Inward, Outward, and Together

The spiritual foundation at the heart of The Cornelius Corps is summed up by the simple phrase “inward, outward, and together.” This refers to our way of practicing the holistic journey of Christian discipleship. Faith in Jesus Christ is an ongoing journey of “inward” spiritual growth that leads to discerning and following God’s “outward” call to mission along with the support and accountability of being “together” in Christian community. While all three aspects of this journey of discipleship are essential, they are experienced and shared in different ways.

In this edition of our newsletter, Robert Norris from Charlotte, NC and Kathy MacKrell from Ashburn, VA describe their own experiences of this journey through their committed participation in The Cornelius Corps. Robert writes about a recent men’s retreat that we had in the beautiful mountains of western North Carolina. Kathy writes of her long time participation in our tutoring mission in an inner city neighborhood of Southeast DC. Although the settings are very different, the presence of Jesus Christ and the practices of Christian discipleship are the same in both places. Robert is following God’s call to form small groups in which people from a variety of backgrounds can experience and practice the holistic journey of discipleship. Kathy gives leadership to our tutors at Savoy Elementary School where we spend time both working with children and coming together to reflect on the connection between our experiences with the children and our lives as disciples of Jesus. Their witness reminds me that one of the great gifts of The Cornelius Corps is helping people to experience the inward, outward, and together dimensions of the Christian journey in ways that unite us across barriers that usually separate people in our society.

Jim Melson - Director

The ministry of The Cornelius Corps continues through your faithful prayers and support. This past year has been a financial challenge for our ministry. If you are able, please consider making a generous year-end gift. You can use the enclosed envelope and make checks payable to:

The Cornelius Corps – CUMC

You can also give by clicking on the “Donations” tab of our web site: www.corneliuscorps.org and following the instructions there.

Mountaintop Spiritual Formation

by Robert Norris

“To our Brothers and Sisters of New Community Church: Jim has asked me to share some of my reflections from the “Cornelius Corps Retreat” of 11 “Older Guys” at Grandfather Mountain, NC on October 4-6, 2013. I really have only one word to describe it: “Awesome”!!!

The Retreat we shared is now over a month old. Your own Jim Melson led all of us over a three day weekend to a real “Spiritual Awakening” by facilitating discussions participated in by everyone there on the topic of “Spiritual Formation.”

All of you are certainly aware of Jim’s Spiritual Formation Curriculum which takes participants on an “intentional and deliberate” Spiritual Journey:

**Inward** - to experience the Holy Spirit and develop personal spiritual disciplines (Centering Prayer, etc.) that will nurture a closer personal relationship with God.

**Outward** - to explore our callings in order to be in Service to others – working as partners and equals with those served, learning from them and enjoying Christian fellowship with them.

**Together** – to form Christian “Covenant” Groups (small Christian communities), which encourage and hold each member accountable, is one such model.

To hopefully capture some of what we learned there, I offer you my reflections.....

When two or more are gathered in Jesus’ name, miraculous things happen!!
A. “Real” conversations occur “one-on-one.” Not just about work, or the Carolina Panthers, but about Spiritual Formation, Inward Spiritual Development, listening for and discerning God’s call, etc.

B. The energy of the Holy Spirit begins stirring in us and through the weekend we become “hungry” for more.

C. We are encouraged to reflect on our past lives not from an economic or “Worldly Success Perspective,” but from a “Spiritual Development” perspective.

D. We begin to think about and discover once again who Jesus really is and what it’s like to be “like Jesus.”

E. We begin to experience the Peace of Christ through “Solitude” and “Prayer.”

F. We realize in order to more consistently “Be in His Presence,” we must become “Intentional” about creating a “structure” for “Inward Spiritual Development” through practicing the “Disciplines” of “Centering Prayer,” scriptural reading, and forming “covenanted small group Christian communities” with others who wish to go “deeper” into Spiritual Formation – as well as become a small group of people who trust each other deeply and who offer mutual support, concern and guidance for each other on a regular basis throughout the rest of our lives.

Through all of this, we begin to focus on allowing God to “make all things new” for us as He works in and through us to cause us to “Be and Act” in the “Image of Christ” and get on the path to “Life” which Jesus walks to create the “Kingdom of God on Earth.”

Now, we must focus on taking the “Next Steps.” Many of us are praying and trust that God will guide us and make certain this “Spiritual Fire” continues to burn so that the steps we decide to take will be pleasant in His sight. Jim Melson helped open our eyes and our hearts so that Christ will work through us to accomplish His will.

Thanks be to God for Jim, the Cornelius Corps, and New Community Church!

My name is Kathy MacKrell and I have been involved in The Cornelius Corps DC tutoring mission through Crossroads United Methodist Church for eight years. I have served at Ferebee-Hope Elementary School in Southeast DC for seven years and currently serve at Savoy Elementary also in Anacostia in Southeast DC.

Truthfully, I became a tutor mostly because I was curious about what the DC Public School system was like, especially in a more impoverished area of the city as compared to what I had heard on the television and in the newspapers. I had heard Jim Melson speak many times about the disparities within the DC Public School system and how race and economics can affect the quality of education a child can receive. I must admit that I had some preconceived notions of what it would be like. As a mom, coming from one of the richest counties in Virginia, I expected the schools themselves to be in disrepair, chaotic, and generally not safe. I was very nervous to get started but realized in order for me to find out what it was really like, I was going to have to get my hands dirty and see for myself.

From the very beginning, I realized that I wasn’t really a tutor. I have never felt like I was there to teach the students something academically. I go into the school each week and just receive whatever comes my way. The kids always greet me with a hug and a smile, almost as if they did not think I would return. I praise the kids when they do something well. I talk with them when they are having a bad day and give them an encouraging word. What I enjoy most about going to the school is just hanging out and talking to the kids. For me it is all about the relationships. While going over a lesson, reading a book, or doing an art project, I talk with them about their lives. A lot of things they tell me remind me of my own kids. They have families, favorite sports and music, and dreams for their futures. They are happy some days and sad on others. They get angry and frustrated at times as well. What make these kids different from mine is the circumstances in which they live. For a lot of these kids the school will be the safest place they will be all day. They are assured two meals to eat and will be warm and cared for while in the building.

My aim is to make these kids feel that they count and are heard. They need to know that despite all of the obstacles they face they are capable of succeeding just like my kids. After a while a special thing began to happen. When I started looking at things from the inside out and getting involved, I started to care. I began to have a special appreciation for the teachers and administration who work with these kids everyday. I started to tell people about these special kids and what great things they could do if given the love and support they deserved. When I was in Ferebee-Hope Elementary and now at Savoy Elementary, I feel like I can truly be the hands and feet of Jesus. He hung with and loved “the least of them.” All of us should too.