. There are others there with you, and rather than looking at each other, together you face the same direction and look out. Standing on the rooftop in Jerusalem, we found an altar and a moment together to turn towards it.

*Emma with friends at the Dead Sea*





*Emma with friends at Harduf*

Our time in Israel ended with two days in the Negev desert. We watched the sun rise and set over a big canyon and again over the Dead Sea. We hiked up white, rocky mountains, slippery with sand, and we swam in a green algae-filled spring. We floated on the Dead Sea, our bodies stinging from the salt, and we slept

out under the stars. After two weeks coming to know this beautiful land filled with so much history and conflict, we breathed out. The desert was open, earth that was so intensely touched by the skies above it that the sun and the stars were everywhere; we did not have to look up to see them, they were all around, in every stone and every piece of sand.

## **The Priest Orientation Weekend in Sacramento: One participant's reflections** —Lelan Harris

On the Saturday of our 3-day Priest Orientation weekend at the Sacramento Christian Community in November, we began the morning with the Act of Consecration of Man. Sitting reflectively in the pew, it dawned on me that our whole-being engagement in sacramental service may contribute to the gradual fulfillment of 1 Peter 2:4-9 and other biblical passages that describe the development of a "priesthood of all believers":

*As you come to him, the living Stone ... you also, like living stones, are being built into a temple of the spirit to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ .... For you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.*

My reflections on the sacrament and scripture mingled with musings:

*"Is it possible that many of us ... all of us? ... are already becoming priests of some kind?"*

*"What then is the difference between this transformation into the "priesthood of all believers" and the transformation that occurs through seminary education and the sacrament of ordination?"*

As the priest orientation weekend continued, the Reverends Bastiaan Baan, Sanford Miller, and Cindy Hinder helped us pay attention to these and many other questions that surfaced in the hearts and minds of the over 30 participants who experienced either all or part of the weekend conference.

Priests serve God with their lives by offering up sacraments on behalf of, and for the sake of, humanity. As servant leaders they do this not only in the "communities whose members feel the Christ within themselves," but also with the community: "Let us worthily fulfill the Act of Consecration of Man ...."

Beyond our participation with the priests in the sacraments, those of us who are not (yet?!) ordained have other crucial roles to fulfill within our congregations. From offering fellowship to new visitors and "old" members alike ... to serving in the ministries of youth work, festival life, board membership, building maintenance, Act of Consecration server ... to contributing potluck dishes, meals for the grieving and ill, time in the garden, handmade arts and crafts for fundraisers ... to investing our finances, energy, resources, wisdom, and love in so many other creative ways.

In this way our lives may become the "living sacraments" that transform our lives and our world, and form the context for becoming capable of discerning God's will (Romans 12:1-2). Questions about God's will – about human destiny and freedom – bring us back to the central question held by many of us participating in the Priest Orientation weekend: "Am I called to become a priest?"

All manner of deterrents generally present themselves to consciousness as soon as this question is asked. Knowing this to be the case, an entire session was devoted to identifying hindrances along the path toward ordination. Upon reflection, it seems that our congregations can help overcome most obstacles.

First, we may begin by affirming the potential for priesthood in both our youth and those in middle years. Even if we look only as far as the number of affiliate congregations that desire to grow, it is clear that we need more priests. Who in our congregations are already showing evidence of a possible calling to ordination?

Second, we need to offer meaningful and tangible encouragement – including financial support – to those who make the commitment to pursue seminary education.

I am grateful for the opportunity to have participated in the Priest Orientation weekend. I highly recommend it to everyone who has an interest in the health and growth of the Christian Community.

## **“The Future of the Earth”:**

### **A lecture cycle in Spring Valley** —*Abigail Dancey*

As a seminary student two years ago, I became accustomed to the rhythm of weekly courses. The intensity of spending a whole week with a specific theme allowed me to live in a topic fully and then to let it go. The current form of the seminary program, as well as my new relationship to it, has created a dramatic change in my own intake of the content that I learn. Most recently, Bastiaan has been giving a series of lectures over the course of three months entitled “The future of the Earth” every other Tuesday night. Given the wide spacing between lectures, I have enough time to fully digest and transform the content of the last lecture before I receive any new information. As a result I can observe the transformation of content within myself more closely. I go through a forgetting that then becomes reawakened knowledge in two weeks time. But what is reawakened from previous lectures is heavily influenced by the new form that it's reappearing in. The latest lecture was centered around the theme, “Newest developments and disturbing ideas regarding the future of the earth.” It is the theme that is most present for me, although it's been made potent by what has come before. The preceding four lectures looked at the phenomena of our present time, and then what mythology, anthroposophy, and the Apocalypse all have to say about the future of the earth.

We are not in a position to deal with the future of the earth lightly. Bastiaan's lecture cycle does very little lightly. He has taken up the subject in a thorough and unflinching manner that can leave the audience member somewhat breathless. With the courage to look at the world as it is and not how he wishes it was, Bastiaan presents his content with trust in the face of the disasters he speaks of. Fear of the unknown is our typical relationship to the future in our everyday lives. Fear has a tendency to rule when we feel it and as a result it's easy to avoid envisioning what's to come. However, there is a way to clearly and calmly look at the future, both collectively and individually. Through a rigorous evaluation of the present situation, and a look at the pictures of the future that the past has given us, we can approach a fuller perspective on how to lead our own lives out of foresight and knowledge. I believe that this is the process that Bastiaan has been leading us through.

We are at a particularly bleak point within the cycle. With the inevitability of climate crisis, the reality of the 2008 financial crisis, and terrorism on our doorsteps, the future of the earth looks differently than it did twenty years ago. Admitting the realities in the world asks for a different type of working in the world. We can no longer follow our own paths toward personal happiness and security. In a world with no security, with no ground underneath our feet, we have to learn how to swim. But good swimmers don't try to find where their toes can touch. They build muscles that keep them afloat. We cannot hope for land – we have to become content in the water. We cannot hope for solace from old solutions, for they will not suffice. The water has already risen. Encouraging us to swim was such sound and practical advice. I am looking forward to hearing some tips on how to build those new muscles in the upcoming and final lectures.

## Open Course: “Seeing Water with New Eyes” —Dr. Kevin Dann

On All Hallows Eve, while most neighbors were honoring the elements of Earth, Air, and Fire, a small group gathered at The Christian Community to give themselves up to water, at the opening of the “Seeing Water with New Eyes” conference. Rev. Bastiaan Baan told of his surprising musical encounter with a group of seals on an overnight island adventure in the Hebrides, followed half a year later by an echo of mutual interspecies recognition on a Netherlands shore, and then enchanted us with the same haunting Hebridean “Faerie” serenade that had caught the attention of those seals. Jennifer Greene, Director of the Water Research Institute in Blue Hill, Maine, then told her tale of falling in love with water as a child (while a land-locked farm girl) in Vermont where water is “land-locked”: mud puddles and mountain springs were her laboratories where discoveries in herself and in water were simultaneous. Jennifer closed her introduction with an invitation to metamorphose our inner life in such a way as to allow water to become our “teacher,” and through this, to invite the highest teacher – Christ – to enter into our watery explorations.

The next morning, Jennifer led us through a series of observations of the simplest act of water magic – the falling drop. The mere act of dropping ink-infused water into a gallon open-mouthed jar had us instantly mesmerized, as we watched the falling blue drop move and metamorphose in the most surprising ways. Jennifer generously and patiently let our “Oohs!” and “Ahhs!” unfold, then drew forth a detailed set of observations illustrating the dramatic dynamism of this simple demonstration. We graduated to a second experiment – drawing a stick through stationary drops suspended in a shallow tray of sugar water. The “train of vortices” we produced were beautiful paisleys that were immediately recognizable as two-dimensional sketches of a whole range of three-dimensional natural forms, from plant calyces and clouds to Fallopian tubes and fern fronds. Having learned from the moment our first drop of ink hit the surface that a water drop is composed of innumerable concentric layers, the vortex string exercise let us see that when layers flowing at different speeds pass each other, all manner of evagination and invagination of flowing forms occur, at a variety of scales. Suddenly it seemed as if we had seen into the heart of Creation.

At the heart of Creation lie the etheric formative forces, those mysterious forces that Rudolf Steiner and his colleagues and students have done so much to penetrate in the twentieth century. Through our study sessions with Bastiaan on the opening five lines of Genesis, and the John Gospel’s tale of the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well, we experi-



enced how working with water and the etheric realm was central to both the Father and the Son. Like Jennifer, Bastiaan is a seasoned phenomenologist, and applied as our method for unpacking these Bible passages the same stepwise questions posed to us by Jennifer for our water observations.

Friday evening, Bastiaan punctuated his lecture investigating Jesus's Baptism in the River Jordan with another Scottish sea song, in which "Michael, Sea Lord, Shield of Light" was invoked by fishermen for protection against wind and wave.

On Saturday we continued our water experiments by creating a funnel vortex, and then, with Jennifer's nifty Rube Goldberg rig, played with the effects of water's indefatigable urge to seek its own level. Then, with just a bit of water in trays as our apparatus, we went on a backyard walkabout for an elementary lesson in wave formation. Saturday evening, Jennifer presented a "comparative morphology" slide show, juxtaposing a dazzling array of forms in Nature to show how our watery planet is bursting with parallel formative activities "from head to toe". All of these, she emphasized, are the physical manifestation of the activities of spiritual beings.

Complementary to the lectures and experiments, we moved further into the watery realm with daily singing and speech activity led by Bastiaan (and beautifully accompanied by Elaine Swaebe), and eurythmy with Anna Radin. In the spirit of making the laboratory an altar, each day began with the Act of Consecration of Man. All of us could imagine no more fulfilling round of activity to bring us into a joyful, devotional atmosphere in which to study water.

## **Orientation Course in Chicago** —Cindy Sas

A core group of six participants, coming from as far away as Lima, Peru and New Bedford, Massachusetts, joined members of the Chicago Christian Community for the workshop *Working with the Spirit of The Christian Community, An Orientation Course about Priesthood in Our Time*. The Seminar was co-led by seminary director Bastiaan Baan, and Chicago priests Richard Dancey and Ann Burfeind.

We took a journey together, beginning with an exploration of how the vocation of priesthood has changed with time. We learned about the three main duties of the priest: Celebrating the Sacraments, Pastoral work, and Teaching, and that listening is a quality vital to all three. Meditation and prayer comprise the craft of priesthood, helping to create a vibrant inner life.

We next moved to an exploration of the significance of the sacraments for humanity and the earth. The sacraments, as fundamental archetype for Logos activity, bring a softening, a pliability to our thinking, helping to offset the hardening influences of our time. The body of the Risen Christ can begin to penetrate all spheres of the earth, including the sphere of human consciousness, bringing possibility for transformation and healing. The

Movement for Religious Renewal represents a shift, from the old - "How can the spiritual world help us?" - to the new - "How can we be of value to the spiritual world?"

In an attempt to discover "Who is the being of the Christian Community," Bastiaan next led us on a layered exploration of the Act of Consecration of Man - from the physical, sensible effects (changes in silences, breathing, and bodily warmth), to the supersensible beings that can be perceived by some (those who have died, those about to be born, the angels of individual congregation members, the angel for the congregation (a giant being of immense love), to the mighty guiding beings for the Christian Community as a whole.

We closed with sharing, questions, a conversation about hindrances in our time, and about the future of the Christian Community. A highlight included conversation about the experience of bringing with us in heart/mind/spirit to the Act of Consecration of Man those for whom we may have concern, and the possibility for healing that offers. We learned that "Celebrate!" is central to the Christian Community, and JOY! - we are celebrating Christ in the world.

We began each day with the Act of Consecration of Man, and ended with a Close of Day service. Interspersed with the sessions were opportunities to sing together, to explore through speech the Greek translation of John's Prologue, and a gospel reading. Delicious meals, prepared by Margaret and Fran, kept us well nourished in body, and the conversations around the meals were nourishing to soul - filled with laughter and stories of the early, founding priests.

If you have the chance in the future to attend one of these workshops, don't miss it! It is informative and enriching not only for those considering the vocation of priesthood, but also for any who are interested in a deeper, richer picture of the Christian Community as a whole.



## **Our Grounding in the Spirit—**

### **A personal journey with the Seminary —*Fleur Scheepens***

Seven years ago, during the Holy Nights, I made the decision to go to the Seminary in Stuttgart, Germany. I was 21 years old and my journeyman years were just about to start. I had studied theology at a university in Holland for three years, a course of study that I found very interesting, yet also rather materialistic in its approach to the subject of religion.

My studies had given me a couple of tools to work with in the professional field of theology, like knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, and an overview of the history of Christianity; these tools also proved useful for a deeper understanding of my own faith. I felt like I was given ground under my feet to stand on when it comes to my being a Christian, but "ground" much more in the sense of pavement, without a possibility to grow roots and hence no way to grow towards the light. I was yearning for the Spirit.

Life at the Seminary in Stuttgart felt in many ways like a modern monastic way of life. Every day started with the Act of Consecration of Man in the morning, followed by a week-long main course on a theological or anthroposophical subject and ongoing courses like Speech Formation, Bible Study, and Eurythmy. All of these courses were directed to bring us students into a process of self-development, and to prepare us to work in the world – some as ordained priests, others in whatever other role in society they found for themselves. The Seminary, to me, is a place where we work towards becoming truly human, towards a priesthood of all believers.

Of course this journey towards an inner priesthood did not come to an end when I left the Seminary, and many people that have not studied at one of the Seminaries of The Christian Community may find themselves on the same path. Still, when the Orientation Course came to my new home congregation in Chicago, I experienced the same quality and intensity of being in a process together as I had at the priest training. It is a coming together of the two mystery streams, which could be described as the path of the shepherd and the path of the king. The shepherd is one with his flock and with the elements, he is out there observing his immediate surroundings and guarding the life of those creatures that secure, in turn, his means to live.

In phenomenological (or Goethean) observation we also find this turning toward the natural world – selflessly, in order that the phenomena can reveal itself to us. At the same time, there is the realization that what is outside of us has a deep connection to us, and that that which is nearby points to something that is far away, to the cosmos. In our working with the Greek text of the Prologue of the Gospel of St. John in the Orientation Course, I felt that, in a way, we were doing just that. Speaking and listening to the Greek words revealed something of a deeper (or: wider) meaning of the words, and the sounds that were here with us in a very real, sensible way, also revealed something of a more encompassing reality of the sounds.

The way of the kings (or 'magi', 'wise men') goes, in my understanding, the opposite direction of starting way out there with the stars and following their rays all the way down to earth – in order to see what their influence is on the earthly plane and in humans. This gesture I perceive more when we study anthroposophy and bring anthroposophical knowledge down to the experiences in our daily lives; or when we hear that, through the sacraments, the Spirit can work in the earthly realm. We are reminded that this priestly impulse, to help the spiritual world find a home on earth, is a truly human impulse. It is the practising of being in the middle, in the Christ-center of our heart, connecting heaven and earth – it is a grounding in the Spirit.

## **NEW COURSES IN 2014:**

### **ORIENTATION COURSE IN HILLSDALE, NY**

Friday February 14, 6:30 pm – Sunday February 16, 3:30 pm

### **ORIENTATION COURSE IN KIMBERTON, PA**

Friday March 21, 6:30 pm – Sunday March 23, 3:30 pm

Theme: *"Working with the Spirit of the Christian Community"*

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With Bastiaan Baan and Priests of the local congregations

### **OPEN COURSE IN SPRING VALLEY, NY**

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**Further information and registration for courses: [a.b.baan@gmail.com](mailto:a.b.baan@gmail.com)**

## **BEGINNING OF THE NEW SEMESTER:**

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