

# LIFE

Two thousand  
years after  
the Nativity, the  
mother of Jesus is  
more BELOVED,  
POWERFUL and  
CONTROVERSIAL  
than ever.

The  
Mystery of

# MARY

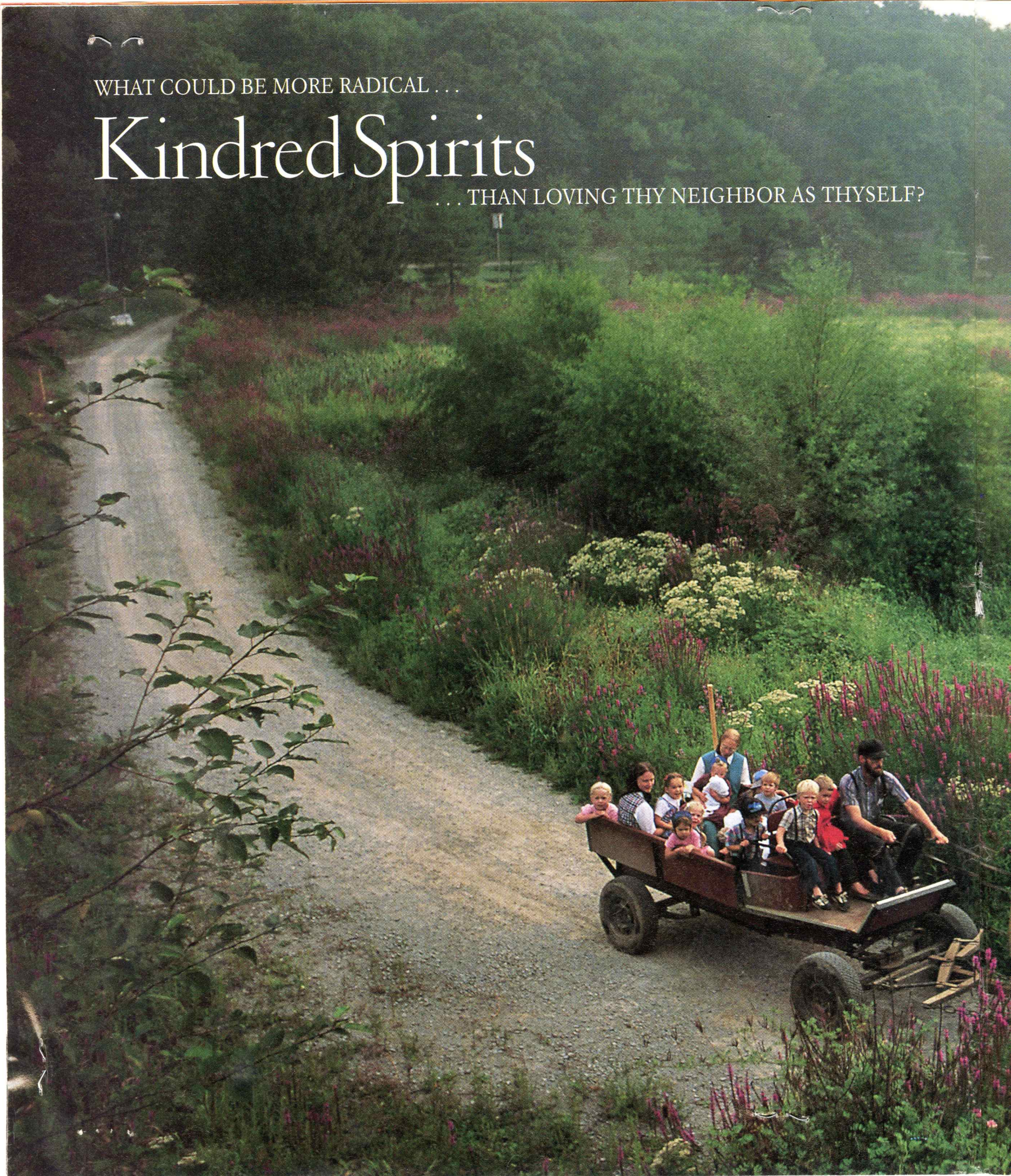
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WHAT COULD BE MORE RADICAL . . .

# Kindred Spirits

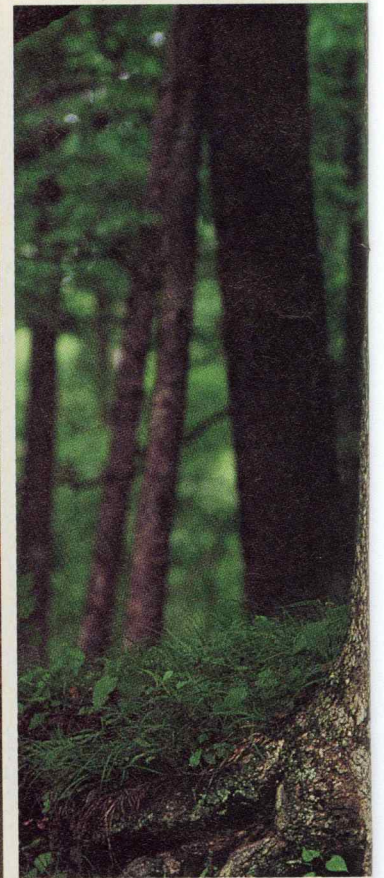
. . . THAN LOVING THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF?



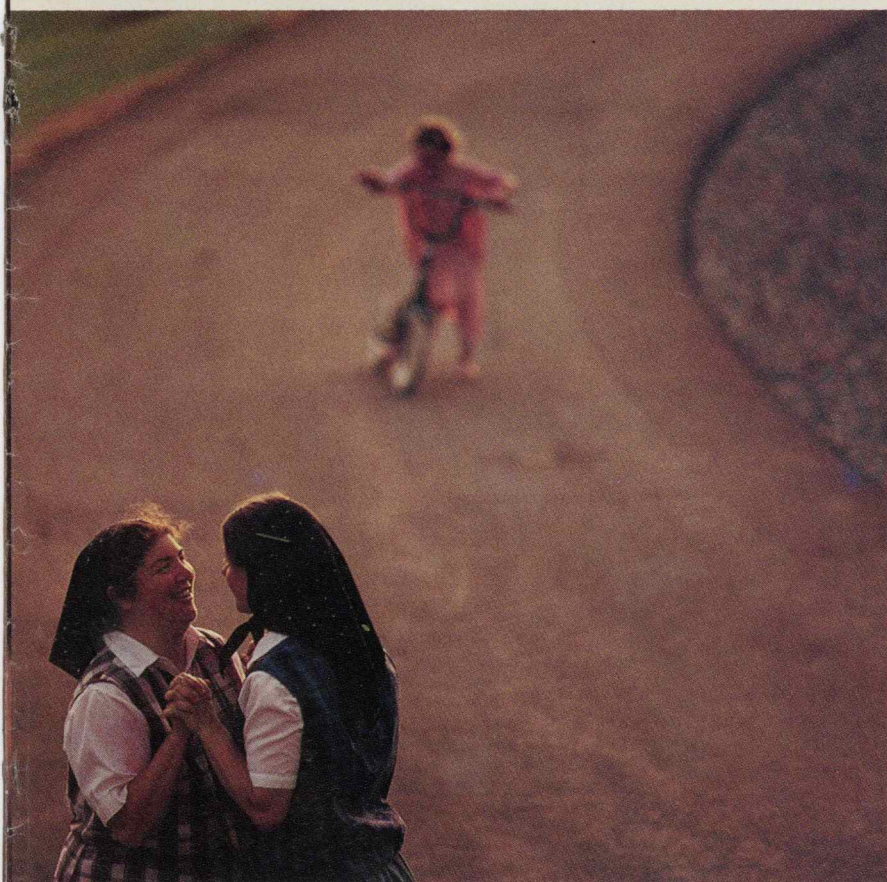


Despite the rustic look of this excursion, members of the Bruderhof are less rigid about modes of travel—or music or most other things—than are other Anabaptist groups.

Photography by  
**Susie Post**  
Text by  
**Elizabeth Royte**



Weddings and baptisms are cause for celebration, and that means special linen,



candles and singing—in four-part harmony.

T

wo-week-old Vernon Kleinsasser snuggles in the arms of his mother, Lynn, as she sits at her window. Outside, in a time-honored ritual of welcome, 250 people serenade the baby with a lullaby. Today these singers are Vernon's neighbors. But 20 years from now, if Vernon sticks around and makes the choice they all have made—to seek baptism in the Spring Valley Bruderhof community in western Pennsylvania—they will become his brothers and sisters.

More than any other sect in America, the Bruderhof movement is dedicated to the principle of unity, the idea of family writ large. All things are held in common. Food belongs to no one in

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THE FEEDING OF THE BRUDERHOF'S CHILDREN IS, LIKE EVERYTHING ELSE IN THE SETTLEMENT, A STUDY IN COMMUNITY (TOP LEFT).  
.....

LOVE CONQUERS ALL: AFTER MARRYING ANTHEA KEIDERLING OF SPRING VALLEY, JOE IDIONG, A HUTTERIAN, CELEBRATES AT A "LOVE MEAL" (BOTTOM LEFT), PART OF A THREE-DAY FETE.  
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IT'S A HUCK FINN LIFE: ALL SIX BRUDERHOF COMMUNITIES IN THE U.S., INCLUDING SPRING VALLEY (TOP RIGHT), ARE IN PLACES SELECTED PRIMARILY FOR THEIR GREAT NATURAL BEAUTY.  
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THE BRUDERHOF FAITH ENCOURAGES ITS MEMBERS TO MAINTAIN A CHILDLIKE JOY, AND THEREBY BRING JOY TO OTHERS (BOTTOM RIGHT).



particular. The kerchiefs worn by women and the dresses on their backs—long, and of modest design—are cut from the same bolt of cloth. Families in Spring Valley often trade apartments, and members regularly relocate to one of the five other Bruderhof settlements in the United States. A telephone tie-line links the 2,500 members and six groups; each week there are conference calls during which decisions affecting the church are made by consensus.

“Bruderhof” is a German word meaning “place of brothers,” and the church’s first place, upon the founding of the movement by radical Christian Eberhard Arnold, was in Germany in 1920. There were relocations to England and Paraguay before the sect reached the U.S. in 1954. Along the way, links were established with the Hutterians, an Anabaptist denomination much like the Amish or Mennonites. But lately the Hutterians have had problems with the Bruderhof movement’s increasing involvement with social issues—the membership is strident in its opposition to capital punishment, for instance—and two years ago the older, larger group formally cut ties.

It’s not just politics; Bruderhof members *are* different. They’re ever smiling. There is no ban on music in Spring Valley, nor on computers or phones or fun. The Bruderhof prayer-book asks, “Are you here for the joy and delight of your soul?” If your answer is no, you’re in the wrong place.

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SEEDING THE NEW SCHOOLYARD IS A TASK FILLED WITH DELIGHT. BY ACTING AS ONE, THE BRUDERHOF ASPIRE TO THE COMMUNION GOD WANTS FOR ALL HUMANITY.



When a brother or sister needs help, he



or she receives help from everyone else. Helping brings joy—to one, to all.

Additional reporting by **Sasha Nyary**

Clare Stober, a former Quaker, answered yes four years ago. Today, still joyful, she heads across campus to her design job at *The Plough*, the Bruderhof's quarterly publication. Her brothers and sisters pass by on their way to other jobs within the community: sewing, running the library, tending to farm animals, teaching the youngest children (teens go to public school) or toiling in the factory down the hill. The Bruderhof make high-end toys for daycare centers and equipment for the disabled. The community receives money for these products, of course, but salaries—of course—are nonexistent. Here, one works for the common good. Profits revert to the community to buy land, to build schools and to send members away.

Yes, to send members away. Before Vernon Kleinsasser will be allowed to answer yes, he will be urged to go away.

Their religion is called by some "the hardest in the world to join." Only adults can enlist—one is not simply born into the Bruderhof Communities—and if it is thought that a candidate is not devoutly committed to Bruderhof principles, then he will not be baptized. "We'd rather have a good friend than a bad member," goes an old Bruderhof saying. Moreover, says Chris Zimmerman, an editor of *The Plough*, "as young adults, we're encouraged to go into the world and do something else." Elders want adolescents to try the outside to see if that is where their fate and faith are calling. "Ours is not an *inherit* religion," explains Mary Ann Sayvetz, an elderly woman who used to live in an English Bruderhof. "The young people come back, and they contribute more. They share their experiences and learn to articulate what they stand for." They really do come back? Yes, they do: They decide, at a rate of 80 percent, to return and become novices, the first step toward baptism.

The Spring Valley commune has a preschool, nursery school, even a medical clinic. By 11 a.m., Dr. Diane Fox's waiting room is

A FLIGHT AND A PHONE ARE PERFECTLY O.K. FOR ELDER J. CHRISTOPH ARNOLD (TOP, LEFT).



full. Children need shots, an elderly man wants a new prescription.

Fox and her husband, an M.D. who practices medicine at the New Meadow Run commune half a mile away, joined Spring Valley with their four children five years ago. She admits it wasn't easy to give up the autonomy and comfortable lifestyle she and her husband enjoyed in Sarasota, Fla. At first, Diane missed the freedom to go shopping. "We all chafe here," she says. "We all want to satisfy selfish desires, and that is the constant struggle." She pauses, smiles. "But look at what we get in return. I have the support and love of my neighbors. My children are safe and cared for, twenty-four

hours a day, by people who share my values. We have open space and food on the table." She pauses again. "And we have forgiveness."

Once, Diane misdiagnosed an allergy, and the patient had to be rushed to the local hospital with a hugely swollen arm. "Outside, I would have been sued," she says. "But in the Bruderhof, the people understood, and they forgave me."

On a winter's night in Spring Valley, another productive, joyful day in the community nears its end. Members gather for supper in the dining hall. There's very little chitchat. Instead, as forks scrape across ceramic plates, a brother reads aloud from an account by writer Jonathan Kozol about the breakdown of the American family. This American family listens intently. □

A BRUDERHOF RULE: ANY AND ALL GRIEVANCES MUST BE RESOLVED BY SUNSET.

Preserving the American family is a constant topic of conversation.