

## Intern Report

By Sarah and Nathan Holst

*Note: Sarah and Nathan spent mid-September to mid-October with BCM as the first part of their internship; this is their report. The second half of their journey will be with our friends at Spiritus Christi church in Rochester, NY, in January-February.*



### **Nathan: Claiming the Call of Watershed Discipleship**

What Christian young adult wouldn't want to experience this kind of internship at a time of formation of life calling? One month of staying in a backyard cabin, connecting to a watershed, reading books that speak to climate crisis, Christianity, democracy, and an alternative vision of bioregionalism, all in the context of sharing community with two amazing mentors who help unpack the books and share inspiring stories of what living a life of faith in action can be. It has been an incredible experience that I would recommend to any person seeking to deepen in their understanding of Christianity and discipleship.

It's certainly difficult to narrow down what was most meaningful about the internship, since there was so much, but to make an attempt, I would say the three most important pieces for me were the shared community, the conversations about the books we were reading, and the work we did for Elaine to support her doctoral work.

I loved the meals we shared together, where we experienced the daily prayer rituals—some serious and some silly, and shared stories about our lives. We saw modeled the hospitality of welcoming people into a home whenever someone visited or sharing a Sukkot feast with neighbors and friends. But perhaps most important to me were the stories we heard from Ched and Elaine about the choices they've made around their relationship to money (and how that plays out in their work relationships), as well as how they have chosen to live out what they value around bioregionalism, creating a home that honors the bounty and limits of the land, connecting themselves and others to the history of the region.

Transcribing the interviews Elaine did for her thesis has had a profound effect on what I see as possible in terms of reconciliation work both cross racially and internally within a community. And lastly, but maybe most importantly, there were the three books that Sarah and I are read out loud together at Ched's recommendation: Michael Northcott's *A Political Theology of Climate Change*, Kirkpatrick Sale's *Dwellers in the Land*, and Vincent Harding's *Hope and History*. They have me sinking into visions and spinning with thoughts of how I will apply what I'm learning to my life. Northcott has given me some important history of the philosophies which have led to much of our world crises, and he outlined many sobering realities our world is facing with climate change. What Sale offered is a comprehensive bioregional vision of how we can collectively respond to the crisis together. This theory lies at the core of much of Ched's work on Watershed Discipleship, which calls us all in our congregations to start living in harmony and mutually beneficial ways with our watersheds, beyond a sometimes superficial "creation care"

response to our crisis. It is incredibly inspiring, and only overwhelming in that there are so many ways I can respond, and I want to choose them all! Harding's book was an incredible account of the Black Freedom Movement (often referred to as the Civil Rights Movement). He brilliantly shares stories of nonviolent struggle, while asking those who read to mentor and teach our youth, offering them much needed tools and power that we can learn from our amazing brothers and sisters who participated in the Movement and continue to work for true democracy.

I feel that we have the starting of a life assignment, a vocation, whatever shape it may take. One book gave us important pieces of the current reality, one a vision of what could be, and one that offers us deep spiritual tools and lessons about democracy, in which to embody the vision and response to our crisis reality.

I look forward to diving in deeply to this life-long venture. As Ched often says, may we go deeply in our traditions, for we will need all the depth and wisdom we can muster to respond to what we're facing. I am ready to say yes to the unknown adventure, surely full of joy and pain, and look forward to joining the cloud of witnesses who have already been working tirelessly on this journey. May we all be given humility and passion to endure in this work together. Blessed be.

**Sarah: "You feel as if you've touched the heart of the place. That's a way of understanding" (Andy Goldsworthy, *Rivers and Tides*)**



I met Ched in the spring of 2013 in Portland, Oregon, where he was leading a workshop on economics, ecology and discipleship entitled "Is Jesus for the Birds?" I remember, as had also been true in the monthly webinars I attended, being struck at the way Ched wove together elements that I had been uncovering in my own center of call. His way of using Scripture, making the stories come alive in the modern indigenous struggle for justice, using art and the land itself to tell the story, suddenly lit on fire for me and made sense. It went beyond what I had experienced in ecological theology up until that point (a subject that already had me hooked), and left me thirsting for more.

I graduated from St. Ambrose University in the Duck Creek Watershed of Iowa in 2011, and was waist-deep in my second year of service with the Jesuit Volunteer Corps Northwest at that point. I spent my first year on the Crow Indian Reservation, where I was adopted into the clan system. A theme of my year serving in downtown Portland with the population experiencing homelessness was how to make sense of all of these worlds in which I had found myself, each as broken as they were alive, as full of blessing as poverty.

It was the evening after the workshop that Ched invited me to look into The Abundant Table Farm Project. That was when I first experienced what I now know as one of Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries' great gifts in a dominant culture shy about depth, meaning, mentorship and relationships: the ability to hear someone's hunger and match it with a place already doing the work.

I placed myself at the Abundant Table, in the often murky but nutrient-filled waters of working on a relationship-based, socially sustainable organic farm in the middle of the larger industrial agricultural context of the Oxnard plain. Two months after completing that year I found myself and my new spouse in a month-long internship with Ched and Elaine. Studying and working with them for a month was the perfect catch-all to make sense of my year on the farm: a kind of “Abundant Table 201.” It was also a great place to start tending the soil of Nathan’s and my shared life and callings. Casa Ana Schulz was the place for all these whirlwinds to settle and for me to dig my hands into the good soil of life again.

One of the places that Ched points us was to in *Who Will Roll Away the Stone?* is Isaiah’s “Love Song to the Land.” Reflecting on this got Nathan and I wondering how we will live out our own love song. The best thing that the Abundant Table gave me was the courage to stand for my calling to the Priesthood--a journey that has been filled with much anger and dismay in my context as a woman in the Roman Catholic Church. The desire to root the Mass into Watersheds, and to create spiritual spaces that the land can speak into with its own wildly various and wise ways, makes me all the more excited to be on this journey. I leave my month in Oak View inspired to know more in my bones:

- how the cycle of water, flowing to the lowest parts of the land, is like a map of God;
- how my German and Czech peoples’ story informs how I will engage in restorative justice;
- how engaging our own shadow sides moves us to love our brothers and sisters long forgotten by the church;
- how I will learn from a litany of saints much wider than my Catholic childhood tradition; and
- how my journey of being connected with like-minded folks in the Watershed Discipleship movement will lead me to do inward and outward work of learning, knowing, loving, and working to ever expand the idea of the “beloved community.”

Sometimes I think we all need to be continuously invited to engage deeply in ways that connect us to one another. My internship with BCM has done precisely that: invited me to know myself



in the context of Catholicism, larger Christianity, experiments with ever-widening democracy, and as a person of a place. Some of these seeds have already become healthy small plants, some of them can’t wait to be planted in the second part of our internship in Rochester, NY with Spiritus Christi. I have met so many folks in the 20/30s bracket who deeply sense that something is broken and are looking for a way to plant themselves, and I can only hope that they too will find mentorship like I have found in the Ventura Watershed.

*(Left: Nathan helping Elaine process cactus fruit juice.)*