



# July 2012 Institute Report

## Reflection on the July Bartimaeus Institute

By Rachel Hudgens

**Note:** *Rachel Hudgens was our summer intern for the month of July. She grew up part of one of the oldest intentional Christian communities in the U.S. All Institute photos below are by Tim Nafziger. (Right: Storytelling around the bonfire at dusk, Bartimaeus Institute).*



As soon as I arrived, I found myself plunged right into preparation for the most recent Bartimaeus Institute. This gathering worked to bridge the disciplines of permaculture and theology, and after our time together I find more and more that they are inextricably tied together for me. What does it mean to consider biblical tradition as the root of ecological sustainability, to examine the ties between cultural and ecological injustice and then root these in scriptural truths? What is the role of the Church as a body of disciples in engaging the call to be reconciled both with one another and with the land we live on? The institute offered a well rounded opportunity to grapple with these kinds of questions, as well as to participate in hands on work. Ched and Elaine's garden served as a beautiful site to explore some important permaculture techniques.

I am incredibly grateful to Chris and Melissa Shank-Grataski, as well as to Elaine and Ched, who facilitated workshops and Bible studies. The grace and integrity behind the work these good people do have been such a gift. I was challenged to think about my own sense of place, and the part of my identity that is grounded there. Ched talks about the history of our world being divided roughly into two broad general cultural categories: those whose identity is defined by the place they belong to, and those who presume to conquer, *own* and commodify land. If you step back, it doesn't take long to center the major conflicts of our world today around this basic cultural distinction.

For me the Institute was a time of coming awake and making connections. I understand the purpose of placing the two disciplines of theology and permaculture in conversation with one another. It is to cultivate a "Bioregional Discipleship" that is defined strongly by ties to the creation around us and by dismantling the structures and systems of injustice that continue to perpetuate violence towards our neighbors and our earth. If we as the church would learn



about our own places, beginning with the ebb and flow of water in our own particular watersheds, perhaps we would feel more responsibility to care for them. (Left: Rachel working on the Institute mural project.)

I am beginning to better understand that in order to love and serve my Creator, I am responsible to my fellow creation. Following Jesus holds implications on how I interact with my neighbor, my enemy, and the dirt beneath my feet. It calls me to come awake to the world around me and begin to listen differently. It is a listening that is grounded in traditions that are “so old, they appear new,” as Catholic Worker founder Peter Maurin put it.

We were reminded at the Institute to ground this push towards bioregional literacy in our scriptural traditions, telling the stories of our foremothers and forefathers whose relationship with the earth was one of mutual trust and respect. There is a need to re-member the old ways of being in and with the world. I am also grateful for the variety of stories and experiences brought together in the Institute. Coming together and bringing our different exposure to permaculture and theology meant that the kinds of conversations we had around meals were dynamic and important. Being in community with others whose experience is different than my own is essential to my discipleship. We can't face the legacy of consumerism and destruction of our neighbors and our earth on our own. The systems set in place are simply too large, and too destructive. It is in cooperation with one another, and working with and in the power of the Holy Spirit, that I find myself able to hope. If I am not alone, I can learn to stand upon the essential recognition of and lament for what has gone wrong, and find energy to reach towards something new. (Right: Chris talks about how to observe nature in a local oak grove.)



## Another Reflection on the July Institute

By Rozella and Thomas Hernandez-Apel

**Note:** Pre-teens Rozella and Thomas were the youngest attendees ever at an Institute. Children of Dennis Apel and Tensie Hernandez of the Guadalupe Catholic Worker, Rozella and Tom made a big contribution (pictured with Tensie at right). Rachel Hudgens visited them in Santa Maria afterward and interviewed them about their experience.



**Tom** (10 years old): I learned about alternatives to modern day medicines and foods, and about permaculture. It is a way to combine nature and gardening to provide an environmentally friendly style of planting, decreasing our carbon footprint and going back to how it was before humans were around.

I also learned about how nature intertwines with biblical history. For example, humans connect with nature in the Garden of Eden, in the garden where Jesus prays, and in the deserts. And about how women who are our ancestors used the resources around them to make wonderful medicines. This Institute awakened me to the fact that we aren't taking good care of the earth, and that it can literally break down. Pollution comes when we try and use artificial products - it leaves no space for our animals and plants. We need a solution that won't affect anyone badly, not any organism.

I also loved the mural. If I had one word to describe it, it would be "speechless." It was astounding: the color, the layers and how it blended perfectly. The story had all these heroes combined, sort of like a "League" of innovators who just changed the world," you know?

I think there is hope in more and more people and organizations getting together on these issues. I hope the participants from the Institute took home these things:

- knowledge about how to make medicine;
- knowing the size of their carbon footprint and how they can shrink it;
- how community works and how it helps;
- that chia pudding mixes with granola; and of course
- how to make "Wolf 'ems."

*[If you want to see an epic video of Tom by the bonfire, instructing us on the last bullet point in a French accent, go to: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GfyMFNBoSec>. Right: Tom listens as Elaine shares a story under an oak tree.]*



**Rozella** (12 years old; *at right by the glow of the campfire*): I'd like to thank all the people who participated for their open mindedness about having us participate. I knew the Institute was going to be an adult centered thing, but it was a good surprise. I learned a lot, and got to see both nature and humans in action for the better. It is important for us to know the land we live on, and what it takes to keep it healthy and clean. That's vital if we want to have the same earth to caretake, and it takes thought and persistence and knowledge. This means looking outside everyday and noticing the things that have changed and those that are still the same.



I was really glad to learn about all the details of Elaine and Ched’s place. Also about the traditions of women - that we have an amazing sense of healing and wisdom that we can offer. Our ancestors teach us so much even today, through their studies of herbs and medicines and how that profits our well being. Every detail in the Bible is an important clue or metaphor to how we ought to live our lives in the universe and nature. Certain words or phrases that we take for granted when we aren’t paying close attention are actually really important.

People who haven’t yet learned about the effects humans can have on the environment need to study. Knowing that I’m able to have an effect on the watershed I live in by doing all I can to help it is hopeful. It is important to remember that as far as being earth friendly, every little bit counts, and if you take the energy to do so, being a friend to the environment can be a fun and exciting task.

## Eat, Pray, Love the Earth: The July Institute—A Photo Essay

**Note:** The pictures below give you a sense of some of the highlights of the Summer Institute mentioned in the articles above. Thanks to Tim Nafziger for the photos; he and Charletta have also been posting to our BCM Facebook page daily. You’ll find more pictures, videos and stories about the Institute at: [www.facebook.com/pages/Bartimaeus-Cooperative-Ministries/134865803104](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Bartimaeus-Cooperative-Ministries/134865803104).



**Left and below, the leadership (L-R):** Chris Grataski explains sheet-mulching; Melissa Shank gives a “wise women” workshop on herbs, teas and tinctures;



Elaine Enns plants a medicinal plant native to Ukraine; Ched Myers leads Bible study under the old oak across the street.

**Below** clockwise from top left: Cassie Lewis, Jeff Kursonis, Erynn Smith and Sarah Bagge listen intently during a permaculture theory session inside; sheet mulching; former BCM intern Julia Baker hangs garlic & onions; Elaine shows off the worm bin.



**Above:** All meals were organic, vegetarian and home-cooked by our team of interns.

**Right:** A prayer circle beside the dry Ventura Riverbed.





**Above:** *The mural project.* Traveling muralist Dmitri Kadiev holds out his sketch of the design based on Elaine’s family stories in Ukraine a century ago, against the backdrop of his “mandala” layer of the mural, a prayerful undercoating. Kadiev (*right*) choreographed the 10 day project with his partner Lisa Slavick (*left*), and many helping hands.

**Right:** Elaine and Ched explain the mural during our house and yard Sabbath Year re- dedication at our “Interdependence Day” alternative celebration on July 4<sup>th</sup>.



**Left:** Charletta Erb and Tim Nafziger.

**Want to see more about the mural?** Check out Tim’s amazing 6 minute time-lapse video of its progress over the course of a week, from the mandala coat to finished product, at:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=ToQxYzpKTVY&feature=player\\_embedded#!](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ToQxYzpKTVY&feature=player_embedded#!)

