

Intern Reflection

by John Bergen



I really had no idea what I was signing up for by becoming an intern here in Oak View. Over Christmas, my friends and family kept asking me what I was doing in January, and the best response I could come up with was “whatever Ched and Elaine tell me to do.” I came here with questions of my own: how to maintain a commitment to following Jesus without burning out; how to integrate commitments to my local watershed and to social justice work that is both local and national; where I am being called after I finish college in May. I don’t have simple answers to these questions, but have learned a lot about the daily practices that can sustain a commitment to justice that comes with accepting the cross of Christ.

I owe much of my wonderful experience here at BCM to Raquel and John Jensen and Chris Wight, who have hosted me in their house next door to Casa Anna Schulz. They have been practicing Christian hospitality and leading house churches for years, and I have learned from them something about how to approach Christian community for the long-term. We’ve also had fun building a chicken coop, preparing their yard for a garden, and watching movies.

One of the reasons I don’t have a simple answer for what I’m doing here is that part of this work involves flexibility and a willingness to try new things every day. Without the bureaucratic structures of the office, or the official church, to tell us what is happening every single day, we have to get creative in arranging our time, so that we can care for ourselves, each other, our watershed and our broader world. I have also found that I need to be open to having my time arranged by the needs of others. There are no guarantees for my week, but at the same time we are all given an equal voice in how the community work gets done.

It is wonderful to be surrounded by people who have given their lives to this work and who have been fed deeply by the Gospel and by the lives of others. BCM is helping me learn something that can only be found when we combine reflection and action--something that college has not taught me. Each person here possesses a deep wisdom about their place in the world and how the call of Christ is different for each of us based on our history and our location. I look forward to returning to the Black River Watershed in northeast Ohio to deepen my roots and continue that work. A friend once told me that burnout is what happens when we have chosen to draw from a well that is too shallow to sustain us. If I take one thing from my time here, I hope it is a connection with the deep well of Love that has sustained generations of Christian activists and organizers.