



BAPTIST PEACEMAKER

The Journal of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America Vol 28 No 3



Seeds of Hope / Sallylynn Askins

*We shall
find peace.
We shall
hear angels.
We shall see
the sky sparkling
with diamonds.*

—Anton Chekov

The Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America gathers, equips and mobilizes Baptists to build a culture of peace rooted in justice. We labour with a wonderful array of peacemakers to change the world.

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Staff:

Johnny Almond, Communications Coordinator
Kathy Coogan, Administrative Assistant
Katie Cook, Editor, *Baptist Peacemaker*
Evelyn Hanneman, Operations Coordinator
LeDayne McLeese Polaski, Program Coordinator
Bob Spinks, Networking/Development Coordinator

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BPFNA Central Office: 4800 Wedgewood Dr., Charlotte, NC 28210; 704/521-6051; fax 704/521-6053; email: bpfna@bpfna.org; web: www.bpfna.org.

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Martin Luther King and the Calling to Speak

by Evelyn Hanneman

The 40th anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. this last April 4th elicited much thought about him and his legacy. I learned new details of that day that moved me to tears. And reading King's full speech from the night before has moved me to action.

King led a march protesting low pay for black garbage collectors in Memphis, TN, on April 3, 1968. That night, he was to speak at a mass meeting. Feeling sick, he had asked Ralph Abernathy to speak for him, but, enthused by Abernathy's speech, King rose to deliver what would be his final speech. He had spoken the lines, "I have seen the Promised Land" and "I might not make it with you" before, but that night, they proved to be all-too true.

When King spoke a year earlier at The Riverside Church in New York City, he did so because of a statement that church had made about the Vietnam War. One of the lines in the statement read: "A time comes when silence is betrayal." That day King said, "The calling to speak is often a vocation of agony, but we must speak. We must speak with all the humility that is appropriate to our limited vision, but we must speak."

For almost 25 years now, the BPFNA has spoken out for peace rooted in justice. Early concerns included nuclear proliferation, apartheid in South Africa, revolution in Nicaragua, racism and conscientious objection. Statements, resources and our newsletters and journals all spoke boldly of the need for peace—most specifically, that elusive peace that is based on justice, not a mere cessation of fighting.

We experienced some of the "agony" King spoke of when we issued our statement, *Justice and Sexual Orientation*, that elicited strong emotions from many people. We spoke even when we thought very few people were listening.

Pam De Young wrote a moving article in a 1987 edition of *PeaceWork*, then BPFNA's newsletter. In it, she told of a letter her nine-year old son had written to US President Ronald Reagan from our Peace Camp, saying succinctly, "Please stop the bombs." She described the response he received—a full-color brochure of the White House. Clearly the President was oblivious to her son's "urgent message." She added, "Oblivious aptly describes many Americans' response to the crisis facing our country....If they have momentarily

faced the truth about our self-serving violence, they have found it too overwhelming to even try to sort out."

Following the September 11, 2001 attacks in the US, BPFNA spoke of the need for a different response to that violence. Ken Sehested, then executive director, wrote, "Part of our prophetic calling is to insist that there are rival, realistic and spiritually-informed alternatives to those policies which depend on superior firepower and the need for political dominations. We lift them up and, together with all who share this common vision, recommend them to our national leaders."

I wrote of the need for a response based in restorative justice: address the crime—don't start a war. "The perpetrators need to be brought to justice in an international court of law....Diplomatic action along with crime investigation needs to be part of a police action that seeks out the individuals responsible. Justice can be done, but not through war." But US leaders led us into war.

But now there is good news! Forty years after King was shot down in Memphis and 21 years after Pam De Young wrote those words, US Americans have looked at the current world situation and are saying, "Enough!" A recent *New York Times*/CBS poll showed that 81 percent of US Americans think "things have pretty seriously gotten off on the wrong track." All signs point to people looking for a new way—one that doesn't kill innocent women, children and men, that cares for the earth, that provides enough for all.

On April 5, 1967, King said, "Another reason that I'm happy to live in this period is that we have been forced to a point where we're going to have to grapple with the problems that men [and women] have been trying to grapple with through history, but the demand didn't force them to do it. Survival demands that we grapple with them. Men [and women], for years now, have been talking about war and peace. But now, no longer can they just talk about it. It is no longer a choice between violence and nonviolence in this world; it's nonviolence or nonexistence!"

Let us choose to rededicate ourselves to that "vocation of agony," to continue to speak—and to act—for peace rooted in justice. We know what King saw from that mountaintop. We, too, are eager to move into a world of justice and peace. It is time we crossed over into the Promised Land. Working together, we can do it. —Evelyn Hanneman is BPFNA Operations Coordinator.

New Estimate Triples Number of War Deaths over Past 50 Years

Spurred by criticism of current methods of estimating deaths from wartime violence, Dr. Ziad Obermeyer at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, MA, along with other researchers, designed a new approach.

The new method compares eyewitness and media reports at the time of the war to information from United Nations' World Health Surveys gathered from families later, during peacetime.

Researchers studied wars in 13 countries between 1955 and 2002. They estimate that almost 5.5 million people were killed, including 3.8 million in Vietnam. The study, published in the *British Medical Journal*, disputes common beliefs that war deaths are decreasing.

Obermeyer stated that it is important that more reliable figures be used to determine war casualties. The true costs of war need to be clear to the military, politicians and the general public.

Building on a study published in *The Lancet* in October 2006, the British polling agency ORB estimated Iraqi civilian deaths at 1,220,580 in September 2007. Documented civilian deaths, from media reports, are between 85,318 and 93,060. As Dr. Obermeyer indicated in his survey, using media and eyewitness reports grossly undercounts such casualties while surveys of families on members who were killed are much more accurate.

—Sources: *voanews.com*, *opinion.co.uk* and *iraqbodycount.org*
See related information on The Cost of War on page 15.

Proclaiming Jubilee

This spring the BPFNA called upon our US brothers and sisters to turn their US tax rebates into Jubilee by giving half of it to the poor. We asked you to take a pledge to participate in God's Jubilee economics by doing this. Then we asked you to let us know what you had done. Here are some of your responses.

• Underwood Memorial Baptist Church, Wauwatosa, WI sponsored a "Render Away from Caesar" program. They published the following on their web site:

Are you primarily a citizen or a consumer? This summer, the government promises most Americans a \$600 tax rebate check in hopes of stimulating the economy. Take this opportunity to write your own version of the national budget. Buying more stuff that you don't need, manufactured who knows where, is not the answer. Give your tax rebate dollars to just, grassroots organizers making a real difference.... Make a choice. Make a difference.

• Members of Lake Avenue Baptist Church in Rochester, NY suggested that people give their rebate to the church for their work with refugees.

• First Baptist Church, Madison, WI members responded generously, giving over \$20,000 of their tax rebate money to the church. Some of the money helped to house three local families. The rest of it will be distributed among ABC-USA International Ministries, helping those returning from incarceration, and rebuilding the Gulf Coast.

The following groups have received gifts from individuals as a result of the Jubilee Pledge:

- a veterans group
- the Judicial Process Commission
- the Food Bank of the Southern Tier & Steuben County Humane Society (for their spay/neuter/vet care program for low-income individuals)
- Vincent Village, a homeless shelter in Fort Wayne, IN, and the San Antonio Catholic Worker House in San Antonio, TX
- DAYS...the Downtown Associate Youth Services organization at First Congregational Church (They sponsor a six-week summer day camp for low-income neighborhood children.)
- the Yamhill Community Action Program, which sponsors a food bank and offers housing to homeless people.



Seeds of Hope/Robert Van Darden

Baptist Peacemaker
**Honored by
Associated
Church Press**

WACO, TX—The *Baptist Peacemaker* staff received word just before press time that the publication has been awarded the Associated Church Press (ACP) Award of Excellence for the “Best in Class” category. These awards are for issues published in 2007.

ACP judges cited the staff’s willingness to take risks “with potentially controversial articles, presenting even ‘incite-ful’ issues in accepting, open-minded—yet balanced—ways.” One judge wrote that Rev. Elise Elrod’s story “A Whole Life Policy” was a good example of the coverage of crucial topics. [See Vol 27 No 4, Winter 2007, page 6.]

Another comment from the judges was that there was “some real reporting going on here,” and that a “host of contributors gives a sense of true conversation.” The publication received the highest marks in effectiveness of communication and appropriateness for the intended audience.

—From BPFNA staff

***Send Us
Your Stories!***

One of the purposes of producing periodicals like *Baptist Peacemaker* is to connect peacemakers with other peacemakers, so that we don’t feel so isolated or helpless. It is vital that we share our stories with each other, to inspire each other, to trade ideas and to keep hope and energy alive in our movement.

So please share your stories. What is your congregation or group doing to promote peace?

Send your stories to Katie Cook at 602 James, Waco, TX 76706; or email them to seedseditor@clearwire.net.



**Global Baptist
Peace Conference**

9-14 February 2009

*Villa Mondo Migliore
Castelgondolfo, Italy*

*Vivi in armonia,
Vivi in pace*

*“Live in Harmony,
Live in Peace”*

—Romans 12:16-19

DEADLINE FOR REGISTRATION
1 December 2008

*For more information, go to
globalbaptistpeace.org*

This is the fourth Global Baptist Peace Conference. Previous conferences were held in Sweden (1988), Nicaragua (1992), and Australia (2000). These conferences bring together Baptists from around the globe who are active in nonviolent struggles for justice and peacemaking ventures. We engage in storytelling, networking, training, spiritual development, and encouragement for the sake of strengthening the witness of Baptist peacemaking in various global contexts. Though this gathering is intended for the Baptist community, it is open to those in the wider interdenominational family. The rich diversity of faith is part of our witness for peace.

Canadians to Cross Country in Multifaith Walk against Violence

CALGARY, SK—The World Health Organization (WHO) defines violence as “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation.”

A group of Canadians, representing a variety of faiths, are walking across the country to raise awareness about the dangers, and the consequences of using violence to resolve conflicts. On April 20, a number of people from Calgary, SK journeyed to Halifax, NS, to begin the cross-Canada Multifaith Walk Against Violence. The group will walk all the way to Victoria, BC, which they hope to reach in November.

Walkers represent aboriginal communities, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism and Hinduism, as well as other faiths and backgrounds. Organisers hope to raise awareness about the effects of violence on society as a whole, and how all forms of violence touch human beings as individuals.

The Walk aims to provide a forum for people concerned about the effects of violence on society to speak their minds. The target is broad—including war, terrorism, gang violence, bullying, domestic violence,

child abuse and elder abuse—all forms of violence that prevent individuals and societies from reaching their full potential.

“We wish to give a voice to the victims of violence and to all those concerned enough to speak out,” said Linda Zachri, Media and Public Relations Coordinator. “We also wish to promote the message that spirituality and spiritual leaders, far from being an obstacle that social services have to contend with—are actually a valuable resource, especially when faith groups work together.”

The walkers entered Quebec on May 10, planning to reach Ontario on May 28, Manitoba on August 14, Saskatchewan on August 29, Alberta on September 16 and British Columbia on October 3.

“We hope to provide an opportunity for all religious groups to join forces for a worthy cause, to learn from each other and to influence not only Canadians, but the whole world, to eradicate all forms of violence for a peaceful, beautiful world,” Zachri said.

The progress of the walk is being monitored online at www.walkagainstviolence.com. For more detailed information, contact Syed Soharwardy at 403/831-6330, leave a message at the toll-free number: 877/WALKALL (877/925-5255), or send an email to: walkagainstviolence@shaw.ca.

“A Call to Compassion” from ABC-USA

In the face of the tragedies in Burma and China, the global food crisis, the impact of refugee resettlement upon local churches, the growing financial problems facing US families, and the continuing struggles faced in rebuilding the Gulf Coast, the leadership of American Baptist Churches USA is asking its congregations to declare the first Sunday of each month from June-December 2008 as “Compassion Sunday”.

Congregations are asked to show solidarity with those who suffer by remembering them in prayer and committing to respond in tangible ways to their suffering as the hands and feet of Christ. Examples cited include fasting and contributing the money normally spent on the meal to local efforts such as food pantries, contributing all or a portion of an income tax refund for relief efforts, or joining a Gulf Coast building project. More information at www.abc-usa.org.

Christian Peace Witness for Iraq Calls for Day of Prayer for Peace

Joining with the World Council of Churches and the United Nations, the Christian Peace Witness for Iraq (CPWI) calls all churches to join together in the yearly International Day of Prayer for Peace. The 2008 Day of Prayer for Peace will be held on September 21.

The International Day of Prayer for Peace offers an opportunity for church communities in all places to pray and act together to nurture lasting peace in the hearts of people, their families, communities and societies. The Day of Prayer is one of the initiatives of the World Council of Churches’ “Decade to Overcome Violence”. Congregations worldwide are invited to pray for peace, possibly using the same prayers, in all participating churches on Sunday, September 21.

BPFNA is a CPWI partner, and encourages its congregations to join in this effort. More information at www.christianpeacewitness.org.

Gandhi-King Day Slated in Hamilton, ON

HAMILTON, ON—Folks in Hamilton, ON, have planned an event for October to mark the anniversary of the assassination of two of the dominant figures of the 20th century, Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Sixty years ago, on January 30, 1948, Gandhi was mowed down by an assassin's bullet while on his way to a prayer meeting in a garden in New Delhi. Forty years ago, on April 4, 1968, King suffered a similar fate while standing on the balcony of a hotel in Memphis, TN before leaving for dinner with the Rev. Samuel Billy Kyles and his family.

The Gandhi-King Day is slated for Saturday October 4, 2008, to mark the anniversary of their deaths and to highlight the relevance of their lives and messages for us today. The day begins with the Gandhi Peace Festival, which runs from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at Commonwealth Square across from Hamilton City Hall. Following that, participants are invited to a workshop, "Living Gandhi and King Today," with Dr. David Adams, the Gandhi Peace Festival keynote speaker, and King's friend, Rev. Samuel Billy Kyles, from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. at the Convention Centre.

Finally, a dinner will be held at the Convention Centre, starting at 7:00 p.m., at which the keynote speaker will be Rev. Kyles. Tickets for the dinner are

\$65 per person. Rev. Kyles will also be the guest homilist at the 11:00 a.m. service at Stuart Memorial Church on Sunday, October 5.

Gandhi and King shared a common commitment to nonviolence, human freedom, equality and justice. Gandhi is best known for the practice of active nonviolent resistance, which he used effectively in the struggle for the liberation of India from British colonial rule. He was a strong advocate for the dispossessed.

King's contribution to the struggle for civil rights for African Americans through nonviolent resistance is widely celebrated today. He championed not only civil rights, but also local and international economic justice and peace.

Hamilton was one of the first Canadian cities to declare itself a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone. The city's mayor is a member of Mayors for Peace. Hamiltonians have publicly commemorated the legacy of Gandhi and King for many years, including through the annual Gandhi Peace Lecture and Peace Festival and the celebration of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. This special Gandhi-King Day event continues that tradition.

—For more information about these events, please contact Rama Singh at singh@mcmaster.ca or Gary Warner at warner@mcmaster.ca.

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A Peace Art Festival for Children and Youth

ROCHESTER, NY—Lake Avenue Baptist Church of Rochester, NY, a BPFNA partner congregation, found a creative way to teach peacemaking to children and youth. Earlier this year, they invited young people to create artwork using the theme, “Hands and Words are Not for Hurting.” Participants were asked to show how hands and words can be used to work for peace through drawings, paintings, creative writing, and clay.

Coordinator Jane Grant contacted local public and private schools and other churches, and urged them to ask their children and youth to participate. At Lake Avenue, the Sunday School classes for older children and youth spent two Sundays on the project. Teachers introduced the theme and connected it to Jesus’ teachings, “Love your enemies,” “Blessed are the peacemakers,” and “Love your neighbor as you love yourself.”

The teachers encouraged children and youth to think of ways hands and words can be used for peacemaking, and then turned them loose with a variety of art tools. With younger elementary children, leaders took just one Sunday for the project and were very concrete in their presentation. They guided the children to think of specific things they can do with their hands, and to think of words they could use to make them helpful peacemakers. Then they gave the children paper on which to draw.

On the day of the show, Jane Grant had mounted all of the two-dimensional artwork on construction paper and displayed it on bulletin boards and room dividers throughout the narthex of the church. Three-dimensional artwork was displayed on tabletops. Each piece was marked with the artist’s name, age or grade, the title of their work, and their church or school. Every piece of art received a gold seal and a ribbon.

“More than 100 refugees from Burma, both Karen and Chin, have come into the congregation in the last year,” pastor Peter Carman wrote. “So this was a great opportunity for these youth and children to express their ideas and hopes for peace, coming out of their background of war and relocation in refugee camps.”

A kindergarten class in a nearby Catholic school created a quilt. Each block included a child’s handprint and a word or phrase of something that can be done to work for good. The after-school program in

the public school closest to the church asked each child to trace their hand and decorate it and write out what they could do to make peace.

Their teachers actually picked up five of their students and brought them to the Art

Show and Festival. “The children’s faces lit up as they saw their artwork displayed!” Peter wrote.

Another child from that school wrote a wonderful poem that she is planning to use as part of her application to Rochester City School’s School of the Arts.

Following regular Sunday morning activities, the church provided a light lunch of peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches and fruit for those participating in the Peace Art Festival.

A few of the activities included making “God’s Eyes” from craft sticks and yarn, Peaceful Playdough—using playdough to pound on when you’re mad, Making a Hug—tracing a child’s arms on a piece of paper and cutting it out to decorate and give someone, and Building Bridges of Peace—thinking of words that make peace and writing them on small pieces of wood and then gluing them together to make a bridge.

“As I looked around the room at the wonderful diversity of children, youth, and adults all enjoying creative, playful, and peaceful activities, I knew we were experiencing a little taste of God’s Peaceable Kingdom!” Peter wrote.

—This story is from Model Ministries, an electronic publication sent by the BPFNA office to partner congregations and other. If you have a peacemaking story that you would like to share, please send it to LeDayne McLeese Polaski at ledayne@bpfna.org. To sign up to receive Model Ministries, visit www.bpfna.org/mm.

**The BPFNA
Partner
Congregation
Program...**



...to encourage strategic alliances for mission between local churches and the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America
For more information, contact LeDayne McLeese Polaski at ledayne@bpfna.org or 704/521-6051.

partner congregations

Meet the BPFNA Partner Congregations

The BPFNA welcomes its newest

Partner Congregations:

Lake Street Church

Evanston, IL

University Baptist & Brethren Church

State College, PA

AB Church of the Beatitudes, St Petersburg, FL
ABC of Connecticut, Hartford, CT
ABC Rochester/Genesee Region, Rochester, NY
Allen Temple Baptist Church, Oakland, CA
Austin Heights Baptist Church, Nacogdoches, TX
Baptist Temple, Rochester, NY
Binkley Memorial Baptist Church, Chapel Hill, NC
Burlington Baptist Church, Burlington, ON
Calvary Baptist Church, Washington, DC
Central Baptist Church, Hartford, CT
Central Baptist Church, Wayne, PA
Christian Unity Baptist Church, New Orleans, LA
Church of the Covenant, Palmer, AK
Church of the Savior, Cedar Park, TX
Church in the Cliff, Dallas, TX
Covenant Church, Houston, TX
Dolores Street Baptist Church, San Francisco, CA
Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, GA
Emmanuel Baptist Church, Albany, NY
Emmanuel Baptist Fellowship, Lexington, SC
Fairview Baptist Church, Vancouver, BC
First Baptist Church, Palo Alto, CA
First Baptist Church, Lawrence, KS
First Baptist Church, Beverly, MA
First Baptist Church, Framingham, MA
First Baptist Church, Jamaica Plain, MA
First Baptist Church, Newton Centre, MA
First Baptist Church, Worcester, MA
First Baptist Church, Ann Arbor, MI
First Baptist Church, Birmingham, MI
First Baptist Church, New London, NH
First Baptist Church, Moorestown, NJ
First Baptist Church, Ithaca, NY
First Baptist Church, Rochester, NY
First Baptist Church, Bedford, OH
First Baptist Church, Dayton, OH
First Baptist Church, Granville, OH
First Baptist Church, McMinnville, OR
First Baptist Church, Madison, WI
First Baptist Church, Waukesha, WI
First Baptist Church of Springfield, Springfield, OH
First Community Church (UCC), Dallas, TX
First Institutional Baptist Church, Phoenix, AZ
Glendale Baptist Church, Nashville, TN
Grace Baptist Church, San Jose, CA
Grace Baptist Church, Chicago, IL
Grace Baptist Church, Statesville, NC
Immanuel Baptist Church, Portland, ME
Jefferson St Baptist Community, Louisville, KY
Judson Memorial Baptist Church, Minneapolis, MN
Judson Memorial Church, New York, NY
Lake Avenue Baptist Church, Rochester, NY
Lakeshore Ave Baptist Church, Oakland, CA
Madison Avenue Baptist Church, New York, NY

Mount Nebo Bible Baptist Church, New Orleans, LA
Myers Park Baptist Church, Charlotte, NC
Noank Baptist Church, Noank, CT
North Shore Baptist Church, Chicago, IL
Oakhurst Baptist Church, Decatur, GA
Old Cambridge Baptist Church, Cambridge, MA
Park Road Baptist Church, Charlotte, NC
Peace Community Church, Oberlin, OH
Peakland Baptist Church, Lynchburg, VA
Prairie Baptist Church, Prairie Village, KS
Prescott Memorial Baptist Church, Memphis, TN
Pullen Memorial Baptist Church, Raleigh, NC
San Leandro Community Church, San Leandro, CA
Seattle First Baptist Church, Seattle, WA
Second Baptist Church, Suffield, CT
Shell Ridge Community Church, Walnut Creek, CA
St John's Baptist Church, Charlotte, NC
The Riverside Church, New York, NY
Underwood Memorial Baptist Church, Wauwatosa, WI
United Church of Fayetteville, Fayetteville, NY
University Baptist Church, Minneapolis, MN
University Baptist Church, Columbus, OH
University Baptist Church, Austin, TX
University Baptist Church, Seattle, WA
Vienna Baptist Church, Vienna, VA
Wake Forest Baptist Church, Wake Forest, NC
Watts Street Baptist Church, Durham, NC
Wedgewood Baptist Church, Charlotte, NC
Williamsburg Baptist Church, Williamsburg, VA
Woodbine Heights Baptist Church, Toronto, ON

New from BPFNA

A PILGRIM IN ROME

Cries of Dissent

by **Al Staggs**

Al Staggs knows about words and puts them to fresh and suggestive use. He knows about brutality that shows its ugly face in too many places. And he knows about phoniness that supports evil by its default.

—Walter Brueggemann

Al Staggs writes his poetry with the passion of a prophet. His words call religious spokespersons and political leaders who lace their rhetoric with religious phrases alike to acknowledge both their idolatry and their hypocrisy. Read him and weep for what your country has become and for what Christianity is no more.

—John Shelby Spong



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Walking Together in New Orleans:

Some Thoughts on Accompaniment

by Jan Corbett

The word emerged early in our discussion at Central Baptist Church of what it would mean to become a partner in Churches Supporting Churches (CSC). Several terms had been suggested—friendship, mission, covenant, solidarity—but when someone said “accompaniment,” we instinctively knew this was the word that would best describe our relationship with St. John Baptist Church in New Orleans.

Our understanding of accompaniment is grounded in our long relationship with the people of El Salvador. In the mid-1980s, Central Baptist hosted a Salvadoran refugee as a part of the Sanctuary Movement. In the first few weeks that Mauricio lived in an apartment behind our worship commons, volunteers provided round-the-clock security by staying in the apartment with him.

During our four-hour shifts, we learned to communicate with him in Spanish and sometimes taught him English. We watched television with him. We ate with him. And some volunteers slept overnight in a room that joined his apartment. We didn’t have any agenda; we were simply present in accompaniment.

Later some of us traveled to El Salvador with the SHARE Foundation¹ to visit refugees from the war that was raging between the FMLN and a Salvadoran military that was financed and trained by the US. Our task was to support these refugees by listening to their stories of torture and deprivation, and then share the stories with faith groups in the United States, in order to raise their consciousness about the consequences of US policies in El Salvador.

Later, when the refugees left the camps in Honduras for their villages in El Salvador, SHARE delegations physically accompanied them across the border, carrying their furniture, their chickens and the building materials salvaged from their refugee housing. Ron Morgan, a member of Central Baptist, participated in several of these delegations.

“The war was still going on and the army didn’t want the refugees to go back to their homes,” Morgan says, “but they wanted to claim their own property.”

North American volunteers accompanied them as they met with representatives of the United Nations Commission on Refugees and with Salvador government officials, who finally allowed them to return to their villages.

“They had been in the camps for eight or nine years and they wanted to be in places where, when the war was over, they would have a say in what happened,” Morgan says. “When the war did end, they were able to till their land because they were living on it.”

Morgan refers to this kind of accompaniment as walking alongside others. “You don’t go with any answers,” Morgan says. “You go to be present. If somebody there wants you to be a part of their solution, you offer to do this.” It is a practice that Central Baptist has continued in El Salvador for 24 years.

Rev. Scott Hutchinson, pastor of St. Andrews United Church of Christ in Perkasio, PA, a CSC congregation, participated in a similar form of accompaniment in El Salvador. A former member of Witness for Peace in Nicaragua, he was searching for a way to connect with faith communities in El Salvador when he was invited to work with the Baptist Association in El Salvador (*Asociacion Bautista de El Salvador*).

On his first full day in the country he was traveling to a resettled area to meet with refugees when his group was stopped by the military, held at gunpoint and menaced. “I remember thinking that any sense of revolutionary tourism I might have had was over right then,” Hutchinson says. But his second thought was, “Some Salvadorans face this kind of harassment every day.”

Hutchinson’s insight came from the simple act of walking alongside others. He describes it as a kind of immersion, a term that was echoed by a Salvadoran friend to whom he related the experience. “So you were baptized,” the Baptist friend said.

By walking with the Salvadoran people, Hutchinson was able to join them in finding ways to respond to the terror they were experiencing. One of these responses was the creation of the Urgent Action Network that bombarded the US Embassy with telegrams when someone they knew was arrested or “disappeared.”²

For Hutchinson, accompaniment was a life-changing experience. “The illusion of self-reliance and autonomy was stripped away,” he says. “I read and heard the Scriptures differently. I could never completely return to life as I had known it.”

This kind of transformation is one of the rewards of accompaniment, Hutchinson believes. You can re-

churches supporting churches

ally understand others when you walk in their shoes, he says, and this is true for the people with whom you are walking, as well. He describes a Salvadoran who learned something about North Americans from his encounter with him.

“It must really be hard to be a Christian in the United States,” the Salvadoran said. “Here our situation is very unjust, but our choices are very clear. Where you live, the decisions are much less clear.”

Being present, sharing stories, walking together, being part of someone else’s solution, transformation, mutuality—these are all a part of the term “accompaniment” as we have come to understand it. But how does it relate to our experience as partners in Churches Supporting Churches?

At a recent meeting of our CSC task force, we tried to spell this out. “You can’t assume you know what’s needed,” James Craig suggested, “and this sometimes leads you in new directions.” He recalled the meeting in which Rev. Don Boutte, pastor of St. John Baptist, our partner church, identified priorities for our work together.

One of his needs was help with trauma counseling. Craig, a social worker who is employed by a medical insurance company, researched this and was able to direct Boutte to a series of free workshops. Sandy Bauer, a professor of social work, also worked on this objective by compiling a list of agencies in the St. John Baptist neighborhood and by assigning her students to compile bibliographies on trauma.

Bauer also suggested another aspect of accompaniment. “It’s communicating, not just doing,” she said. Some people expected us to send a work group to build houses as soon as we joined CSC, she recalled. It was hard for them to understand the importance of communication in building a relationship that serves as a foundation for working together on physical projects.

Ginny Leonard suggested that the term implies respect based on an understanding and acceptance of differences. She recalled a family situation in which she and her husband became much more comfortable with two of their relatives after they had visited in their home and walked in their shoes.

To Stephanie Powell, accompaniment is something like the relationship one has with one’s friends. “You can’t do your friends’ work for them, but you can walk with them as they do it,” she said. Those who got to know Rev. Clifford Jones, assistant pastor of St. John Baptist, at the BPFNA Summer Conference affirmed the value of this kind of accompaniment.

In many ways, we are able to define what accompaniment can mean, but we are still struggling to apply the term to our work with Churches Supporting

Churches. We have had to learn, for example, how to be patient as we work through priorities and procedures with our partner church.

We have had to discover how best to communicate: how to use email effectively but not excessively, how to sense when such personal communication as conference calls and visits is helpful, how to communicate economically among our task force and church by establishing a blog.

Being present, sharing stories, walking together, being part of someone else’s solution, transformation, mutuality—these are all a part of the term “accompaniment” as we have come to understand it.

We have had to learn how to relate to a network of area churches that are also partnered with St. John Baptist, accompanying them in our common mission.

This learning experience has been rewarding. We have been amazed at the resources we have been able to uncover when we have become aware of a need to which we can respond.

We have marveled at the number of people who have offered their skills, time and money to a mission they have come to understand and embrace. And we have been awed and humbled by the people of New Orleans whose faith offers hope where others see only despair.

The term “accompaniment” has taken on a new significance for us as we use it in a new context, and we are still discovering the full implications of this. But, for us, it seems to be the best way to respond to our mission in Churches Supporting Churches.

—Jan Corbett is a retired English professor and member of Central Baptist Church in Wayne, PA, a BPFNA Partner Congregation and a Churches Supporting Churches congregation.

Notes

1. The SHARE Foundation is an international non-profit organization that accompanies poor communities in El Salvador as they work for economic justice, democracy and sustainable development alternatives at the local and national levels. More information at www.share-elsalvador.org.
2. The “disappeared” were not those who voluntarily left their communities but those who were physically removed by the military and later found murdered. If there was an attempt to rescue them within 24 hours, they were often saved.

Holy Obedience: One Christian's Story of Civil Disobedience

by Ken Sehested

Unfortunately, it's too easy to write off Tim Nolan's decision to commit civil disobedience at the US Supreme Court building, calling for the closure of the US prison at Guantánamo Bay, as political looney-tune. But no less a public figure than former Secretary of State Colin Powell has spoken against the prison.

"Guantánamo has become a major, major problem...in the way the world perceives America, and if it were up to me I would close Guantánamo, not tomorrow, but this afternoon..." Powell told NBC's *Meet the Press* in June 2007.

"Essentially, we have shaken the belief the world had in America's justice system by keeping a place like Guantánamo open and creating things like the military commission. We don't need it, and it is causing us far more damage than any good we get for it."

Powell is neither a pacifist nor alone in his convictions. Recently, four previous US Secretaries of State (two Republicans, two Democrats) joined Powell in calling for the prison's closing.

US presidential candidates John McCain and Barack Obama have agreed—as did major Democratic contender Hillary Clinton. Even the current Secretary

of Defense, Robert Gates, tried early in his tenure to close the facility.

Tim Nolan, a member of Circle of Mercy Congregation in Asheville, NC, a nurse practitioner, spouse to Amy and father of three young children, didn't undertake the action lightly. He's done this before, including last year's "Witness Against Torture" action on the fifth anniversary of the prison's opening.

Over coffee one recent morning, he outlined to me the substantial case against "Gitmo," based on US and international law.

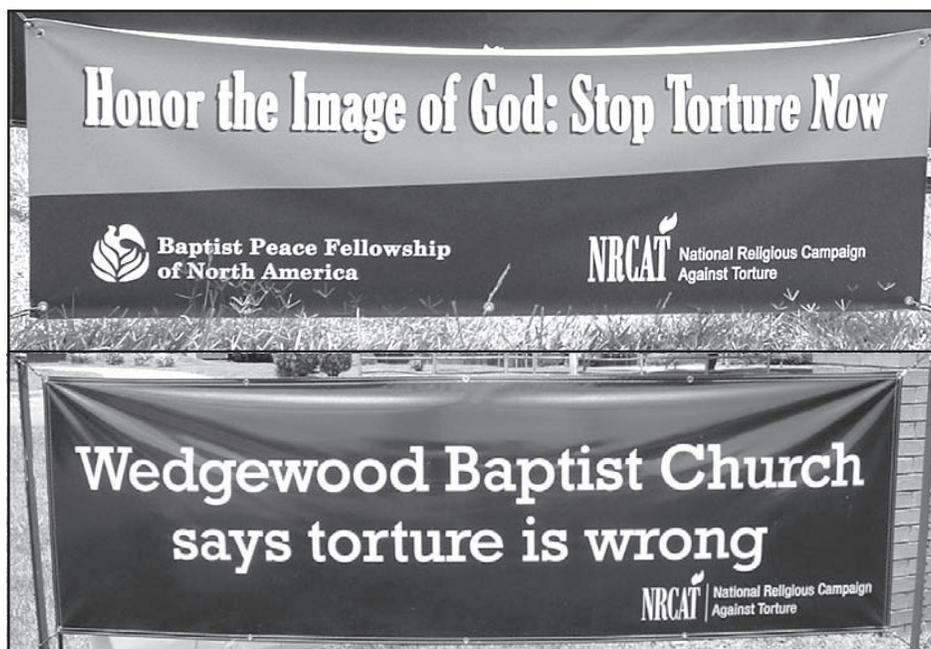
"The legal charade of this Administration's justification is astounding. The invention of terms like 'unlawful combatants,' the suspension of *habeas corpus*, which is the foundation of our jurisprudence, and the systematic use of 'enhanced interrogation techniques,' formerly known simply as *torture*."

But Nolan, whose medical work is focused on low-income people living with HIV / AIDS, does not base his conviction merely on legal or political grounds.

"Actually, this action is an outgrowth of prayer." And so it was for the majority of the 200 who paraded from the National Mall in Washington, DC, to the steps of the Court on January 11.

Each wore the distinctive orange jump-suit of Guantánamo prisoners and the black hoods made fa-

Anti-torture banners erected by BPFNA and Wedgewood Baptist Church are seen by thousands of motorists each day in Charlotte, NC. The banners were produced in conjunction with an ongoing awareness effort by the National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT). To date, more than 330 congregations in 50 US states have erected such banners.



mous from a similar prison, Abu Ghraib, in Baghdad. Most of the people involved in the action were rooted in, or inspired by, the faith-based Catholic Worker Movement.

"I think of prayer as the portal to seeing the world in a new way, through God's eyes," Nolan commented. "Prayer isn't an escape hatch from the agonies of history, but a means of confronting history in redemptive ways."

The day began with a rally on the National Mall, co-sponsored by Amnesty International and more than 100 other human rights organizations. Shortly after noon, some 400 persons embarked with legal permits and a police escort on the 45-minute silent walk, two abreast and in pouring rain, to the Supreme Court building.

Upon arrival, the 200 in theatrical orange garb knelt on the sidewalk in front of the Court. Thirty-six of them had volunteered to risk arrest by mounting the Court stairs toward the entrance.

As this unfolded, another 45 volunteers, who earlier passed through security at the Court and assembled inside, read a statement and unfurled a banner.

With no attempt to resist arrest, those on the steps were arrested and charged with violating an ordinance prohibiting demonstrations on court grounds. Those inside were charged under a provision that makes it a crime to give "a harangue or oration" in the Court.

"During the drive to DC, during the strategy sessions the night before, all during the morning on the Mall, but most especially as we walked to the Court, I have to admit I was anxious, nervous, wondering if I was crazy," Nolan said.

"But all that melted away as we

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Tortured News: Excerpts that Most of Us Never Heard

• After the *New York Times* reported the abuses at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, the paper also said the CIA had, in 2002, issued its own report that most of the prisoners held at Guantánamo did not deserve to be there. (*Columbia Journalism Review, 2006*)

• In a 2006 study of Department of Defense (DoD) records, lawyers representing Guantánamo detainees report that "only eight percent were labeled by the DoD as 'al Qaeda fighters,' and just 11 percent had been captured 'on the battlefield' by coalition forces." Others had been captured by Northern Alliance forces in Afghanistan and Pakistani security forces and exchanged for bounties provided by the US. (*Ibid*)

• Stafford Smith, another lawyer representing Guantánamo detainees, says that "a large majority of the prisoners in Guantánamo [were] sold to the United States for bounties." (*Mother Jones, February 2008*)

• Writing for *Mother Jones* magazine, Celia Perry reported, "In the months after 9/11, bounty leaflets were publicly distributed throughout Pakistan. One read, 'Get wealth and power beyond your dreams. Help the Anti-Taliban Forces rid Afghanistan of murderers and terrorists.'

It worked. General Pervez Musharraf boasted in his 2006 memoir *In the Line of Fire*, 'We have played cat and mouse with [al Qaeda]. We have captured 689 and handed over 369 to the United States. We have earned bounties totaling millions of dollars.'" (*Ibid*)

• According to Col. Morris Davis, former chief prosecutor for Guantánamo's military commissions, the military commission process through which Guantánamo detainees are tried has been manipulated by Administration appointees in an attempt to foreclose the possibility of acquittal. Davis, who resigned in protest in October 2007, said in a December 10, 2007, *Los Angeles Times* op-ed: "I concluded that full, fair and open trials were not possible under the current system."

Then, in an interview with *The Nation* in February after the six Guantánamo detainees were charged, when Davis was asked if he thought the men at Guantánamo could receive a fair trial, he provided the following account of an August 2005 meeting he had with Pentagon general counsel William Haynes. "[Haynes] said these trials will be the Nuremberg of our time."

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Holy Obedience

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began climbing the steps. And as we were handcuffed, facing those massive courthouse pillars, I felt free and calm, with a sense that—in the face of this massive injustice [the existence of this and numerous other secret prisons of torture]—I was exactly where I wanted to be and needed to be.”

All were handcuffed and taken to a trailer at the side of the building for processing by Court police. Instead of offering their own names, each instead gave the name of a Guantánamo prisoner.

Four hours later, they were escorted into the Court basement and processed again, and pictured, then seated along a hallway. At midnight, in groups of four, they were transported by DC police to disperse precincts, and then moved again, at 3:00 a.m., to the Central prison.

By 9 a.m. the entire group was reassembled, hands still cuffed and now legs shackled, at the Superior Court holding cell in preparation for their arraignment. Again in groups of four, they appeared before a judge, who provided two options. To accept or reject a “cease or desist” order, pledging to not be arrested again for at least six months.

Some chose to agree to this restriction. Others, like Nolan, who was finally released under bond at 5 p.m., refused and now face a possible penalty of 60 days in jail, a fine or both.

“The most significant thing that happened in this 29-hour incarceration was the fact that, in my appearance before the judge, I initially gave the name of ‘Fazaldad’ and have it officially recorded in a court document,” Nolan said.

Fazaldad (“no first name known,” according to Guantánamo records) is among the approximately 275 prisoners still being held, some for over six years, in legal limbo and without recourse to legal action of any kind. Each of the “Witness” activists appearing before the judge that afternoon did the same thing, just for this purpose, before finally stating their real names.

“Just yesterday,” Nolan told me, as we wrapped up our conversation, “I heard an interview with one of the first lunch-counter, sit-in participants [in Greensboro, NC.]

“He talked about the fear he felt, as a black man approaching the taboo of a segregated lunch counter, as he first entered Woolsworth with the intention of

breaking the law. But then he said something like, ‘When I did finally sit down, I knew it was right. And I knew I’d stay there come what may. It might mean a long stay in a hostile prison. Or it might even mean I’d be shipped home in a pine box. But I knew this was right. I knew I was where I wanted to be, where I needed to be.’”

“I immediately recognized that feeling,” Nolan said, smiling.

Earlier I told Nolan about the experience of others from our Circle of Mercy, on a visit to our “sister” church in Cuba, how his story was told at a special “service of prayers for peace” the very night of his arrest.

As you might imagine, the narrative had quite an impact on the gathered Cuban Christians, against whom our country maintains an illegal embargo.

Such bonds, across borders and boundaries of every kind, are at the heart of our calling. And, sometimes, civil disobedience is a form of holy obedience. —Ken Sehested is co-pastor of Circle of Mercy Congregation and a stonemason in Asheville, NC. Sources: Reuters, Atlanta Journal Constitution, CBS News. For more information, go to www.witnesstorture.org.

Ed. note: Just as Baptist Peacemaker went to press, we received these updates from Ken Sehested:

- Tim Nolan and 33 others arrested January 11 at the Supreme Court went on trial in Washington, DC the week of May 26. Each was convicted and offered a choice between up to 15 days in prison or a one-year probation with a promise to stay away from the Supreme Court. Nolan and 21 others chose the probation, on top of a \$50 fine.

- Recently the Pentagon announced it plans to spend \$60 million to build a 40-acre detention facility at its Bagram military base for suspected terrorists near Kabul, Afghanistan, to replace the existing prison. Spokeswoman Lt. Col. Rumi Nielson-Green asserted “this is not going to be Guantánamo II,” saying, “There will be a great deal of improvement in the quality of life (for detainees) in the new facility.” (*McClatchy-Tribune Information Services, June 13, 2008*)

Baptists Ready to Assist Myanmar

from Baptist World Aid

WASHINGTON, DC—Baptist World Aid (BWAid), the relief and development arm of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), has pledged US\$50,000 to assist with emergency relief efforts in Myanmar.

Myanmar, formerly named Burma, experienced a devastating cyclone that hit the Southeast Asian country on Saturday, May 3, killing an estimated 22,000 people, generating fears that the death toll will rise even further as tens of thousand more are missing. Large areas of the country are heavily flooded.

In addition to the \$50,000 pledge, BWAid is coordinating relief efforts with Baptists around the world.

“We will be working with and through the very capable Myanmar Baptist Convention....and we are in contact with BWAid partners in North America, Europe and Asia,” said Paul Montacute, BWAid Director.

Among the immediate needs of those affected by the cyclone and the flooding are for clean drinking water,

nonperishable food, blankets and medical kits.

The Myanmar Baptist Convention, a member body of the BWA, is the single largest Baptist group in Asia with a membership of more than 1.1 million baptized believers.

Baptist witness is largely among minority and marginalized ethnic groups such as the Karen, Chin and Kachin.

Donations to the Myanmar relief effort may be made to the BWAid Emergency Response Fund at www.bwanet.org/bwaid or sent to:

Emergency Response Fund
Baptist World Aid
405 North Washington Street
Falls Church, VA 22046
USA

Tortured News
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Davis responded saying, “if we come up short and there are some acquittals in our cases, it will at least validate the process.... At which point, [Haynes’s] eyes got wide and he said, ‘Wait a minute, we can’t have acquittals. If we’ve been holding these guys for so long, how can we explain letting them get off?’” (The Nation, February 2008)

- In a February 2008 interview on BBC Radio, US Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia said it was “extraordinary” to assume that the ban on “cruel and unusual punishment”—the US Constitution’s Eighth Amendment—also applied to “so-called” torture such as waterboarding.

“You can’t come in smugly and with great self satisfaction and say ‘Oh it’s torture, and therefore it’s no good.’” (BBC News, February 2008)

—Compiled by Ken Sehested

The Cost of War
figures as of 6/28/08

In Iraq —

US military & civilian deaths.....4,113

US military & civilians wounded...30,275
(estimated up to 100,000 – Since the US military counts only those wounded by gunfire or shrapnel, many wounded are not included in the official figures.)*

Iraqi civilian deaths.....85,314 to 93,056
(estimated: 1,220,580)*

Financial cost of war..US \$532,171,664,494

In Afghanistan & other locations included in “Operation Enduring Freedom” —

US military & civilian deaths.....527

Canadian military deaths.....86

**See related article on page 4.*

Sources: US Department of Defense (www.defenselink.mil/news), Canada National Defence (www.forces.gc.ca/site/focus/fallen/), iraqbodycount.org; nationalpriorities.org

Soaring Prices Spark Global Food Crisis

GENEVA, SWITZERLAND—With the price of food at record highs and world food supplies decreasing, hunger and malnutrition risks are greater than ever for millions of people.

Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General of the United Nations (UN), says an urgent and effective response is needed to reach the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set in 2000 and cut hunger and poverty in half by 2015.

Prices of wheat, corn and rice have gone up 50 percent in the past six months. Causes include the rapid industrialization of China and India, extreme weather conditions and high oil prices that have increased transportation costs.

Already food riots have erupted from West Africa to South Asia. Afghan president Hamid Karzai recently re-

quested \$77 million to provide for the more than 2.5 million people greatly affected by the rising costs. The average Afghan household currently spends 45 percent of its income on food, as opposed to 11 percent in 2006.

In a renewed effort to meet the MDGs, the UN has launched

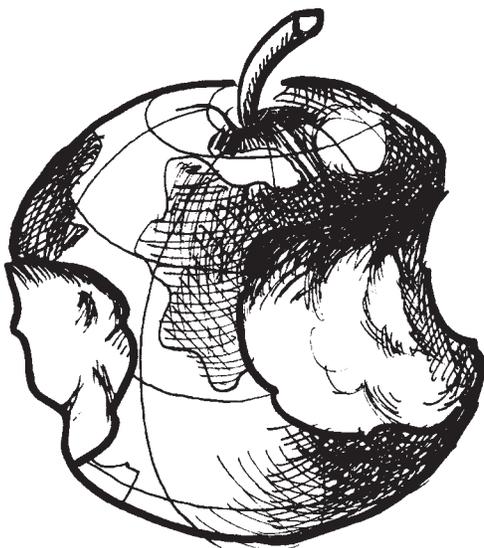
a plan to improve conditions in poor countries.

First, humanitarian needs must be met. The World Food Program plans to feed 73 million people globally. The program needs an additional \$500 million to cover the rapid rise in food prices.

UN programs must be strengthened and early-warning systems developed to reduce the impact of natural disasters. Building drought and flood defense systems can help communities adapt to climate change.

The UN also hopes to boost agricultural production by introducing, to developing countries, new science and technologies that offer permanent solutions for the problem of hunger.

—From *Hunger News & Hope*, compiled by Rebecca LaFlure. Sources: Washington Post, USA Today



American Baptists Launch Global Food Fund

from Associated Baptist Press

VALLEY FORGE, PA—American Baptist Churches USA has launched a fund drive to provide money to help ministry partners in poor areas deal with the rising costs of basic foodstuffs.

ABC International Ministries started the Global Crisis Food Fund with \$100,000. The missions agency contributed \$50,000 of its resources. The other \$50,000 came from One Great Hour of Sharing, an offering conducted by the ABC World Relief Office and several other Protestant denominations.

In regions around the world where hunger already stalked the land, a dramatic increase in food prices has worsened the situation. [See the story above.]

“Our fund is a response to our partners and other Christian organizations who are on the frontlines of helping to feed the hungry and homeless every day,” Reid Trulson, executive director of ABC International

Ministries, told the American Baptist News Service. “We want to help them so they don’t have to cut back on basic staples their people need for survival.”

Half of the money will be granted immediately to the Thailand Burma Border Consortium, to help cover the rising cost of rice in that area.

Rice is the primary staple for hundreds of thousands of displaced Burmese people living in refugee camps along the Thai border.

The remaining \$50,000 will be available for partners to apply for grants. US partners may apply through American Baptist National Ministries.

The food crisis is blamed on many factors, such as the rising cost of oil, which increases transportation costs; government subsidies that have increased food costs in some countries; natural disasters and other ongoing crises.

Jubilee Act for Debt Relief Moving Forward in Congress

WASHINGTON, DC—The US Congress is currently moving forward with the Jubilee Act for Responsible Lending and Expanding Debt Cancellation, arguably the most important piece of debt legislation in seven years.

The act, which has 98 legislative cosponsors, serves “to provide for greater responsibility in lending and expanding cancellation of debts owed to the United States and international financial institutions by low-income countries.”

This bill will help achieve the Millennium Development Goals set forth by the United Nations to cut extreme poverty in half by 2015.

Since the efforts of the Jubilee 2000 movement a few years ago, which called for the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to cancel the debts of the poorest countries in the world, 23 countries have obtained nearly full cancellation of their debts. Debt relief has helped

millions of children in Zambia and Tanzania return to school and receive basic medical care.

Still, more than 40 poor countries wait to receive debt relief. If their debt payments were eliminated, their national budgets could be invested in health care, clean water and education. At press time, the bill had been passed by the House and was going to the Senate for debate.

Jubilee USA Network is a partnership of more than 80 religious denominations, human rights, environmental, labor and community groups that advocate the cancellation of debts to poverty-stricken countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

—From *Hunger News & Hope*, compiled by Rebecca LaFlure. Sources: Global Solutions (www.globalsolutions.org), Jubilee USA (www.jubileeusa.org)



BPFNA Hosts Peace Breakfast at Cooperative Baptist Fellowship General Assembly

BPFNA hosted a Peace Breakfast at the annual General Assembly of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF), June 19-20 in Memphis, TN. Charles Duplessis, pastor of Mount Nebo Bible Baptist Church in New Orleans, LA and a member of the board of directors of Churches Supporting Churches (CSC), spoke of the important work CSC continues to do to rebuild churches and restore communities in the Lower Ninth Ward (see a related article on page 10).

The BPFNA Peace Breakfast has become a tradition at Biennial Meetings of the American Baptist Churches USA, but the June 20 event marked the first time the Peace Fellowship hosted a breakfast in conjunction with the CBF assembly. BPFNA also exhibited books and promotional materials in the assembly's Resource Fair.

Pictured, l-r: Steve Jones, BPFNA board president; Amy Mears & April Baker, co-pastors of BPFNA Partner Congregation Glendale Baptist Church, Nashville, TN; and Charles Duplessis, pastor of Mount Nebo Bible Baptist Church, New Orleans, LA; at the BPFNA Peace Breakfast in Memphis, TN.
Photo by Tom Walsh.



The Opportunity to Serve: The Story of Elise Elrod

by Rebecca LaFlure

“I had nearly given up on church,” Elise Elrod wrote in the summer of 2007. “Other churches tried a rude awakening on me, telling me to stay away, walking me out in the rain. How wonderful it is to be awakened gently, lovingly, in the hands of people with the right attitude.”

Rev. Elrod has lived a life largely filled with accomplishment. She’s been a successful engineer, Southern Baptist pastor, parent and life partner.

However, she’s also on a journey most could never fully comprehend. A journey filled with misconceptions, depression and guilt, often with feelings she herself couldn’t understand.

*Elise Elrod is serving as a pastoral intern at Holy Trinity Community Church in Nashville.
Photo courtesy of Elise Elrod.*



Elise Elrod, born Ronnie Elrod, has a condition known as Gender Identity Disorder (GID). It refers to a conflict between a person’s actual physical gender and the one with which each identifies himself or herself. GID is extremely rare, affecting only a few thousandths of one percent of the population, according to Elrod.

“When you’re young, all you know is you’re a child. You don’t relate that to gender, per say. You don’t know that other boys think differently, and girls think the same. It’s a growing angst, a growing problem, until you get so depressed you can’t handle it,” she said.

Individuals with this condition are often called “transgender.” She is quick to point out that this is simply a slang term. Her gender did not go “trans-anywhere.”

In 1999 Elrod, then known as Ronnie, and her wife, Joni, moved their children to Tennessee to serve a Southern Baptist Church as pastor and music director. Their lives were typical of most seminary graduates. They had money and a beautiful home not far from the church where they worked.

Elrod, however, had been enduring an inner battle with gender identity for 40 years that could no longer be ignored. After revealing the struggle to Joni, the couple went to a year’s worth of intense therapy. But the feelings would not subside.

“There was no inspiration—only desperation, with near suicidal depression. I told Joni so that I might beg her to go to the doctor with me,” she said. “I initially went to the doctor to make the feelings go away and then realized they weren’t going away.”

In 1999, with Joni’s support, Elrod began the transformation to match her physical appearance with how she felt on the inside. Through surgery, Elrod transitioned from living outwardly as a male to being female.

“In short, I am and have always been female; before and after surgery—before and after transition,” she said. “I was not a man who wanted to be a woman. I was a woman who wanted to be a woman.”

The consequences of her pursuit were huge. Elrod’s best friend from seminary said he would never

news of peacemakers

be in her presence again. Both sides of the couple's family were unsupportive.

The cost of surgeries and medical treatment exceeded \$100,000, and the financial strain resulted in the loss of their lake house. Elrod endured harassment at work, and was forced to move from church to church, searching for a community of love and acceptance.

"Because of the amount of noise coming from harassment at work, church, my family and discouraging mail and phone calls, I got so depressed," Elrod said. "I was very weak spiritually."

That was until she read an article by the Associated Press about a church in her hometown of Nashville that was accepting of members in the gay, lesbian and transgender community.

The church was called Glendale Baptist, and she decided to attend a Sunday school class. Elrod was immediately welcomed, restoring her faith in church and church people.

"It was in re-establishing my relationship with God while at Glendale that I stopped allowing all of the external noise... to tell me who I am. My faith in God allows me to know that I am God's child, capable of 'being' a 'person' of worth with or without the approval of others," she said. "God is not finished with me yet."

Elrod, upon being received in Glendale's loving and inclusive environment, returned to her ecclesiastical roots, and is now serving as a pastoral intern for Holy Trinity Community Church, a United Church of Christ congregation consisting mostly of gay and lesbian members.

"Joni and I knew almost nothing of gay and lesbian persons and had never heard the word 'transgender,' before going to the doctor," she said. "Obviously, the over-arching goal is to bring our journey full circle by allowing me to serve a church again full time."

Elrod is in the process of changing ordination from Southern Baptist to United Church of Christ through a process known as Privilege of Call.

Holy Trinity had a successful Easter Sunday, with over 360 people in attendance. The church baptized 15 people the following Sunday. Elrod is now beginning a two-month Bible study on Wednesday evenings and has had the opportunity to preach during two church services.

Elrod was especially touched when she recently received an anonymous donation to pay for her vestments.

"My faith in God allows me to know that I am God's child, capable of 'being' a 'person' of worth with or without the approval of others."

Elise and Joni have been proudly married for 38 years and share three children and three grandchildren. Elrod says she is blessed to have them.

"God is dealing with me in ways I never imagined as an old Southern Baptist preacher," she said. "I am just so thankful to God for the opportunity to serve again."

—Rebecca LaFlure, from Tyler, Texas, is a journalism student at Baylor University in Waco. She is serving as an intern for Seeds of Hope Publishers.

Gifts of Honor

In memory of
Bob Coursen
from Thomas & MaryJane Coursen

In memory of
Rev. Dr. Reaves F. Nahwooks
from James Miller

In honor of
Gene & Beth McLeod &
Rod & Nancy Byard
from Jan Clark & Janice Pope

In honor of
Gordon Whitaker & Bob Hellwig
from Dennis & Diane Hill

In honor of
Rev. Arthur Basile
from Barbara Basile & Felix Lopez

In honor of
Jean Hopkins
from Arlene Lietz

Meet Your New BPFNA Board Members!

The Board of Directors of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America is pleased to announce the results of our third election with the presentation of 10 new board members, elected by the BPFNA constituency or appointed by the Board. New board members serve three-year terms, beginning with the October board meeting.



Tom Bryson, our current Treasurer, lives in Charlotte, NC and is a member of St. John's Baptist Church in Charlotte, a Partner Congregation. He has been on the BPFNA board since 2005, is chair of the Finance Committee and also serves on the Local Peace Networks Committee.



Aubra Love is executive director of The Black Church and Domestic Violence Institute in her hometown of Atlanta, GA. Ordained in the United Church of Christ, she has served on the BPFNA board since being appointed in 2007 to fill one year of an unexpired term.



John Cantelow III is pastor of Greenwood Missionary Baptist Church in Tuskegee, AL, where he is also active in community development and working with troubled youth. He previously served Sixth Avenue Baptist Church in Birmingham, AL as associate/assistant pastor for nine years.



Cassie McKenna of Waterloo, ON has just completed her third year of Political Science and Canadian Studies at Wilfrid Laurier University. She attends Aylmer Baptist Church, Aylmer, ON and has served on the BPFNA board since elected as a Young Adult representative in 2006.



Susie Dorsey is a member of Williamsburg (VA) Baptist Church, a BPFNA Partner Congregation. Now retired from a journalism career, she also serves on the board of Child Development Resources and on the board and Education Committee of the Williamsburg Area League of Women Voters.



Chakravarthy Zadda Ravindra is a second generation Christian from Kumool, India. He was ordained by Telugu Baptist Church of India and has done master's degree research on fundamentalist Hindu resistance to Gospel preaching. He is now in Chicago, IL, accepted for Ph.D. work in "Violence in the Name of Religion".



Cheryl Dudley of New York, NY serves Church World Services as senior advisor to the executive director and acting director of the Mission Relationship and Witness Program. She is a member of The Riverside Church and previously served as associated executive director of National Ministries of the ABC-USA.



Daniel Schweissing is a native of Colorado who now lives in the Bahamas, where he and his wife serve as American Baptist missionaries. He was active in social justice issues from an early age and previously spent several years teaching, studying and ministering in the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico.



Carol Eklund lives in Concord, CA and is a member of the Shell Ridge Community Church in Walnut Creek, CA, a BPFNA Partner Congregation. Carol has been on the BPFNA board since 2005, is currently chair of the Personnel Committee and also serves on the Gatherings Committee.



Jonathan Sledge is a member of Pullen Memorial Baptist Church, Raleigh, NC, a BPFNA Partner Congregation. A cabinetmaker by trade, he is passionate about Pullen's international partnerships, particularly AMOS Health and Hope, a ministry in Nicaragua under the leadership of the Parajón family.

Living Faith: How Faith Inspires Social Justice

by Curtiss Paul DeYoung, reviewed by Katie Cook

Fortress Press (Minneapolis, 2007). ISBN-13: 978-0-8006-3841-2. ISBN-10: 0-8806-3841-7. 186 pp.



In *Living Faith: How Faith Inspires Social Justice*,

Curtiss Paul DeYoung examines the lives of three people whose faiths have motivated extraordinary social activism. He first relates, in a brief but compelling manner, the story of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran pastor whose faith motivated him to challenge the German Nazis in the 1940s.

He goes on to the story of Malcolm X, whose Muslim faith inspired him to stand up against racism in the US—and, ultimately, to oppose all human injustice. The third story DeYoung recounts is that of Aung San Suu Kyi, the Nobel Peace Laureate whose Buddhism caused her to endure many years of hardship in the struggle against tyranny in Burma.

DeYoung describes these three—along with others who have made similar journeys and similar contributions—as “mystic-activists.” His reason for delving into the lives of such people is to find inspiration for spiritual leaders in the twenty-first century. His goal is to discover those elements of faith that caused the social activists of that century to persevere in their efforts, in the face of widespread spiritual devastation. “By penning this book,” he writes, “I choose hope and the faith that leads to peace and justice.”

DeYoung first discerns that sacred writings and narratives of all of the major faith groups hold an unequivocal mandate for social justice. Thus, for him, religious writings and holy narratives become the foundation for social activism.

He also concludes that the faith experience of activists who persevere for any length of time always includes spiritual discipline. Meditation and prayer, listening for a word from the divine or an inner voice, enable them to sustain an inner equilibrium in the midst of the maelstrom.

After describing the elements of faith that inspire social action, DeYoung employs the stories of Bonhoeffer, Malcolm, and Suu Kyi to demonstrate how these elements found their way into practice in their lives. For Bonhoeffer, it was the discovery of “the view

from below,” the ability to look at the world through the eyes of the marginalized and oppressed. For Malcolm, who was himself persecuted for his color, it was first a resistance of the systemic evils

of the white society, which gave way to a broader calling to ensure human rights for all people. For Suu Kyi, it was a “revolution of the spirit” that gave her the grace to reach out in love to her persecutors.

DeYoung intersperses these riveting narratives of Bonhoeffer, Malcolm, and Suu Kyi—always underlining the elements of their struggles—with similar stories of other faith-inspired people like Mohandas Gandhi, Archbishop Oscar Romero, Nelson Mandela, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Rigoberta Menchu.

The book includes an appendix with brief biographical sketches of 17 such “twentieth-century mystic-activists.” He refers to them as a “supporting cast” for the three “primary actors.”

Some of these activists grew up in situations of privilege and were converted to the cause of justice through exposure to marginalized people. Some of them grew up in oppressed communities and learned to work for freedom. All of them learned, through their scripture and through spiritual disciplines, that many of the social structures of our day are evil.

They all learned, not only to denounce the oppression in the world, but also to announce the possibility of a new society—a new way of doing things that will not oppress or marginalize people, that will not undermine human rights. They were able to continue their work in the face of incredible hardship, because they were convinced that they were in keeping with the will of God.

It is DeYoung’s hope that the twenty-first century will be a time “when many more choose mystic-activism and take a journey of faith in the inner regions of the soul and at the outer regions of the society.” *Living Faith: How Faith Inspires Social Justice* is an excellent place to begin.

—Katie Cook edits the *Seeds of Hope* publications *Sacred Seasons* and *Hunger News & Hope*, as well as *Baptist Peacemaker*.

Let's Take Another Look

A Different Thought about Olympic Torch Relay Protests

by Steve Jacobsen

Like most of the 21st century's political issues, the questions being raised over Tibet are many-faceted and more complicated than they first appear. Issues surrounding the status of Tibet came into the public eye during the Olympic torch "relay," carrying the torch to several countries over the course of nearly five months.

Under the umbrella of a "Free Tibet" movement, protestors of many causes have assaulted the relay and created substantial press attention.

Until we're willing to face our past and to admit our part in Earth's huge cultural and environmental changes, we are in a terribly weak moral position to join the current style of protests.

Tibet is the name popularly given to a large region of Asia bordered on the south by the Himalayas and containing large areas of high altitude plateau. Its political boundaries have been contested for many centuries and are still uncertain.

Officially, about half of traditional Tibet is now part of the Tibet Autonomous Region of China. But many people who would identify themselves as ethnic Tibetans live in surrounding provinces and other autonomous regions.

Sections of the southern boundary of the country are still contested with India. So the first major hurdle in understanding the "Free Tibet" movement is in discerning exactly what Tibet is. Most protestors seem rather unclear on this point.

The Tibetan region has been, off and on, part of the Chinese empire for many centuries. Between the middle of the 17th century and the middle of the 20th century, it was administered by a Dalai Lama, but power frequently shifted between Chinese and indigenous Tibetan leadership. During the 18th century, Chinese troops actually defended Tibet from invading Nepalese forces.

In the 19th century, Britain made some unsuccessful attempts to colonize the area, even getting as far as renaming famous Mount Qomolangma after the chief British surveyor, Sir George Everest. In 1911, after the fall of the Qing dynasty (the last dynasty in China), Tibet declared independence from China.

Civil war and political unrest were prevalent throughout China in the early 20th century, ending with the victory of the communists in 1949. In 1950 the Chinese invaded Tibet and brought it under their control—forcing the Dalai Lama to flee to India.

An interesting sidelight is that during the early 1950s, opposition to communist land redistribution (from large land holders to the peasants) received support from the United States CIA, among others.

At the time of the 1950 invasion and during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), Buddhist institutions were systematically destroyed, and a program to resettle the area with many Han Chinese (the major ethnic group in China) began.

A railroad link to central China was completed in 2006, and efforts continue to strengthen ties with the rest of the country. At the same time, substantial efforts to rebuild monasteries and other Buddhist sites have been underway for several years.

However, much of the indigenous culture that had been systematically and brutally destroyed has little chance for revival in the face of the even more powerful force of free enterprise and consumerism that is running rampant throughout all of China.

It seems likely that much of the current internal opposition to the changes in Tibetan culture, wrought by the Chinese, is as much based on the "Westernization" of the last 20 years as on China's previous overt attempts at cultural genocide.

We North Americans, wanting to be critical of China and its "human rights" record *vis a vis* Tibet at this juncture, need to look not only at our own history of genocide of indigenous peoples or the perverse work of early Christian missionaries, but also at our economic exploitation of the people of China through purchase of cheap consumer goods.

Many young Tibetans are part of the largest migration in human history that has dislocated people from inland China to the coastal Special Economic Zones for work in factories producing goods for export. The cultural changes wrought by our exploita-

tion of these young people dwarf many of the explicit changes made by China in the Tibetan regions of the country.

The other hidden cost of goods made in China is the environmental damage caused by their use of cheap energy and careless disposal of toxic wastes. China's ability to produce goods at low cost has come with their willingness to allow environmental degradation.

Perhaps the ultimate irony in the present situation is that the Olympic torch relay has already become little more than another opportunity for crass commercialism. The runner is preceded and followed by a phalanx of vehicles covered with advertising messages for Coca-Cola and other sponsors of the event. For decades, the Olympics has been turned into yet another venue for selling products. Maybe it's the consumer mania that we're now exporting that really needs to be addressed.

So, in addition to remembering our own bloody history of forced cultural changes, I'd like to suggest that those seriously committed to protesting against China, especially with respect to Tibet, ought to consider the hidden costs (both cultural and environmental) of goods that we purchase from China, and our dependence on them.

Until we're willing to face our past and to admit our part in Earth's huge cultural and environmental changes, we are in a terribly weak moral position to join the current style of protests.

If the goal of current activists is to nonviolently pressure the Chinese to improve their human rights record (or to clean up their environment), why not consider a boycott of all products produced in whole or in part in China?

Being aware that Chinese products include components in nearly all of our communications, electronics, transportation, clothing and pharmaceutical industries, such a boycott would require an immense lifestyle change for North

Americans and remind us all just how complicit we are in human rights and environmental degradation throughout the world.

Let's take another look and keep our eyes on the real issues.

— Steve Jacobsen, a former Business Manager for BPFNA, is now retired from other "careers" and living in Lewisburg, PA. He made these observations after a trip to China this spring, as the Olympic torch relay was just beginning.

A Call to Peacemakers

This is an urgent appeal to all peacemakers around the world. The American Baptist Coalition is very concerned about the situation in Tibet at this time. As you may know, the condition of the Chinese relationship to many of the Tibetan people is grim indeed. During the years following the takeover in Tibet, it is reported that over a million Tibetans perished and suffered at the hands of the Chinese government. Still others became long-term refugees in neighboring countries.

I'm sure you are aware of the ongoing atrocities and human rights violations on the Tibetans and others by the Chinese government recently. We are highly concerned that the situation now is much more widespread and abusive than is being reported. The free press is not allowed Visas into China, and the few that are handpicked have not been allowed to speak openly with people.

As a Godmother of two American-Tibetan godchildren, I am highly concerned. We are demonstrating outside the Chinese Embassy each day, asking that the killing stop and human rights prevail. We are also demonstrating often outside the White House. We are in contact with members of Congress as well. Please remember us in your prayers. If you would like to do more, please contact the Chinese Embassy, requesting that human rights prevail.

The Embassy of China
2300 Connecticut Avenue
Washington, DC 20008

With a copy to Representative Nancy Pelosi at:
Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

We are considering calling for a boycott of the Olympics.

Bless you for your concern.

Yours in Christ,
Sherry L. Mitchell
Germantown, MD
Member of the American Baptist Coalition

We Hear You

by Barb Bnslin

Dear God of Peace,

We hear you.

“Do not destroy life in order to make peace, for Peace is Life.”

You say,

“Peace is Life
that takes a big breath and steps confidently into the smoldering ruins of your errors.

Peace is Life
that gathers leftover bits of love from a war torn world and tucks them back into empty hearts.

Peace is Life
with hands to hold until the smoke has vanished.

Peace is Life
with feet to join your dance across fields of freedom.

Peace is Life
with a voice for singing, for teaching, for praising.

Peace is Life weeping without shame and laughing with abandon.

Peace is not the Absence of, but the Living for.

Do not destroy life in order to make peace,
for peace is life fulfilled.”

We hear you, and we cannot but add, “Amen.”

— Barb Enslin is a retired administrative secretary. She and her husband, a retired United Church of Christ minister, moved to northwestern Wisconsin in 2004. They are associate members of the United Methodist Church in Danbury, WI.

Seeds of Hope / Lenora Mathis

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