

View from Blackwater Bluff — Charles LaFond

WEBSTER — Blackwater Bluff is a small farm that juts out over the edge of the meandering Blackwater River just below the dam of the same name, not far from Canterbury's Shaker Village. This small farmhouse built in the mid-1800s is where I'm making my new home, after having left a monastery in Cambridge, Mass. The farm has a pottery and a bit of forest, so it's a good, quiet place to call home.

Most of my old friends know me as a city dweller! They look at me funny and say, "What do you do there?" implying that I was foolish to choose a house on a dirt road in the woods.

I say I am busy "becoming." And it is true. I am trying daily to become God's hope for me. Sometimes I fail miserably and sometimes I can just barely hold my own. And sometimes I can see that I am changing — becoming converted into the likeness of the One who created me.

"Stewardship" — the word gets a bum rap in church. It gets tarted up with all sorts of misplaced anxiety and misspent efforts of design and program. Some people, in a fit of frustration, will say they want to erase the word from the church's vocabulary and start again. But I like the word. It tells the truth that what we have is not ours and that what seems to be ours is really a gift given by the real "master." Even so, I sometimes resist the notion of stewardship because I want to pretend that what I have came from me and is mine to do with as I please. But that is a lie.

Like most people, I've found that moving into a new house involves buying stuff. And I like to buy stuff. As a result of purchases at outlets and 50 percent off tables I'm on buyer lists, and now I'm being flooded with catalogues as the Christmas sales season approaches. Television is doing the same thing — playing on my insecurities to get me to buy things. "Am I good enough? Am I loved? Am I handsome? Am I liked? Am I impressive enough?" When the answer bubbles up from a sad place as "no," then I go shopping. I anesthetize myself with small and useless purchases.

But on my better days I am and want to be a child of the living God who created me and formed me and continues to form me. The ads



HOME AND POTTERY OF CHARLES LAFOND

on TV are lies. The loneliness is lies. The implication that things will make me happy is a lie.

What is true is that we are deeply loved by a God who gave us all we have. What is also true is that God delights in our enjoyment of what we have. As I live my story, it is lived as a Christian — created in the image of a God whose primary way of being is as creator, a lover and a giver.

So I too must be a creator, a lover and a giver. As a potter I love to create. As a friend I love to love. But sometimes I need help being a giver. I count on the life of the church to help me in my becoming a better giver.

I think Blackwater Bluff is where God will do some of God's best and hardest work on my soul. Becoming is hard work but it is wonderful work, too. I take heart from the words of author Frederick Buechner who speaks about 'telling secrets:

"...I have come to believe that by and large the human family all has the same secrets, which are both very telling and very important to tell. They are telling in the sense that they tell what is perhaps the central paradox of our condition — that what we hunger for perhaps more than anything else is to be known in our full humanness, and yet that is often just what we also fear more than anything else. It is important to tell at least from time to time the secret of who we truly and fully are — even if we tell it only to ourselves — because otherwise we run the risk of losing track of who we truly and fully are and little by little come to accept instead the highly edited version which we put forth in hope that the world will find it more acceptable than the real thing. It is important to tell our secrets too because it makes it easier that way to see where we have been in our lives and where we are going." Telling Secrets (New York: Harper & Row, 1991, pp. 2-3.)