

## United States: At home in beloved community

Written by Lizz Schallert

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In November I received an email from Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) describing the 21st Century Freedom Ride, asking if someone would be willing to represent CPT on the trip. After reviewing the website, I quickly jumped on the opportunity to spend a weekend with Dr. Vincent Harding and dozens of folks representing present social justice movements. I am thankful to be a part of CPT and support its work to reduce violence and undo structural oppression.

Over the weekend of the Freedom Ride I found myself celebrating the diversity of God's people: openly undocumented youth, recently incarcerated women now working against our prison industrial complex, formerly homeless men seeking shelter for others, sisters and brothers at various Catholic workers and intentional Christian communities, and those carrying on the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement by fighting for racial justice—certainly an unlikely gathering in the eyes of the world.

What is the thread that binds us together in our diverse ages, races, and stories? How did we all end up on a bus travelling across southern states, visiting war zones and holy sites of the Civil Rights Movement? As the weekend progressed, answers to these questions emerged.

While Dr. Harding spoke to us and encouraged us toward the New America, the "America that must be born again," the dust began to settle and the spool began to spin. We all wanted to be midwives in this work—to dream, to yearn, to create this "country that does not exist, of which we are citizens."

Throughout the weekend we were blessed, critiqued, and encouraged by Dr. Harding as we envisioned a new democracy. We sat close, shared the microphone, and incarnationally found ourselves living what we hope for.

As a Christian, I could not help but draw connections between our discussions of hope for a new country with my hope for a new Church. As a somewhat lost Catholic-Quaker-Brethren who grew up in the Church of Christ, I felt at home for a few days. Every voice mattered. Everyone was seeking the truth.

Before boarding the bus to Alabama I was hoping I could still make it to Mass on Sunday, particularly in this season of Advent, when we anticipate and hope for the return of Christ in us and the world. This desire gently diminished and disappeared as Dr. Harding put on Ben Branch's Operation Breadbasket Orchestra's version of "Precious Lord, Take My Hand" during

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our first gathering over the weekend.

As the song came over us our eyes began to close, our toes tapped, and we were together. Our barriers no longer mattered. Eternity mingled with the present. This is the Holy Church, I thought. This is the work we are to be about. Here we were, in 2012, a rag-tag mix of concerned citizens of a "country that does not exist," singing Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s last request.

*Ben, make sure you play 'Precious Lord' in the meeting tonight. Play it real pretty. –MLK Jr. on April 4, 1968 at the Lorraine Motel, just before his assassination.*