

# ANOTHER LIFE IS POSSIBLE

INSIGHTS FROM  
100 YEARS OF  
LIFE TOGETHER

FOREWORD BY  
ROWAN WILLIAMS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANNY BURROWS

EDITED BY CLARE STOBER



ANOTHER  
INSIGHTS FROM  
LIFE IS  
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POSSIBLE  
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CREATED BY  
CLARE STOBER  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
DANNY BURROWS  
FOREWORD BY  
ROWAN WILLIAMS

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The Bellvale  
community watches  
a marionette show  
created and performed  
by the fifth and  
sixth graders.

Plough

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# FOREWORD

## BY ROWAN WILLIAMS

**The church of God** is repeatedly reminded of what it actually is by the way God calls believers to take community seriously, generation after generation. The church, in the widest sense, constantly slips back into being either a hierarchical body where some decide and others obey, or else a loose association of individuals sharing a common inspiration but little else. The Bruderhof movement has, over the last century, firmly and consistently declared that neither of these will do. The Good News is nothing if not embodied in a style of living together—learning, praying, working, deciding together—that simply manifests what God makes possible. As our civilization shakes and fragments, and begins to recognize belatedly what violence it has done to the whole created order as well as to the deepest levels of human dignity, this embodied witness is more and more significant.

The Bruderhof communities are not the creation of wild and eccentric religious speculation. These are people who accept the great central mysteries of the Christian faith—the eternal threefold life and love of God, the coming of God’s Word in the flesh—and seek only to live in faithfulness to the gifts of the Spirit and the guidance of Scripture, read prayerfully and intelligently in fellowship. For all who call themselves Christian, this simple witness to the implications of the classical central affirmations of faith should give pause. If God is truly as we say; if Christ’s spirit is truly manifest—as Paul says—in the style in which we live together without resentment, rivalry, and fear; if the Christian is truly set free from the violent power structures of this world; why are the priorities and practices of the Bruderhof not more evident in other Christian communities? The Bruderhof gently holds up a mirror to the Christian world and asks, “Why not this?”

My own contacts with the community have been a joy and enrichment over many years. The Darvell community has welcomed me as a guest, and I have had the special pleasure of sharing a little in the educational life of the group, speaking with children in the school and discussing some of the publishing work. One of the most striking things about the Bruderhof is what you might call their spiritual and intellectual hospitality—as warm as the literal hospitality the visitor experiences. This is a community willing to learn from and to celebrate the early Christians and Saint Francis, Catholics such as Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton, Jean Vanier and the L’Arche communities, Russian

Christians such as Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy, and many more. In that sense, this is a genuinely catholic reality, a community seeking to nourish itself with the wisdom and experience of the whole Christian family extended in time and space. There is no sectarian aggression here—clear and uncompromising principle, yes, but not the urge to demean or despise others.

**This is a beautiful book** on several levels, beautiful in the images it gives of simple and harmonious relation with an environment, but beautiful also in its chronicling of lives that have been held and healed in this shared enterprise of the Spirit. It is a gift, and a welcome one—but above all a gift that speaks of the first and greater gift of the presence of the Bruderhof in this world. My friends on the Bruderhof are witnesses to the peaceable kingdom—not merely people who believe peace is an ideal worth pursuing, but men, women, and children who trust the God of peace sufficiently to give their lives to incarnating the peace of God. I hope this book will help all its readers learn something of how such trust becomes possible and real.

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**Rowan Williams**, Archbishop of Canterbury from 2002 to 2012, is a master of Magdalen College in Cambridge and chancellor of the University of Wales.



# EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

**This is the book I wished for** when I first visited the Bruderhof almost thirty years ago. Back then the community's publishing house, Plough, had only published a couple of songbooks for children, a collection of Christmas stories, and half a dozen other books of talks and essays. But there wasn't one book that told what members of the community believed and how that influenced their daily life together. I hope this book will do that and much more.

Many things about the community struck me on my first visit, but the strongest impressions I took back with me were the stories people shared about their own journeys to find an alternative life—a life where loving God and loving your neighbor are truly daily priorities. Not long afterward, I returned for good and became a member (see my story on page 17). Since then, I've had the chance to talk with hundreds of others in the community, and have realized how diverse the paths are that brought each of us here. I found myself thinking, "These stories need to be told."

So when, almost three years ago, Plough asked if I'd be interested in collecting stories for a photojournalism book on the Bruderhof, I jumped at the chance. I left my job marketing Rifton Equipment, the community business that manufactures equipment for people with disabilities, and started scheduling interviews with very different people located around the world. It doesn't get much better than that.

With the hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Bruderhof approaching, it seemed natural to bring these stories together in a book (and on a website) to show how an assortment of people could live out their shared vision of a just society. One of the most challenging parts of this project was choosing which hundred stories to include. There are literally thousands of possibilities, many of them fascinating and colorful—which should be featured? In the end, with input from Plough's editorial team, I decided to focus on stories that, taken together, would provide a candid and balanced view into the community for readers who have never heard of it.

We all agreed we did not want a history book full of sepia-toned photos. I remember being impressed, on my first visit, by the inner vitality of the older members and their freedom from nostalgia. They rarely talked about "the good old days," but instead lived in the present and looked toward the future, encouraging younger members to take on responsibility and leadership. So this collection of stories includes a representative



cross-section of young and old; men and women; people, like me, who came as adults, as well as people who grew up in the community. It is not a list of achievements or milestones, but a record of God's working in the lives of individuals.

**The next challenge** was how to show a unique way of life. I wanted current photos of our communities, if possible all by one photographer. That's when someone suggested Danny Burrows. Danny is a British photojournalist who had been documenting the plight of North African refugees in the Calais Jungle, the huge shantytown in France that sprang up during the European migrant crisis of 2015 to 2016. He turned out to be the perfect fit. After Danny agreed to the assignment, he and I visited communities around the globe, he shooting and I recording interviews. (See Danny's perspective on page xix). Danny took thousands of photos and gave us more than three thousand that he felt were artistically worthy to carry his name. From that selection we've used about two hundred in this book. You can see many more on the accompanying website.

**So if you're that rare person who actually reads introductions, here's the brief introduction to the Bruderhof that I missed having thirty years ago.**

Simply, we're a group of men and women who have each chosen to follow Christ above all else, and who have felt called to follow him, together, for our entire lives. We live with

^  
Ryanne and Clare spend a cold moment on the Millennium Footbridge en route to the Tate Modern in London.



our families—or, as in my case, singles as part of families—in communities where we share meals, work, and income. We believe that God wants such a life for his people—a life of peace and unity, where no one is richer or poorer than another, where the welfare of the oldest, youngest, and weakest is a shared priority; where family life is treasured; where there is meaningful work for everyone; and where there is time for laughter, friendship, and children.

Today there are twenty-six Bruderhof community settlements around the world (see map on page xvi), each distinctive but sharing the same purpose. The bigger communities (200 to 350 people) are like small villages, each with an elementary school, dining hall, community kitchen, medical and dental clinic, community laundry, workshop, and other workplaces, like our publishing house, where I spend my workdays. Families eat breakfast together and then walk to school or work, meeting again at noon for lunch in the community’s dining hall and then returning to work (for the adults) and afternoon activities (for the children). Evenings may include a family dinner or, after the younger children are in bed, a community worship meeting, an all-hands-on-deck project in the workshop or garden, or just time for relaxation, socializing, or hobbies. (Since coming to the Bruderhof, I’ve spent many creative hours in the pottery.)

Daily life at the dozen smaller communities scattered throughout the world is naturally different, although they also meet for regular meals and worship. Some of the small

^  
During a school field  
trip to a working  
windmill, inspecting a  
sifter used for refining  
white flour

communities run service businesses, while at others people have jobs outside the community or volunteer with local charities. Regardless of how income is generated, though, all of it is donated to the community, following the personal vow of poverty each member has taken. In return, people’s needs are all provided for.

Our life together comes out of faith in Jesus and a desire to follow his commandments. The founders of the Bruderhof were inspired by the Sermon on the Mount, with its uncompromising call to a life completely dedicated to God’s will. A glimpse of what that life might look like is found in Acts 2 and 4, which describe the first church in Jerusalem where “all who believed were together and had all things in common, and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to any as had need.”

Just as Jesus called the first disciples to “drop your nets,” each of us has felt the same call to give up everything to follow him in a dedicated life. We’ve promised to give everything we have—“the whole strength of your body and soul”—in service of that calling. Because membership is for life, each of us has to feel called by God to make this commitment. Conversely, when someone asks to become a member, the circle of existing members also feels a responsibility to discern the depth of his or her calling. Baptism based on belief (sometimes in one’s late teens, and often later) is the first step toward membership. Only when someone has become an adult at twenty-one can he or she ask for membership—we do not have birthright membership. Wherever we live, all of us members have taken the same vows of lifelong loyalty to Christ and to each other.

**Life in community is different** from living as a Christian who attends a church for a few hours a week. Because we believe that every aspect of life has the potential to be an act of worship—working together, sharing a meal, singing together—actual church services are relatively simple. Led by one of the appointed pastors or another community member, we meet each day to sing, pray, and hear Scripture or other readings. Several communities often gather to celebrate more formal events such as weddings, baptisms, and acceptance of new members. Friends and neighbors from the public frequently attend these celebrations as well.

Our shared beliefs are simple: we read Jesus’ words and try to put them into practice in daily life, guided by the witness of the earliest Christians as well as the sixteenth-



<<  
Jawhan returns  
from helping his  
grandchildren cut their  
family Christmas tree.

century Anabaptists of the Radical Reformation, who likewise sought to return to a discipleship guided by the words of the Bible. We believe that the church (of which the Bruderhof is only a small part) is an eternal work of God and cannot be identified with any state institution or human hierarchy. That said, we recognize Jesus' power to work in all people, regardless of their creed or walk of life. We are happy to join with other Christians and people of good will to work toward a better world, whether by volunteering in a local soup kitchen or working with organizations such as World Vision and Save the Children on disaster relief efforts.

As I discovered, and as I hope the photos on the following pages show, we love children. We love being out in God's creation. We love working, singing, and celebrating together. Community offers a life lived to the full, where difficult times are shared and where each individual can find fulfillment.

Millions of Christians have read C.S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity* on the path to conversion, and I was no different. I encountered it when I was twenty-one and it changed my life more than any other book at the time. Lewis guides the reader step

by step through what it means to be a Christian and then considers the practical effects of discipleship:

The New Testament, without going into details, gives us a pretty clear hint of what a fully Christian society would be like. Perhaps it gives us more than we can take. It tells us that there are to be no passengers or parasites: if man does not work, he ought not to eat. Everyone is to work with his own hands, and what is more, everyone's work is to produce something good: there will be no manufacture of silly luxuries and then of sillier advertisements to persuade us to buy them. And there is to be no "swank" or "side," no putting on airs.

To that extent a Christian society would be what we now call Leftist. On the other hand, it is always insisting on obedience—obedience (and outward marks of respect) from all of us to properly appointed magistrates, from children to parents, and (I am afraid this is going to be very unpopular) from wives to husbands. Thirdly, it is to be a cheerful society: full of singing and rejoicing, and regarding worry or anxiety as wrong. Courtesy is one of the Christian virtues; and the New Testament hates what it calls "busybodies."

If there were such a society in existence and you or I visited it, I think we should come away with a curious impression. We should feel that its economic life was very socialistic and, in that sense, "advanced," but that its family life and its code of manners were rather old fashioned—perhaps even ceremonious and aristocratic. Each of us would like some bits of it, but I am afraid very few of us would like the whole thing.

Reading those words today and looking around I think, well, that pretty much describes how we are trying to live. As Danny and I went around trying to capture iconic community events in photos, it struck me that much of our life is experienced in the small ways we relate to one another every day—and that's something photos will never fully capture. For that, you'll just have to come and see for yourself.

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**Clare Stober**, Fox Hill, 2020

# BRUDERHOF TIMELINE

**1920**

**First Bruderhof established**

The Bruderhof was founded in Germany by the Protestant theologian Eberhard Arnold, his wife, Emmy, and her sister Else von Hollander, who moved with Eberhard and Emmy's five children to the village of Sannerz. There, inspired by the teachings of Jesus, they started to live in community.

**1934**

**Community in Liechtenstein**

When the community was notified that the school would be taken over by a Nazi teacher, all Bruderhof children and their teachers fled Germany to the Liechtenstein Alps, where they were soon joined by their parents and men of military age.

**1936**

**A new start in England**

The community purchased a farm in the Cotswolds in 1936 as a possible refuge should Nazi persecution force the community to flee Germany.

**1937**

**Escape from Germany**

The expelled members traveled via various routes to the new Cotswold Bruderhof in England. The men who had been arrested were eventually released and traveled to England as well. In early 1938, shortly after Germany invaded Austria, the Liechtenstein community was closed and all members moved to England.

**1939**

**World War II**

By 1940, following the outbreak of war, the English government had begun a policy of forcible internment of enemy aliens. The community was faced with a choice: internment of all German nationals, or leaving the country as a group. Committed to staying together, they sought refuge abroad.

**1942**

**Wheathill in England**

There continued to be so much interest in community in England that the three remaining members were asked to purchase a new property there. The community at Wheathill, a farm in Shropshire, grew quickly as young men and women visited and requested to join a life lived as an alternative to war.

**1954**

**Woodcrest in New York**

After World War II, dozens of young Americans interested in communal living visited the Paraguayan communities in England. In 1954, Woodcrest, the first North American Bruderhof, was founded in New York State. Meanwhile, other communities had been founded in Europe as well. By 1962 the Paraguayan communities had closed and members had emigrated to the United States and Europe.

**1971**

**Darvell in England**

In 1971, a new Bruderhof was founded in East Sussex. Since immigration to the United States was difficult, many Europeans who wanted to join the Bruderhof found a home there.

**1985**

**New communities in the United States and England**

Over the next years, the Bruderhof continued to grow and spread. Several new communities were started in the 1980s and 1990s: Maple Ridge in New York's Hudson Valley, Spring Valley in southwestern Pennsylvania, Platte Clove in the Catskill Mountains, Fox Hill, also in the Hudson Valley, and Beech Grove in Kent near Canterbury.

**2002**

**Return to Germany**

When the Bruderhof's original home in Sannerz, Germany, was available for purchase, the Bruderhof bought it and a small community was established there. Two years later, the Holzland community was started in the village of Bad Klosterlausnitz.

**2009**

**Back to Paraguay**

The founding of Villa Primavera, a small community in the city of Asunción, marked the Bruderhof's return to the country that welcomed them in the 1940s.

**2019**

**Korea and Austria**

Baeksan House in Taebaek, South Korea, and the Gutshof in Retz, near Vienna in Austria, are the two newest Bruderhof communities.



FIRST BRUDERHOF



COTSWOLD



WHEATHILL



LIECHTENSTEIN



PARAGUAY



WOODCREST



DARVELL



THE MOUNT



HARLEM

**1933**

**Growth and opposition by the Nazis**

In its first ten years the Bruderhof grew to over a hundred people, also opening its doors to orphans, single mothers, and others. It survived on farming and the sales of books from its publishing house, still active as Plough. Poverty became more acute after 1933, when the Nazis banned the sale of the community's books and crafts.

**1935**

**Death of Eberhard Arnold**

Eberhard Arnold died unexpectedly during surgery for complications to a broken leg. In his last months, he protested Nazi policies, and spoke repeatedly on the theme of the greatness of God's cause in the face of the suffering world. At the time of his death, the Bruderhof had 150 members living in four locations.

**1937**

**Bruderhof in Germany raided by the Gestapo**

Hundreds of storm troopers surrounded the community, imprisoned several men, and gave the rest forty-eight hours to leave Germany. As a Gestapo official wrote in an internal memo, the Bruderhof "represents a worldview totally opposed to National Socialism."

**1938**

**New members in England**

The Cotswold community grew to 350 members over the next years. Many who had become pacifist through the horrors of World War I came to visit and later joined the Bruderhof. Others heard about it through its publications, including the Plough magazine.

**1941**

**Travel to Paraguay**

The only country willing to accept a multinational group of pacifists in wartime was Paraguay. By the end of 1941, the whole community — except three members who remained in England to sell the Cotswold property — had traversed the submarine-infested waters of the Atlantic and set out to build community in the jungle.

**1945**

**Building community in Paraguay**

Life in Paraguay, with a harsh and unfamiliar climate, tropical diseases, and limited access to the wider world, was difficult. Over the next twenty years, three Paraguayan locations were established, as well as a hospital that served both the community and local indigenous Paraguayans.

**1960s**

**Community Playthings**

As the Bruderhof established itself in a new country, it continued to develop and was supported by Community Playthings, a business making wooden toys and furniture for children.

**1977**

**Rifton Equipment**

Rifton Equipment began as an offshoot of Community Playthings when Bruderhof designers were asked to custom-build a chair for a disabled child near a Bruderhof in Connecticut. Today, it produces a range of products for people with disabilities.

**1999**

**Bruderhof in Australia**

Danthonia, the first Australian community, opened in 1999. In 2005, a house community in the town of Armidale was started.

**2003**

**Communities in the city**

A group of young couples and singles moved into a derelict building in Camden, New Jersey: the first urban Bruderhof community. The house community model has since been replicated in London, Brisbane, New York, Pittsburgh, and several other cities.

**2012**

**The Mount Academy**

In 2012 the Bruderhof founded the Mount Academy, a New York State registered private high school, to educate teens whose parents are Bruderhof members, as well as students from the neighborhood and abroad.

**2020**

**At 100 years ...**

The Bruderhof communities are now home to around 3,000 people of many nationalities on twenty-six communities in the United States, Great Britain, Germany, Austria, Australia, Paraguay, and Korea, with small mission outposts elsewhere around the globe.



# BRUDERHOF COMMUNITIES TODAY

## UNITED STATES

COLORADO  
Denver 2019\*

FLORIDA  
Bayboro 2006

MINNESOTA  
Crossroads 2018

NEW YORK  
Woodcrest 1954  
Maple Ridge 1985  
Platte Clove 1990  
Fox Hill 1998  
Bellvale 2001  
Rondout 2004  
Butler 2006  
Harlem 2006  
Parkview 2006

NORTH CAROLINA  
Durham 2015

PENNSYLVANIA  
New Meadow Run 1957  
Spring Valley 1990  
Pittsburgh 2016

WEST VIRGINIA  
Morgantown 2005

▼ LARGE COMMUNITY  
▼ HOUSE COMMUNITY  
\* YEAR FOUNDED

## PARAGUAY

Villa Primavera 2010

## UNITED KINGDOM

Darvell 1971  
Beech Grove 1995  
Peckham 2016

## GERMANY

Sannerz 2002  
Holzland 2004

## AUSTRIA

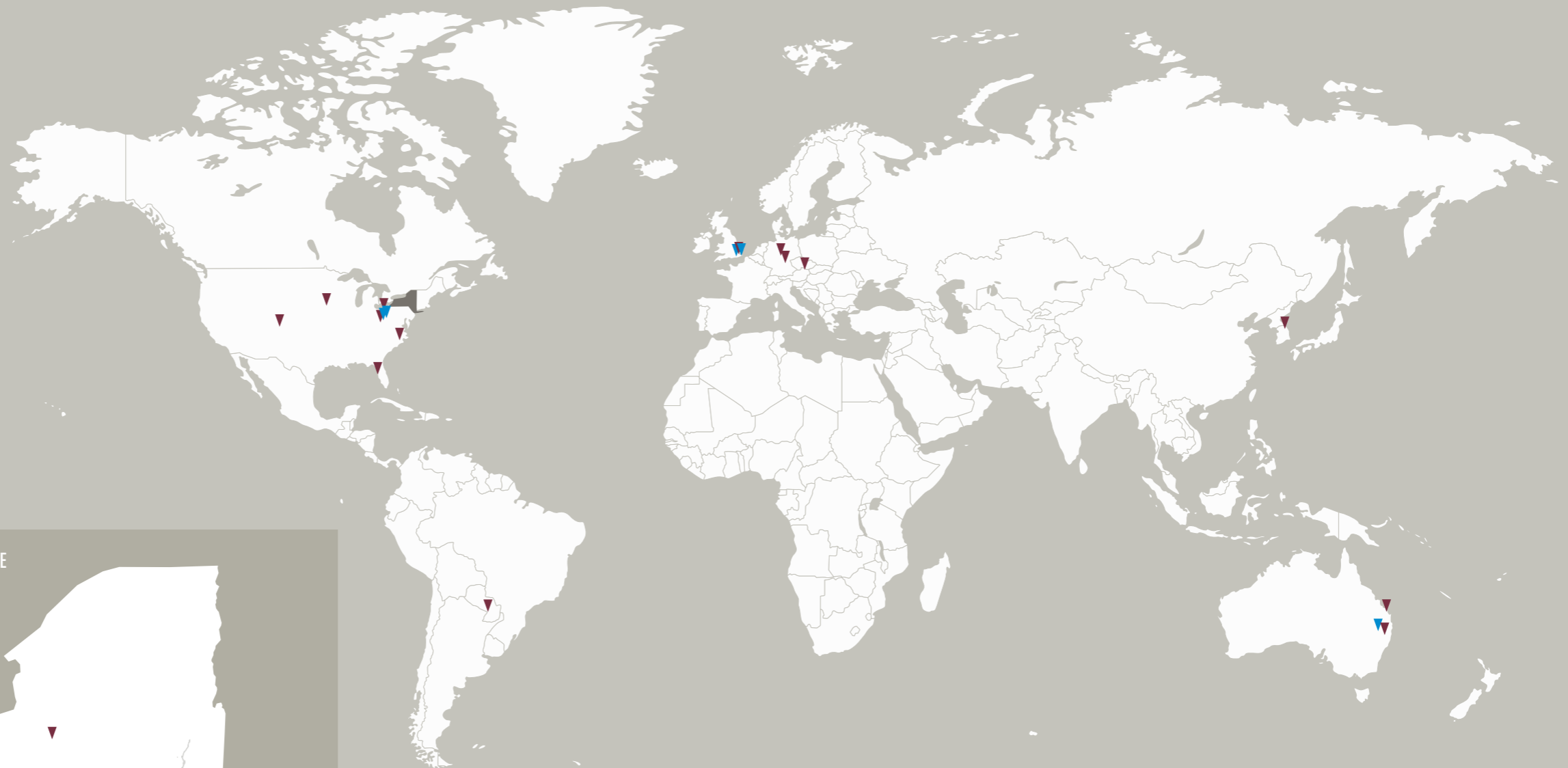
Retz 2019

## KOREA

Baeksan House 2018

## AUSTRALIA

Danthonia 1999  
Armidale 2005  
Brisbane 2017



### COMMUNITIES IN NEW YORK STATE





# PHOTOGRAPHER'S NOTE

**I first met the Bruderhof** while documenting the refugee crisis in a sprawling camp in Calais, where the distinctive dress and light American accents of a group of volunteering teenagers caught my attention.

I spoke with them briefly, and on my return to England I wrote to ask if I could make a photographic documentary about the Bruderhof. A reply soon came from Bernard Hibbs, who invited me to lunch at Beech Grove to discuss my ideas. We corresponded sporadically until about a year later, when Bernard rang again to ask if I would photograph a book to celebrate the community's centenary. I jumped at the chance.

Over the following year I visited Bruderhof communities around the globe, from England to the USA and Germany to Australia. In each community I was warmly welcomed and (perhaps to the frustration of those supervising the project) spent many hours chatting about the world, politics, and life over a glass of wine or homemade beer—thank you, Jeff, for the latter! And more than once I was moved to tears by the stories we shared.

It was the Bruderhof's commitment to pacifism and community of goods that initially sparked my interest, and it was a pleasure to experience these values in practice. As a photographer, I am meant to observe my subjects objectively, but I have to admit that I grew to admire the community. That is not to say that I didn't encounter ideas that were contradictory to my own, but I respect their commitment to family and loved ones, the absence of wealth and possessions, the enjoyment of nature, and an immersive experience of faith. The more I experienced the more I began to appreciate what the Bruderhof refer to as "another life," a working alternative to "my world."

**My final assignment** was Sannerz, Germany, where the community began its journey. Watching the sun set over the countryside was the perfect end to the project. To all who welcomed me as I worked on it: thank you for letting me experience your life.

**Danny Burrows**  
dannyburrowsphotography.com



^  
Danny puts a young subject at ease.

>  
Neighbors gather  
for a campfire  
at the Danthonia  
community.



WHAT MONEY CAN'T BUY



# EBERHARD ARNOLD

1883–1935

**Eberhard Arnold, a German theologian and philosopher, founded the Bruderhof in 1920.**



BRUDERHOF ARCHIVES

**B**orn into a long line of German academics and himself a doctor of philosophy, Eberhard Arnold abandoned middle-class life to found the community now known as the Bruderhof. His own words describe his journey best:

**In my youth, I tried to lead people to Jesus through the Bible, and through addresses and discussions. But there came a time when I recognized that this was no longer enough. I began to see the tremendous power of greed, of discord, of hatred, and of the sword: the hard boot of the oppressor upon the neck of the oppressed. . . . I had preached the gospel but felt I needed to do more: that the demands of Jesus were practical, and not limited to a concern for the soul. . . . I could not endure the life I was living any longer.**

His spiritual awakening had begun years earlier when, as a teenager on summer vacation at the home of “Uncle” Ernst, his mother’s cousin, he had read the New Testament with fresh eyes. Ernst, a Lutheran pastor who had lost his church position after siding with the poor weavers of the region during a labor dispute, impressed him deeply. By the

<  
At Sannerz in Germany, site of the first Bruderhof and today home to about twenty, including Steve and Mim and their daughters



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A Sunday morning meeting at the Sannerz community

<  
Eberhard and Emmy Arnold exchanged hundreds of letters during their three-year engagement. Emmy later had the letters bound into nine volumes.

time he returned home, Eberhard was burdened with a new consciousness of his privileges and the plight of the impoverished.

**The next years were tumultuous.** He volunteered with the Salvation Army, started an intensive Bible study, and neglected his secondary school studies to such an extent that his desperate parents finally sent him to boarding school. When he graduated he clashed with them over the next step: Eberhard wanted to study medicine, while his father insisted on theology. Eberhard yielded.

This did not lead to the respectable career in the state church his father hoped for, however, as he was ultimately barred from sitting for his final exams. Through his study of the Bible and the influence of the evangelical revivalist movement, Eberhard came to believe that infant baptism was not valid and was re-baptized as an adult. This decision disqualified him from completing his degree. His parents disowned him, and the father of his fiancée, Emmy von Hollander, denied him permission to marry her until he had successfully defended another doctoral dissertation.

Eberhard switched his course of study to philosophy, completed a thesis on Nietzsche, and married Emmy in 1909. Meanwhile, he was making his voice heard as leader of the local chapter of the Student Christian Movement. The newlyweds moved from one city to another, following his work as a public speaker, while hosting gatherings in their home that attracted a lively and diverse attendance, from pious housewives to communist revolutionaries.

The First World War led the couple to read the Bible in a new light. Counseling wounded soldiers in an army hospital, Eberhard was shattered by what he heard and saw. Formerly an energetic advocate of the German cause, he embraced pacifism as truer to the gospel.

The end of the war in 1918 heralded little in the way of peace: there were strikes, assassinations, revolutions, and counterrevolutions, and finally the haphazard birth of the Weimar Republic. In Eberhard's words, the hour demanded a discipleship that "transcended merely edifying experiences." Increasingly he pondered the evils of mammon, the god of money and material wealth. "Most Christians have completely failed in the social sphere and have not acted as brothers to their

“Christ’s love calls us to give up our possessions, too. That is the only way to help the world; it strikes at the root of our selfishness, making it possible for us to live in harmony – to live a life of love and justice and community.”



fellow man. They have risen up as defenders of money and capitalism,” he said. An alternative emerged, simple but all-consuming:

**Jesus says, “Do not gather riches for yourself.” That is why the members of the first church in Jerusalem distributed all they had. Love impelled them to lay everything at the apostles’ feet; and the apostles distributed these goods to the poor.**

**Christ’s love calls us to give up our possessions, too. That is the only way to help the world; it strikes at the root of our selfishness, making it possible for us to live in harmony – to live a life of love and justice and community.**

As Emmy wrote in an unpublished memoir:

**Social contradictions such as the fact that one person can enjoy the plenty of life without sweating, while another does not have bread for his children despite working like a slave, occupied us more and more. Through reading the Bible, we realized that this is not God’s will.**

**From the outset of our friendship, Eberhard and I had wanted to give our lives in service to others. That was our primary concern. So it was perhaps natural that we now found ourselves joining with people who were dissatisfied and were challenging public life and human relationships with the old slogans of freedom, equality, and fraternity. These ideals were drawing people from all walks of life; and all of them were struggling to find God’s will, even if few would have expressed it like that. . . .**

**At a series of open evenings in our house we read the Sermon on the Mount and were so overwhelmed by it that we decided to completely rearrange our lives according to it, cost what it may. Everything written there seemed to have been spoken directly to us: what Jesus says about justice, about hungering for righteousness, loving one’s enemies, and finally, about actually doing God’s will.**

But Eberhard’s radical pacifist and economic views were incompatible with his employer, Die Furche, the publishing house of the Student Christian Movement

where he had worked since 1915. In early 1920, Eberhard gave notice and, in June of the same year, the Arnolds took the plunge. Surrendering their life insurance policy for cash and leaving their comfortable Berlin home, they moved with their five children to Sannerz, a poor farming village, where they began living in full community with several other like-minded seekers, including Emmy’s sister Else.

Starting such a community, as Emmy wrote later, required a leap of faith:

**We had no real financial basis of any kind for realizing our dreams. Not that it made a difference. It was time to turn our backs on the past, and start afresh – to burn all our bridges, and put our trust entirely in God, like the birds of the air and the flowers of the field. This trust was to be our foundation – the surest foundation, we felt, on which to build.**

The Arnolds were hardly alone in their thinking: their fledgling community was one of dozens of similar settlements that had sprung up across Germany at the time, attracting young people disillusioned with both bourgeois piety and social inequality. More than

^ The Bruderhof re-acquired the Sannerz House in 2002. The original Bruderhof community was here from 1920 to 1927.

>  
Klaus Barth, one of the last living members who remembers Eberhard Arnold, enjoying a moment of winter sunshine.

>>  
Hans Brinkmann tends the grave of Eberhard Arnold in the community burial ground near Sannerz, Germany.



a thousand guests descended on the community in Sannerz during its first year.

**From his new home base**, Eberhard soon resumed publishing with the mission, as he wrote, of “allowing the gospel to work in creation, producing literary and artistic work in which the witness of the gospel retains the highest place while at the same time representing all that is true, worthy, pure, beautiful and noble.” He saw Sannerz and other exemplars of voluntary Christian community as beacons of hope—models that could inspire other attempts at social and economic renewal. This would surely happen, he believed, once people’s eyes were opened to the possibilities of brotherhood and the joy of sharing everything in common, as opposed to competing for every last coin. As he said at a lecture in 1929:

**People tear themselves away from home, parents, and career for the sake of marriage; they risk their lives for the sake of wife and child. In the same vein, people must be found who are ready to sacrifice everything for the sake of this way, for the service of all people.**

**Community is alive wherever these small bands of people meet, ready to work for the one great**

**goal, to belong to the one true future. Already now we can live in the power of this future; already now we can shape our lives in accordance with God and his kingdom. This kingdom of love, free of mammon, is drawing near. Change your thinking radically so that you will be ready for the coming order!**

By this time the community had grown, its ranks expanded by homeless war veterans and single mothers, orphans and day laborers, people with disabilities and mental illness, anarchists and communists, Christians and Jews. To accommodate this new influx, it resettled on a farm in the Rhön hills.

Meanwhile, Eberhard had become increasingly interested in the example of the Anabaptists, who emphasized unity, sharing of possessions, nonviolence, and the church as a “city on a hill.” He learned that one branch of this movement, started by Jakob Hutter in the sixteenth century, had existing communities in North America, and he reached out to establish a relationship with them.

The rise of National Socialism in the 1930s presented Eberhard and the other members of the Bruderhof with the challenge of remaining faithful in an



> Eberhard Arnold's original vision was for a community centered around children.



increasingly hostile state. The pacifism of the early Anabaptist movement remained a core principle of their identity, despite the persecution they knew it would bring. This also meant that, from the very beginning, they distanced themselves from the regime. The Bruderhof's connections to Jewish communities also strengthened their resolve against the anti-Semitic aims of the Third Reich.

The first of several Gestapo raids occurred in 1933. Eberhard was not intimidated, and sent off reams of documents to the local Nazi officials, explaining his vision of a Germany under God. He even wrote to Hitler, urging him to renounce the ideals of National Socialism and to work instead for God's kingdom – and sending him a copy of his book *Innerland*, which spoke forcefully against the demonic spirits that animated German society at the time. Not surprisingly, this letter was never answered.

Following the raid, Bruderhof parents quietly began the process of evacuating the community's children to Liechtenstein. When a Nazi-sanctioned teacher showed up to take over the school in 1934, she found no pupils waiting for her. With hostilities in Germany rising, the whole community soon moved to Liechtenstein, but did not stay for long – from there they left for England, and later Paraguay.

Eberhard did not live to shepherd them through these changes, however. His death came suddenly in 1935, the result of complications following the amputation of a poorly set broken leg. Under extremely difficult circumstances, others took up the work he had begun.

**Remembered a century later**, his "voice of one crying in the wilderness" delivers "a wakeup call for the religiously sedated and socially domesticated Christendom of the Western world," writes Jürgen Moltmann, a German theologian. "He saw down to the root of things, leading to uncompromising decisions in the discipleship of Jesus between the old, transient world and the future of God's new world."

"It may seem strange that such an insignificant group could experience such lofty feelings of peace and community, but it was so," Eberhard wrote shortly before his death. "It was a gift from God. And only one antipathy was bound up in our love – a rejection of the systems of civilization; a hatred of the falsities of social stratification; an antagonism to the spirit of impurity; an opposition to the moral coercion of the clergy. The fight that we took up was a fight against these alien spirits. It was a fight for the spirit of God and Jesus Christ." ♦



COURTESY OF PARK FAMILY

## SUNG HOON PARK 1972–

We were living in Seoul with our two little boys when we heard about the Bruderhof. My wife, Soon Ok, had worked at Samsung headquarters and then become the director of a daycare center. She was working on her master's degree. My parents are animists but I had become a Christian, studied theology and education, and worked at a publishing house. We owned a nice house and a car.

On the surface we were happy, but underneath, our marriage was almost broken. We were both so busy, and I was burned out and depressed. There was a desperate emptiness in my heart: I was hungry for a real Christian life.

At work, I was involved in publishing books from the Bruderhof that said they loved one another, but I was skeptical. Everywhere I looked there was such a big gap between what people said and the way they lived.

But, during our first visit to Woodcrest in New York we learned that if we opened our hearts and followed our hearts, God could work. We sold our house and car and got rid of our expensive laptop and camera. In return, we found joy! We found out what is really important: love and family. God healed our marriage: I could apologize to my wife, and she could forgive me.

People might think living here is not easy, especially for a Korean. There are so many cultural differences: language, food, dress. But God is so much bigger than that. I wish many, many other people – Asians, Europeans, people from all continents – could find their way to this life and joy.





*What we would like to do is change the world – make it a little simpler for people to feed, clothe, and shelter themselves as God intended them to do. And to a certain extent, by fighting for better conditions, by crying out unceasingly for the rights of the workers, of the poor, of the destitute . . . we can to a certain extent change the world; we can work for the oasis, the little cell of joy and peace in a harried world.*

*Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Worker Movement  
1897–1980*

^  
High school girls  
perfect their ball-  
handling skills.

## NORMA WARDLE

1953–



ILLUSTRATION BY CHRISTINE NELSON

Born into a large Irish-Catholic family near Pittsburgh, Norma won a popularity contest as a child, and then struggled for years with an unexpected aftereffect: the need to maintain her image at all costs. By eleventh grade, she was a beauty queen, class president, and head of the cheerleading squad. She dated the quarterback of the football team and the captain of the basketball team: “I didn’t follow the trends at my school; I set them.” The problem was, it all cost money — money she didn’t have: “We were a lower-middle-class family, so I had to work hard to keep up my image. In fact, I had two afterschool jobs. I could have shopped at bargain stores but wouldn’t. They lacked class. Instead, I went to the high-end department stores. I also shoplifted.”

At college, Norma reveled in the new freedoms of the early 1970s: “You could let your hair go and forget about makeup. I went to hash parties. I embraced the whole counterculture thing.” What seemed like freedom wasn’t, however: “You had to go to the right concerts,

and you still had to wear the right things: T-shirts with sequins, hoop earrings, and bell bottoms. Sure, we protested the war and talked about peace and love. But a lot of it was still driven and steered by commercialism.”

Fast forward a few years, and Norma had joined the Jesus People, a loose network of Christian fellowships and communes then at its height. One weekend she visited the Bruderhof:

Culturally, it was completely foreign to me, but these people looked past my appearance. They wanted to know what I was thinking about, and they listened. I never thought I’d join, but something kept drawing me. Before, money and clothes defined me. I had lived for myself. These people were living together as brothers and sisters, for one another, trying to build up a truly new society. That goal inspired me so deeply, nothing else mattered anymore. At the community, I found something no amount of money can buy.



*As thou takest thy seat at table, pray. As thou liftest the bread, offer thanks to the Giver. When thou sustainest thy bodily weakness with wine, remember him who supplies thee with this gift, to make thy heart glad and to comfort thy infirmity. Has thy need for taking food passed away? Let not the thought of the Giver pass away too.*

*Basil of Caesarea, bishop and theologian  
AD 329–379*

Community campfire  
with s'mores



COURTESY OF GONZALES FAMILY

## CARLOS GONZALEZ

1965–

Carlos lives in a Bruderhof in upstate New York with his wife, Berenice, and their three daughters. He enjoys pointing out that his birthplace, Jalisco, Mexico, is where tequila comes from. “And I’m a very Jalisco person,” he adds.

I studied industrial design, and later worked for Volkswagen. Then I did publicity for restaurants and hotels, then opened a restaurant of my own. It was a successful investment, but too stressful. Later, I sold electronics, worked in the tourism industry, and enrolled in a graduate program. I lived in a Jesuit community and did human rights work with an NGO. I realized that I liked to help people – to serve. It was around then that I got in touch with the Bruderhof through a young woman from the community who had come to Mexico to work in a children’s home.

Today, Carlos has a reputation as the ultimate host, and not just for fellow community members, but for guests from the neighborhood too.

Gathering is pretty much my culture, my background. I love to make margaritas. And to cook: enchiladas, chilaquiles – simple, traditional stuff. Of course, the most beautiful thing is to have time to interact with others, to get to know them. Everything else is superficial in the end. What is essential is the atmosphere, the joy of community. When you receive that, you have received a gift for life. Come by! My house is always open.



<<  
Tim and Kathleen  
with Sammy behind  
the Harlem House  
community



COURTESY OF CLARE STOBER

**A successful entrepreneur who realized that living a life of meaning had nothing to do with wealth**

## CLARE STOBER

1955—

**A college dropout** who built up a successful graphic design and advertising agency near Washington, DC, Clare was the perfect example of someone who achieved the American Dream.

**Ironically, it was out of that place of financial success that I was able to see through the dream. I had everything I wanted; I could go anywhere; I could buy anything I wanted. I was pulling down \$150,000 a year. Adjusted for inflation, that's about \$350,000 today. I had worked very hard to get there, but, deep down, I knew I did not deserve what I was getting in the way of compensation. I knew of countless people of color or people with other economic disadvantages who worked harder than I did and were not making it.**

**That basic inequity made me feel very uncomfortable. And along with that I felt so empty inside.**

**Fifteen years earlier, I had experienced what I think you could call a conversion. I was working alone in a darkroom (a great place to think), and I remember standing there and being overwhelmed with all the deceitful, selfish, evil things I had done in my short life. Among other things, I had no relationship to speak of with my parents, I had had an affair with a married man, and my own marriage had lasted all of eight months. One by one, I saw the faces of the people whose lives I had ruined in my drive to get ahead.**

**It was frightening, but even worse was the realization that I was not**

“Desperate,  
I begged for help  
from a God I  
wasn’t even sure  
was real.”

able to redeem myself. I had tried before, and here I was once again, having left even more trampled people in my wake. What was it going to take? I did not want to have a rerun of this revelation on my deathbed with fifty more years of broken relationships added on top.

Desperate, I begged for help from a God I wasn’t even sure was real. In answer, two alternatives became clear: continue calling my own shots and deal with the messy consequences as best I could, or let go of everything and allow God to take control of my life. The latter was clearly the less glamorous choice, but I went for it.

That’s when Clare started the design business with a fellow Quaker. Together, they worked hard for fifteen years and built up a strong business. But, in the process, their dependence on God was slowly replaced by self-reliance, business acumen, and a desire to meet ever higher financial goals. It was another moment of realization that forced Clare once again to choose between having a wealthy but stressful life or slowing down and regaining a life of faith and joy in God. Choosing God would mean leaving the agency she had built up and co-owned.

Before leaving, I had to settle affairs with my business partner.

This was complicated: he and his wife had once been my close friends and spiritual mentors, but over time we had grown apart.

It took multiple offers and counteroffers to come to a final agreement, but the result was that I ended up paying \$50,000 in taxes which my partner should have paid. When I realized how he and his accountant had conspired to crush me, I was so consumed by anger that I couldn’t sleep for days. Sure, it was “only money,” and I didn’t need it at the time. But it was a lot of money, and it was mine. Obviously, the IRS could not be put off, though, so I wrote the check and hoped in a God of vengeance.

Clare says her journey to forgiveness took two years, and was part of her deeper quest for renewal: the search for what Tolstoy calls the “true life.” Along the way, she says, she stumbled on new treasures: vulnerability, humility, trust, and joy.

In the end, the renewal I was looking for cost everything. I sold my antique furniture, my vacation home on Nantucket, and after that, my townhouse in McLean. I dropped my career. My whole life took a new turn as I tried to discern what God wanted me to do. But with every step, I was amazed to realize how quickly the deepest



yearnings of my heart were filled. I felt like I was given a clean slate to start life completely over. Beyond that, the experience led me – further than I had ever been led before – out of myself and to community with others, where I am still learning what it means to truly share your life – practically, and in the spirit – with brothers and sisters. This is what God created us to do.

In my former life, I used money as a way of building security against imagined catastrophes, for a comfortable retirement, and to live a good life in beautiful surroundings. When I was a guest of the Bruderhof wrestling with whether or not I was “called” to this way of life, I woke many nights at 3 a.m. with

the icy fingers of fear gripping my heart and wondering, “What if the community collapses? What about retirement and insurance?” These were real fears that I had spent all my adult years working to address. The irony is that once I joined the community, I never even thought about those fears again. They completely dissipated.

Life doesn’t stop. No community is perfect. As life-changing as that morning in the darkroom was, I’ve come to realize that if I am going to live authentically, I must continually go through new cycles of repentance and renewal – that there must always be new beginnings. I look forward to them, because that’s when I’m most alive. ♦

^  
Married over fifty years, Dan and Hanni have nine sons, fifty-two grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

# OLIVIA BARTH

1978-



Born in Surrey, England, Olivia came to the Bruderhof as a nine-year-old with her parents and younger brother. Now a mother of four sons, she is an account manager for Community Playthings:

Ironically enough, living in community doesn't necessarily make you less materialistic. I still have this tendency to hang on to certain things for myself. I'm a big fan of my public library, and if I want a new book I get the library to order it. But then, there are some books I can hardly bear to return. Or – this is a silly example, but it's true: because I can't go and buy the one perfect bag, I find myself collecting second-rate bags!

I've read blogs about minimalism and find it very appealing. But minimalism isn't necessarily the opposite of materialism. I would like to have a very bare house with a couple of things placed artistically here and there, but my family loves to read and so I think it's important to have books on every surface of the house, and then there are the school projects and half-made Lego creations as well. And I welcome that because ultimately I want my house to be a friendly, hospitable place, not a work of art.

>>  
Early morning sun  
on the linden tree  
at the center of  
Darvell community





BRUDERHOF ARCHIVES

# JOSEF STÄNGL

1911–1993

Josef was born to a poor Catholic family in rural Bavaria and raised in a boys' home where beatings were a daily occurrence and afterschool recreation meant peeling potatoes. He was later apprenticed to an uncle who was a baker. At seventeen, he took to the road, along with thousands of other young men. It was the height of the Great Depression, and in Germany, some five million were estimated to be jobless. Happening upon the Bruderhof — then a poor farming community near Frankfurt — he was struck by the sight of uneducated peasants working alongside professionals, and by the brotherly love he witnessed among them.

Instead of the “divisive spirit that rules the world,” Josef found, in the community, “the struggle for God’s kingdom. . . . It was here that the message of the gospel dawned upon me: that all classes, all social strata which are separated from one another in the world, are united in the gospel; and that Christ came for all — that every individual, no matter his background, would be welcomed and included.”

Ten years later, during the darkest days of World War II, Josef affirmed the reality of this truth in a most personal way, through his marriage to fellow community member Ivy Warden. The daughter of a wealthy doctor whose patients included Vanderbilts, Morgans, and Rockefellers, Ivy had grown up in Paris and on the French Riviera, where she played tennis with the future Queen Elizabeth II, and attended Edinburgh University. After breaking off her engagement to an English lord, she had embarked on a search for another life, and found her way to the Bruderhof. Josef and Ivy had eight children, four sons and four daughters. For decades, he served the community as a baker.



*Our work as a whole should provide for the common table at which all sit down and every one satisfies his hunger. This was the experience of the Jewish people after liberation from Egyptian slavery and it was the experience of the early Christians in Jerusalem who, aglow with the spirit of Christ, lived together in peaceful, just, and united community, sharing their possessions communally.*

*Hans Meier, engineer and Bruderhof member  
1902–1992*

^  
Fetching fresh bread  
for breakfast from the  
communal kitchen



# BRIAN DUNN

1974—

**An educator who  
teaches sharing as part  
of every lesson**

^ Brian guiding young birders on a Saturday morning outing  
<< The communal dining room in Sannerz

**The son of** an industrial arts teacher and a nurse, Brian was born on Long Island and came to the Bruderhof as an eight-year-old with his parents and four siblings. A musician and teacher who has taught in the community's elementary schools for more than twenty years, mostly in southwestern Pennsylvania, he has naturally spent hours observing children. In recent years he has given a lot of thought to the harmful influences of materialism and the way they can be overcome. To Brian, it's a vital aspect of education:

**Sharing always comes out of a culture of sharing. And this culture is first instilled in us by our parents. I remember two incidents from my childhood as clear as day: I was seven, and we were still living on Long Island. A neighbor knocked on the door, looking for food, and there was ground meat and steak in our freezer, and my father gave him the hamburger. The neighbor was grateful, but as soon as he was gone, my mother asked my father, "Why didn't you**

**give him the steak?" That made a deep impression on me.**

**The other incident: my father had taken us kids to a camp for migrant workers who were picking apples in the area. We brought them Dunkin' Donuts. As we passed them around, we noticed that nobody was eating. Dad asked, "Is something wrong?" They said, "Oh no. We're just waiting until everyone has one before we begin." They cared about each other.**

Brian also tries to teach generosity and selflessness in a more focused way, right in the classroom, mostly through literature:

**There's Aesop's fables, Grimm's fairy tales, there's Dr. Seuss, and there are longer works like Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, where the children can see the distinct change in Scrooge's life once he stops thinking about himself.**

Brian notes that most children have "an innate sense of justice and



## JULIANA GNEITING

1932—

Juli came to Primavera, the Bruderhof's South American community, at fourteen, through a well-to-do family who had taken her in as a maid (a member of the family joined the community, and thought she'd be interested too). She herself was dirt poor, and grew up sleeping in a hammock — out of reach of snakes — in a windowless hut. Juli never knew her parents but was raised by her Italian grandmother, who had married an indigenous Paraguayan.

Generous to a fault, Juli caught the eye of her future husband, Jakob, on an outing to Asunción when she impulsively took off her only jacket and gave it to a shivering young woman right on the street.

Juli is still giving things away. Describing shopping trips with her, her granddaughter Denise says, "She'll have a whole list of people in her head who need something: a candle, a pack of stationery, a tablecloth, a box of chocolates. In February, she's already thinking of the old friend who has a birthday in April. But it's not about shopping. It's about having a heart for others. If a child is crying in the supermarket, she'll say, 'Poor thing!' and then engage the child and mother. Barriers don't exist for her."

Juli's love extends beyond people, to birds and animals and insects: "No squishing spiders: you take them outside. Ants? Why poison them? They also need food!" Nor is she one to put aside special things for special occasions: "What if we're dead tomorrow? Then you'll regret not sharing it!"



fairness, of whether things are balanced or right" — and that this can simply be nurtured and encouraged.

**For years, I've run a weekly session where I choose five or six different current events, and we discuss them. And whenever there is something relating to poverty or war, or refugees, or civil rights, the reaction of the children is the same. They see the difference between rich and poor and say, "That's so unfair." They can understand world politics at that basic level, and they'll respond from their hearts.**

**Several years ago, one of my fourth graders won a \$100 gift certificate in an art contest. That week we talked about a devastating earthquake that had just happened in Nepal, and how the**

**children there must be suffering. The girl who won the \$100 suggested we use it to buy supplies for a school in Nepal, and that's what we did.**

**Still, even among children, human nature is what it is. Yes, there are moments when kids will spontaneously give to others. But that's not always the case. In fact, it's mostly not the case. So as educators, as parents, it is our duty to help them to put others first. This is vital if our children are going to grow up to become productive members of society. And that will never happen as long as they are guided by selfishness. Selfishness is a disease!**

**But a lot can be accomplished by ensuring that children are given the time and space to grow up in a world**

**not needlessly cluttered with things:**

**I have found that the more you give children materially, the less grateful they are, and that the less you give them, the more likely they are to be happy anyway — happy with less. When I was student-teaching at a non-Bruderhof school, I once had a class that was nothing short of spoiled: they knew every restaurant in town, they belonged to every club in the neighborhood, they were on all the teams; but the first thing they'd ask when they got to my classroom — I was running an after-school program — was, "Brian, can we play outdoors?" And they were truly happy doing that.**

**Obviously you have to supervise them, but if you let them, kids will spend hours just playing: building**

**stick houses and dams, playing fort, finding nests or watching birds. And the experience of losing themselves in outdoor play will give them something no amount of toys or gadgets or things can compete with.**

**Everyone wants the best for their kids, but often the best means giving them less materially, and rather giving them more of your time and attention. What children need most — a time and a place to play, and to be at peace with themselves, their family, and their friends — can't be bought. That's what we try to give them at our schools on the Bruderhof: memories that last, and — I hope — a lifelong habit of generosity. ♦**

^  
Fathers and sons making cookies to share with a rival team at the next soccer game in the village





COURTESY OF BRIAN BUTTON

## BRIAN BUTTON

1993 –

Born and raised on the Bruderhof, Brian studied accounting, economics, and information systems at a private college in upstate New York and interned at an international accounting firm. At the end of the internship, he was offered full-time employment and a comfortable salary. He declined, however, and moved back home to the Bruderhof. But his education didn't stop there:

After college I spent six months with a small Christian NGO that does relief and development work in Myanmar and Bangladesh. It was my first experience of extreme poverty and oppression, and it opened my eyes.

The realities in front of me did not fit the neat economic frameworks that I had learned about in business school. I saw children growing up in refugee camps where desperation, hopelessness, hunger, and disease are the norm, and medical care, education, and hope are denied on the basis of their ethnicity.

I saw how the displacement of an entire ethnic group, the Rohingya, is directly related to the government's efforts to accommodate the international investors who circle like vultures over the region's natural resources.

Sometimes the work I was doing felt effective; at other times I felt helpless—overwhelmed by the enormous scale of the problem. When you have three hundred food packs to distribute to twelve hundred families, it is impossible to ignore the nine hundred you can't feed.

Today, Brian works in an office most of the day, managing the Bruderhof's insurance portfolios. But he does not forget his months overseas:

Moving between a world where revenues are measured in the millions and one where a few dollars make the difference between life and starvation, I felt validated in my decision to live a life outside of the capitalist system whose primary goal is the accumulation of money and power.



*Men pray to the Almighty to relieve poverty. But poverty does not come from God's laws – it is blasphemy of the worst kind to claim that. Poverty comes from man's injustice to his fellow man.*

*Leo Tolstoy, Christian anarchist and pacifist  
1828–1910*

^  
Deciding how to approach a project on the community farm