

Planting seedlings for peace and justice



Presbyterian mission volunteer Shannon O'Donnell plants a pine seedling on a Palestinian farm (p. 5)



The Co-Moderators' Column

“Schism Happens” but Being a Neighbor is Hard Work

by Jake Young, Co-Moderator of the Witherspoon Society board

Nicaragua is a beautiful country. Not just the landscape, but the people, too. It is impossible to visit there, as I did not long ago, and fail to notice this. And yet, there is no reason why these neighbors should welcome *NorteAmericanos*.



Women (and one man) working in the sewing coop

My government and fellow citizens – past and contemporary – have wreaked havoc on this beautiful land and people. Nicaraguans have suffered years of tyranny and civil war thanks to our “interventions.” We have not been a good neighbor.

You may have heard that Nicaraguans recently elected a new President. Well, not exactly new: Daniel Ortega. He was President earlier, in the eighties, when the US saw fit to trade resources with Iran in order to fund the Contras who caused the civil war there. Then, Ortega eventually was voted out of office in a democratic

election—the same way he came into office.

Salman Rushdie described the poet Ortega as “a bookworm who had done a body-building course; his manner, too, combined a bespectacled blinking, mild-voiced diffidence with an absolutely contradictory self-confidence. You wouldn’t kick sand into his face any more.”¹

Why the kicking of sand? Because before he was President the first time, Ortega was a political prisoner. He was tortured. His poem *In the Prison* depicts the experience:

*Kick him this way, like this,
in the balls, in the face, in the ribs.
Pass me the hot iron, billy-club.
Talk Talk, you son-of-a-bitch,
try salt water,
ta-a-alk, we don't want to mess you up.*

Daniel Ortega is not Jesus Christ and does not pretend to be. But there are



Co-Moderator Jake Young

5 million people – and hopefully a few more – who want to see him serve Nicaragua well.

Ortega is not Christ. But he and all Nicaraguans are our neighbor. It’s sad, but I did not truly realize that until I went to Nicaragua and was treated like a neighbor. It was humbling really.

It’s Lent and the Relief and Development Office of the PC(USA) is sponsoring the annual push for One Great Hour of Sharing. This year the theme is “Who is my Neighbor?” I can’t think of a better theme – phrased as a question, no less.

Our denomination currently faces a time of tribulation. Neighbors fighting neighbors. As I write, some congregations are not just planning, but undertaking to leave the PC(USA). Schism is happening.

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Women working with the material to make light-weight concrete blocks

Amid these difficulties, Witherspoon Society members – and many other Presbyterians – are saying, “Let’s reach out and learn how we are all connected to one another.”

In this spirit, we have pursued global engagement. Our efforts involve supporting a Mission Coworker in Israel/Palestine, Shannon O’Donnell.

This issue of *Network News* features an update from Shannon about her work at Sabeel Institute. (p. 5)

Also, the One Great Hour of Sharing promotional materials highlight the work of the Nicaraguan Women’s Sewing Cooperative in Ciudad Sandino. This is a project of the Center for Development in Central America, a long-term partner with the congregation I serve. I was privileged to visit the

Women’s Cooperative and observe how my neighbors are making apparel, including T-shirts for those who serve relief efforts on the Gulf Coast in Katrina affected areas. We’re all connected

I encourage you to join us September 16-19 in Louisville for our conference, “Becoming Neighbors: An Invitation to Global Discipleship.” The work of

God’s Reign continues, despite ecclesiastical setbacks. Come explore how we are learning to be neighbors on a global scale

Over and over again in Nicaragua, I heard the word “hope.” No one pretended to know what the new President’s rule would bring, but everyone – friend and foe – said, “We wait and hope that this will be good for our country.” And for many, this is the first time in years that hope is a part of the vocabulary.

God is not done with us.

Grace and hope to you as we continue the journey toward justice and peace,

Jake Young

¹ *The Jaguar Smile: A Nicaraguan Journey*, Salman Rushdie (1987), p. 23

The Editor’s Spot

It’s time to get out of the boat

by Doug King

Matthew’s telling of the time when Peter walked on water (Mt. 14:22-33) has always held great power for me. Maybe it’s because water in fairly large amounts (even a swimming pool is enough) has always made me a little uneasy. That may be because I don’t do swimming very well – unless you count a lot of splashing and swallowing of water as swimming.

So I can identify with Peter and the other disciples huddling in their storm-tossed little boat. I feel their anxiety. And I’m all the more impressed by Peter, who was willing to face the wind-tossed waves, and call out to the dim form coming toward him through the spray. And then to get out of the boat and try walking across the water!

What courage Peter had, to step out of that boat, insecure as

it was, into the raging waves. But then as soon as he gets started, he realizes what he’s doing, and starts to sink. Self-awareness is a good thing, but sometimes it can paralyze us, too. We pay too much attention to what’s going on around us – the wind and waves, the conflicts and tensions and threats to ourselves, perhaps to our church or our society – and our anxieties overwhelm us. We’re sunk, or at least sinking.

But the story isn’t finished. Peter calls for help, and Jesus responds – by holding out a hand so Peter can grab it. (Then as Matthew tells it, Jesus gives Peter a little scolding – “You of little faith ...!” – but that may have been the story-teller’s effort to underline the point of Jesus’ divine power.) For me the point is this: It wasn’t Peter’s courage that made possible this little walk through the storm. It was his trust in Jesus, and Jesus’ support through an outstretched hand, that allowed him to overcome his anxiety.

This adventure in water-walking may offer an example for us in these stormy days. We face the storms of division in our denomination. People on our national staff in the General

Assembly agencies face the anxieties and pressures of repeated staff reductions, which seem frequently to be aimed at people who have shown courage to support and guide the church's mission of witness to God's love for all people, and Christ's call to be peacemakers and doers of justice.

We face the storms in the wider world – winds of war emanating more often than not from our own nation's capital, and the tensions the war-making has created within our own society. We may be tempted to huddle in our little boats, overcome by the anxieties that our own government seeks to exploit, and by our frustrating inability to do anything about the dreadful course on which we are embarked.

In the midst of these storms, and in the face of these paralyzing anxieties, Jesus calls us to step out of our boats, to confront the waves, to move toward him, to follow his beckoning into the stormy world.

We can do that – but only if we're willing to risk leaving the safety (such as it is) of our little boats.

We can do it if we look beyond the immediate crises – the crises of tension and division and shrinking funds in our church; the crises of war and threats of even more war; the crises of suffering and death that we are inflicting, directly or indirectly, on so many people around the world; the crises of climate change, and growing gaps between rich and poor, and lack of health care, and so much else.

Jesus called Peter to walk across the waves. Martin Luther King invited us to see a dream and bring it to reality. ... Courageous leaders of our own Presbyterian Church have called us toward visions of peace and justice, toward listening seriously to "voices long silenced," toward actions of

witness and service done in partnership with brother and sister Christians around the world, and in new partnerships with people of other faiths as well.

But our anxieties tell us to huddle in the bottom of the boat. Don't look out, don't hope for anything better, don't take a step toward some new possibility.

There's no safety, though, in a sinking boat. Our hope lies in reaching out – to one another, to strangers, to our Brother Jesus. Our hope lies not in protecting ourselves, but in risking, in getting out of the boat, in connecting with others, with Jesus, with the world.

We hope this issue of *Network News* will offer you some invitations to do just that.

Let's step out of the boat, seeking new visions, dreaming new dreams, and finding the strength in ourselves and in our connectedness, to dare new actions.

Helen Keller put it well:

Security is mostly a superstition. It does not exist in nature, nor do we children of men as a whole experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing. To keep our faces toward change and behave like free spirits in the presence of fate is strength undefeatable.

Doug King

"Let Justice Roll Down"

The Witherspoon Society Mission

We are a network of concerned Presbyterians responding to God's call to let justice roll down, and to work for healing in a wounded world.

Our mission is:

- To listen and learn from those who have been silenced as we seek solidarity with them;
- To nurture the prophetic voice of the church;
- To equip Presbyterians for faithful participation in the church and world;
- To challenge unjust relationships of power;
- To advocate for peace, justice, the integrity of creation, and the full inclusion of all God's people in church and society.

We seek to revitalize the church's proclamation and action, informed by the whole gospel, and living into the promise of God's reign.

Meeting the Real Holy Land

A report from Shannon O'Donnell, Presbyterian Volunteer in Mission, serving in Jerusalem with the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center in Jerusalem.

February 17th, 2007

Now I have found the Holy Land. Before today, I had only concepts, Bible stories, or historical sites to refer to when people mentioned the "Holy Land." I had not experienced much "Holy" here; mostly I have seen hatred and injustice. I did not expect for God to be more present here than in any other land. I still believe that God is present in our daily lives, and the essence of that I find holy. But today I have gained a new understanding of this land, a deeper appreciation of it, and a stronger connection to the place and the people.

Open spans of land in the Palestinian areas are threatened by confiscation if left unused. It doesn't matter if one has legal documentation of ownership, because the Israeli government can still take the land. This is the fear of the Nassar family. Daher Nassar was a Palestinian Christian who lived all his life on his 100 acres of land, located nine kilometers southwest of Bethlehem. I could almost see the Mediterranean Sea from the highest point on their land. Daher purchased the land in 1916, and the original land papers from the Ottoman period have been preserved and passed down through the family. In 1991 the Israeli government declared the area state property. Since then, the Nassar family has challenged Israel's declaration and repeatedly brought the case to court. The case is still being debated, and currently postponed, by the high court. In the meantime, the Nassars have started a program called "The Tent of Nations."

The Tent of Nations seeks to prepare young people for a positive contribution to their future and culture by bringing values of understanding and tolerance into their life experience. This is accomplished by various programs that the Nassar family and other volunteers carry on at the vineyard: tree planting, work and study camps, vocational training, and the reconciliation program. Groups of local or international youth will come for a few days, or a few weeks, to participate in these programs.

My friend and I went to the Nassars' land (also called Daher's Vineyard) to help plant trees. As we approached



Daher's Vineyard with Israeli settlement in background

the vineyard, we were greeted by several friendly dogs, and a few puppies. I have seen many stray cats in the city, but dogs are not as common. Daoud Nassar gave us a tour, and said they take in many dogs because people don't want them. He also said when local young people first came to the vineyard some would throw rocks at the dogs because they were afraid of the animals. But soon, they would interact with the animals, and their fears would dissolve. I could tell the animals are loved by the way they approached me.

It may seem like a small thing to bring youth from the cities to work in a vineyard, but connecting people to the land reaps greater rewards. There is so much stress and conflict in this country over land, it is easy to lose track of what people are fighting for. Teaching people to respect the land is not difficult, but giving them a space to tend to the land, to truly love it, is harder to do when it may be taken away. The Nassars' land is surrounded by illegal Israeli settlements. We were there planting trees, because settlers came and cut down the many olive trees a few years ago. I had no idea it took so long for an olive tree to mature. When planted, they look like twigs in the ground, and they take at least 10 years to produce anything. It was sad to see the remains of the chopped-down trees, which were at least 50 years old. The land is very rocky, and hard to plow or dig. But there's nothing like the satisfaction of planting a tree. This land is holy to me now because I have worked it. I have cut my fingers on the thorny bushes, gotten blisters from the heavy hoe, dripped sweat and blood into the soil.

As my friend and I were leaving, a group of settlers were coming toward us on the road. They walked past us and lingered around the big concrete block that was placed in the middle of the road a few years ago. My friend cau-

tiously asked them what they were doing. A teenage boy, who was casually carrying his M-16 gun slung across his shoulder, answered by saying, "Oh, we are just out enjoying our beautiful land. It's nice, don't you think?" We answered politely, but my friend later said what I was thinking at the time, "the land would be much nicer if there weren't so many illegal settlements in it."

Shabbat is the Jewish Sabbath, which goes from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. The shops are closed, and people usually don't drive. On the ride home, I saw families walking to the Western Wall to pray. It is hard to be torn between such sights: the family walking to pray, the settlers walking through Daher's vineyard. I wonder: how can it be pleasing to God to trespass onto someone else's property, armed with a gun? The words "Shabbat Shalom" seem more like a joke some days...

I can't wait to return to plant more trees. I pray that the Israeli government doesn't take the land, that the settlers don't destroy the trees we've planted or cause trouble for the Nassar family that lives there. And I hope that one day Israelis and Palestinians can both walk around and enjoy their beautiful land ... equally and peacefully.



Buildings at Daher's Vineyard

ABOUT SABEEL: Sabeel is an ecumenical grassroots liberation theology movement among Palestinian Christians. Inspired by the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, this liberation theology seeks to deepen the faith of Palestinian Christians, promote unity, justice and love. Sabeel also works to promote a more accurate international awareness regarding the identity, presence, and witness of Palestinian Christians as well as their contemporary concerns. It encourages individuals and groups worldwide to work for a just, comprehensive, and enduring peace informed by truth and empowered by prayer and action.

40 Years in the Wilderness: 40 Years of Occupation Sabeel International Young Adult Conference July 19- July 29, 2007

- Do you want to know more about Current Realities in Palestine, during this 40th year of the Occupation?
- Do you want to visit Biblical Sites and share Biblical reflection with Young Adults from around the world?
- Are you between the ages of 18 and 35 and want to be involved in advocacy for peace with justice in the Holy Land?

If you answered "yes" to these questions, then we invite you to participate in Sabeel's 2nd International Young Adult Conference.

Our vision for this conference is to gather, network with, and further educate young leaders from Palestine and around the world, during this 40th year of the Occupation, so that they may be trained, commissioned, and equipped with the tools to act in advocacy to end the Occupation.

The conference will include:

- Visits to Palestinian Towns and Villages
- Events Celebrating Palestinian Culture
- Worship and Biblical Reflections
- Volunteer Experience
- Advocacy Workshops
- Sharing Experiences and Ideas with Palestinian Young Adults

The registration and program fee for the conference is \$700. This includes all of your land costs – food, accommodations, ground transportation, speakers and activities – but it does not include airfare. When scheduling flights, please keep in mind that participants should arrive on July 18th.

SPECIAL OFFER- For those interested in traveling in the Galilee there will be an option for a two-night tour for an additional \$150 after the conference.

REGISTER BY JUNE 15th AT WWW.SABEEL.ORG or e-mail youth@sabeel.org for more information

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Catching up on anti-Semitism – and now it’s the “new” anti-Semitism

You probably recall the furious criticisms of the Presbyterian Church (USA), after the 2004 General Assembly called for studying the possibility of the church’s divesting itself of stocks in companies currently doing business in or with the State of Israel in ways that support the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territory. We reported and commented on those attacks at the time, and have continued to link to many discussions of Israel, Palestine, and charges of anti-Semitism.*

But now a number of Jewish groups in the US are talking about a “new anti-Semitism,” which some observers see as the familiar fear-mongering that has been practiced so effectively by President Bush and his administration, using “terrorists” (and of course Arabs and/or Muslims) as the focus of the fear.

The fierce criticisms of Jimmy Carter’s recent book, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, seem to be one current example of what these members of the “Israel lobby” are calling the new anti-Semitism.

To gain some understanding of what’s happening among our Jewish sisters and brothers, Geoff Browning, an active participant in the Israel-Palestine Network, attended a conference on “the new anti-Semitism” in the Bay Area, and shared a report with the group. He has kindly agreed to let us share it here, as well.

The Lessons I Learned at The New Anti-Semitism Conference

by Geoff Browning

The New Anti-Semitism Conference was put on by a long list of Bay Area Jewish organizations including the Anti-Defamation League and the Jewish Community Relations Council. I wanted to attend the conference because I have been participating in a Jewish/Presbyterian dialogue group for more than an year and yet I felt, as a Presbyterian, that I still didn’t understand the strong connection Jews feel with the state of Israel and the fear Jews feel around the issue of anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism is still a very real problem in the world and we all know its ugliness in the form of vandalism of synagogues, slurs against Jews as greedy, miserly, etc. But what does the “new” anti-Semitism mean? That is what I was hoping to learn.

Lesson 1: Perhaps it was the police cars parked in front of the locked and

gated facility or the searching of our bags and backpacks or the guards at the entrances and on every floor, but there was no mistaking the sense of fear that was the subtext of this conference on the “New anti-Semitism.” Yet, for all the heightened security, the security seemed like a pretense. As a flock of us early birders were gathering outside the gate before the conference, someone took the initiative and pressed the green button that might unlock the gate. A disembodied voice spoke from a speaker that reminded me of the scene from the Wizard of Oz, “What do you want?” Our undesignated initiator replied, “We want to come in,” sounding a little puzzled that such an explanation was necessary. We heard the buzzing sound that unlocked the gate and we all filed through to register our presence without anyone verifying who we were or what we were there to do. When they did get around to searching our bags and backpacks after registration, it was little more than a perfunctory effort. Gratefully, they didn’t search the deep body cavities of my person, but if security

was a concern, why wouldn’t they thoroughly search my backpack? On the other hand, I guess it would seem odd to have a conference about the hatred of Jews without at least some security. I just wonder whether the purpose of the security was to insure safety or to underscore that Jews ought to be fearful. Perhaps the topic itself warrants an orange alert.

Lesson 2: The new anti-Semitism, as described by the speakers at the conference, including the keynote speaker, Anthony Julius from Britain, has two distinguishing characteristics: it is expressed by those that are on the political left and it includes criticism of Israel. These characteristics seem so general as to be meaningless unless their intent is to claim that a substantial portion of the State of Israel is also guilty of the new anti-Semitism. Oddly enough these characteristics seem to contradict the stated principles of the conference which included the phrases, “Criticism of Israel is not anti-Semitism” and “We will support a safe and supportive environment where a diversity of views can be expressed.”

* See *Network News*, Summer 2004, pp. 9 - 12. On our website go to http://www.witherspoonsociety.org/2004/israel_actions_arch_1.htm, and more recent pages.

Nevertheless, every workshop and plenary session we attended linked criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism without any corresponding counter-point or nuancing explanation.

This linkage between criticism of Israel and anti-Semitism is dangerous because it associates Israel with worldwide Jewry. Once we go down that road, logic will allow Israel's critics to claim not just that Israel is invading Lebanon, but that the "Jews are invading Lebanon" or the "Jews are invading Gaza." This is the logical consequence of associating criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism. And doing so perpetuates and propagates anti-Semitism. There must be a careful examination and explanation of what it means for Israel to be a Jewish state without it also being representative of all Jews. This discussion was entirely lacking from the conference.

Lesson 3: At least two leaders of workshops had expressed the view that the Presbyterian Church (USA) and/or all its members are anti-Semitic. In one session, it was so blatant that the leader of the workshop announced that all Presbyterians are anti-Semites, "...they just don't realize it yet." As a Presbyterian, I consider this to be a form of hate speech. There is no other way to put it. The categorizing of an entire denomination and/or its members is just as bad as the anti-Semitism they claim to be fighting against. It incites animosity between our communities and that does nothing to further understanding and mutual support. In both of these cases, the speakers were Christian ministers and yet there is no doubt that the organizers of the conference knew their biases and they were asked to participate because of their biases. This is particularly troubling and ironic since the Anti-Defamation League was among the sponsors and organizers of this conference.

Lesson 4: In another session, two Jewish activists got in an argument. Women in Black, a peace group that protests the effects of war and violence around the world, claimed that another group, Voice for Israel led by one of the workshop leaders, was using hateful tactics against them. They claimed that the Jews from the other organization called them cruel and hateful names, used bullhorns in their faces, etc. The Voice for Israel activist responded with counter claims of his own.

First of all, there is nothing new in rival religious groups experiencing this animosity. Rival Christian organizations have done as much and worse to one another. What did strike me was the tragic irony that if a non-Jew did the things that the Women in Black claims were done, it would be a blatant example of anti-Semitism. Yet in the mind of this activist, he did not see his actions as in any way hateful even though his actions were full of anti-Jewish slurs and just as well rationalized. And finally, his response of counter claims of misdeeds done by the other party struck me as astonishing. Here, in this small room of about 30 people, we could see the same dynamic being played out between Palestine and Israel, claim and counter claim and vice versa. The best defense is a good offense.

Lesson 5: The final lesson from the conference was for me the most disturbing one of all. The session on how to respond to hurtful language turned into a session on how to respond to criticism of Israel. The message of this session was clear; criticism of Israel is hurtful. The session leader, David Hirsh, was role playing the critic of Israel and asking the audience to come up with impromptu responses. One criticism that was offered was that the "occupation is a violation of Jewish values." Since no one in the audience volunteered a response, Mr.

Hirsh offered his own analysis that the term is so subjective that we can't be sure what it means. I found this confounding since as a non-Jew, I have found the Jewish values of justice and human rights and care for the poor and oppressed to be a beacon of hope for our world. Long before there were Christians standing up for justice and for the poor, there were Jews speaking out on behalf of the widows and orphans and the oppressed. The prophet Isaiah says it well:

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke.

Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

These are the values that allow Jews, Christians and many others to stand together against bigotry and racism, against the scapegoating of immigrants, to be advocates on behalf of food and shelter for the poor and homeless. These are the values that my Jewish friends and teachers and heroes have taught me. I'm sorry they were not among the lessons I learned at The New Anti-Semitism Conference.

The author: Geoff Browning is the Peacemaking Advocate for the Presbytery of San Jose, and has been involved in the local Jewish/Presbyterian dialogue up to the 2006 GA. He has been to Israel/Palestine twice. His local congregation, First Presbyterian of Palo Alto, has always been a strong supporter of the Jewish community. He wrote earlier on the criticisms of the PC(USA) in *Presbyterian Outlook*, in January, 2006.

A Progress Report on the "New Social Creed"

By Gene TeSelle

In previous issues we have reminded readers that the so-called "Social Creed of the Churches," dealing with issues of labor and industry, was adopted unanimously at the founding meeting of the Federal Council of Churches in 1908. It should be noted that the statement was not a "creed" in the formal sense and certainly did not give itself that title. But almost immediately it was called that because of its brevity and pointedness, and the General Assembly of 1920 used the term. Perhaps it would better be called a "confessional" statement, applying Christian principles to the contemporary situation.

Looking ahead, the General Assembly of 2004 directed the Office of the General Assembly to consider an appropriate celebration of this event, and the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) to consider the current economic situation and with other churches consider an updated social creed for the 21st century.

A resolution team, appointed by ACSWP, has been at work for several years and has stayed in communication with several other denominations and with the National Council of Churches. Here's what has been accomplished so far:

A draft social creed has gone through many versions in the resolution team, in conversation with the Justice and Advocacy Commission of the National Council of Churches, chaired by Michael Kinnamon. This will be presented to our own General Assembly next year in San Jose for adoption.

In the meantime the United Methodists, who have always included a Social Creed in their worship materials, have developed a creed in song form, which may be especially relevant in our non-print culture.

The resolution team has also prepared an introduction, setting the context, and a brief "commentary" explicating each of the items in the new social creed. The commentary is intended to be an aid to study and dialogue, and the General Assembly will probably be asked to recommend it for study in the churches.

The draft social creed was presented at the meeting of Theological Educators for Social Witness (TEPSW) at Princeton Theological Seminary last October. Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty chaired the panel, which included Max

Stackhouse, Janet Fishburn, and Gonzalo Castillo Cardenas.

A documentary is being prepared under the direction of William Thomas, video developer, to acquaint Presbyterians and others with the background and influence of the original Social Creed and the situation in which the new Social Creed is being developed.

Aware of the widespread attention given to Walter Rauschenbusch's *Prayers for the Social Awakening* (1909), the resolution team suggested a similar volume, *New Prayers for the Social Awakening*, edited jointly by Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty and Chris Iosso, probably to be published by Westminster John Knox Press.

The new Social Creed will be discussed at a consultation focused on globalization (the topic of an extensive document approved for study by the 2006 General Assembly) which will be held in May, 2007, in Chicago. This will include both academics and "practitioners," and is expected to contribute to a multi-faceted globalization study guide and a book dealing with economics and ethics in our time.

Curriculum materials are also being talked about, especially for high school and college groups. Suggestions along several lines have already been put forward.

During 2007 and early in 2008 these will become more public as the church moves toward the 2008 General Assembly.

The Social Creed will also be a major focus of our Witherspoon conference, to be held in Louisville this coming September. (See page 23.)

If you want to join the conversation –

Don't overlook the opportunity to play a role in this discussion, not only by contacting Chris Iosso (ciosso@ctr.pcusa.org) but by going to a discussion initiated by Rita Nakashima Brock and FaithVoices, using an on-line system called Synanim. You can find the announcement of the discussion at <http://SocialCreed.org>

Brock's website, FaithVoices <<http://www.fvcommunity.org/>>, held an open discussion on the Social Creed during two days in January, which allowed some 190 participants to engage in focused, structured discussions on specific questions. They produced an interesting set of points in response to questions like what should be the "critical elements of our social creed," what are the "major threats to

Continued on page 20

A SOCIAL CREED FOR THE 21st CENTURY: Received for Study.

Revised Nov. 14, 2006

Remembering the prophetic Social Creed of the Churches of 1908, we respond to God's call to transform our social order toward justice and peace, and address the 21st century's great challenges of globalization and sustainability.

Hearing also concerns of churches and peoples around our globe, we pledge ourselves to specific practices of personal and social responsibility that reflect our Triune God's gracious will for all creation. We rejoice in the Biblical vision where all "shall long enjoy the work of their hands" and "not labor in vain or bear children for calamity" (Isa. 65: 22-23).

In faith, we celebrate the full humanity of each woman, man, and child, all created in God's image, by working for:

- Employment for all, at a family-sustaining living wage.
- Protection of workers from dangerous occupational conditions, injuries, and death.
- Full civil, political and economic rights for all people, protected by new governance structures.
- Abolition of forced labor, human trafficking, and the exploitation of children.
- The rights of workers to organize, and to share in workplace decisions and productivity gains.
- Adequate time and resources to care for families without fear of work penalties.
- High quality public education for all, free from racial, gender, or economic disparity.
- A fair, de-racialized criminal justice system, based on restorative justice and rehabilitation.

In the love taught by Jesus, despite the world's sufferings and evils, we honor the deep connections within our human family and seek to awaken a new spirit of cooperation by working for:

- Abatement of poverty and enactment of policies benefiting the most vulnerable.
- Universal healthcare.
- Safe, affordable housing, served by adequate public transportation.
- An effective program of social security during sickness, disability and old age.
- Tax and budget policies that reduce disparities between rich and poor, strengthen democracy, and provide greater opportunity for everyone within the common good.
- Just immigration policies that protect family unity, safeguard workers' rights, require employer accountability, and foster international cooperation.
- Public service as a high vocation, with integrity in voting, campaign finance and lobbying.

In hope sustained by the Holy Spirit, we pledge to keep and heal the environment, recognizing our responsibility for its health and our interdependence with Creation and one another, by working for:

- Adoption of simpler lifestyles for those who have enough.
- Access for all to healthy food, clean water and air, with wise and equitable land stewardship.
- Sustainable use of all resources and promotion of alternative energy sources.
- Equitable global trade that protects local economies, initiatives, cultures and livelihoods.
- Peacemaking through international cooperation and rule of law, mutual security rather than unilateral force, nuclear disarmament and a strengthened United Nations.
- Redirection of military spending to more peaceful and productive uses.
- Relationships of mutuality among the world's churches and faith communities.

With all those who labor and are heavy-laden, we commit ourselves to a culture of peace and freedom that embraces non-violent initiatives, human dignity and greater equality, with a deeper spirituality of inward growth and outward action. By these means, we witness to our hope in the God who makes all things new, whom we know in Jesus Christ.

From the Presbyterian Witness in Washington Weekly:

The Federal Budget: a Human Needs Budget?

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. – Matthew 6:21

These analyses have been posted by the Presbyterian Washington Office, as part of their Witness in Washington Weekly, with the first section appearing in the February 12, 2007 letter, and the second in the February 19 letter. They are authored by Leslie G. Woods, staff person for Domestic Poverty and Environmental Issues. More articles will be posted in the near future.

We reprint them here with the kind permission of the Washington Office. If you find these analyses helpful, you can receive them yourself only by subscribing to the e-list for them, since they are not normally posted on the Washington Office web-site. Just go to <http://capwiz.com/pucsa/mlm/signup>. And we encourage you to do just that!

February 12, 2007

On Monday, February 5, 2007, President Bush released his Fiscal Year (FY) 2008 budget proposal. This document outlines how the President sees the nation's financial future from October 2007 through September 2008, the 2008 fiscal year. While some of the assumptions the President's budget makes are widely seen as unrealistic with respect to reducing the deficit and balancing the budget in 2012, even worse are the terrible priorities displayed by the President's choices in the programs he funds and those he cuts.

A federal budget is about more than just spending, taxes and thousands of pages of tables and graphs. It is about what this nation values as a community. Where we choose to spend our money shows what we value most as a society and this budget proposal displays values that are outright hostile to low- and even moderate-income Americans who are making ends meet only with the help of federal programs that provide assistance for health care, food and nutrition, housing, the cost of energy, child care, and much more.

Within federal expenditures are several different kinds of spending, including interest on the national debt, mandatory spending (such as Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid), Defense, and Domestic Discretionary spending (including Homeland Security). Other than mandatory spending, which is also sometimes called "entitlement" spending, the programs that serve the most vulnerable in society are funded

through the domestic discretionary spending section of the budget. Other than the interest on the national debt, which in 2006 was 8 percent of total expenditures, spending on non-defense, discretionary service programs made up the smallest wedge of the pie, at 14 percent in 2006.

Now that the President has proposed his budget, Congress must go to work to create its own. By April 15, Congress must pass a "Budget Resolution" that will set an overall spending cap for FY 2008 federal spending, but it will not set funding levels for specific programs or departments. After the budget resolution passes, the individual appropriations committees will go to work creating detailed budgets for each of the federal programs and departments, so advocacy for individual programs will begin later in the year. Right now, advocates' focus is on making sure the overall budget spending cap is high enough that human needs programs do not have to fight with each other for funding (i.e. cutting Head Start to fund housing vouchers).

There are several programs that will experience severe hardship if this budget is enacted as the President proposes. Some of the programs that will experience especially egregious cuts and reductions in the services they can provide are the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), Medicaid, housing assistance, Food stamps and other nutrition programs, Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), child care programs and Head Start, some college aid programs, the Social Services Block Grant, job training, education, pollution control, and funding for veterans' health care (which will be increased in FY 2008, but cut in each of the four subsequent years.)

The President's budget does contain some very encouraging policies, including increased international HIV / AIDS funding, increased commitment to the Millennium Challenge account, increased humanitarian aid and peacekeeping programs for Sudan, and increased maximum allowed Pell Grant, which helps low-income students go to college. It is important to preserve these positive steps toward meeting our commitments abroad, but we must also meet the commitments that the government has made at home.

In the following weeks, Witness in Washington Weekly will individually address some of the domestic human needs issues and programs that are affected by the President's budget proposal. The 1988 General Assembly stated, "In light

of the growing disparity in household income and the past positions of General Assemblies, the 200th General Assembly, urges the President and Congress of the United States to oppose further cuts in social programs that benefit poor people and to increase support for programs unable to serve all eligible persons due to lack of funds.” (1988 Statement – PC(USA), p. 364) As people of faith we are called to advocate for the common good on behalf of “the least of these,” but this budget does the opposite. Advocates should follow the budget debate and urge their members of Congress to make sure the Budget Resolution overall spending cap is high enough to adequately fund programs that help real people every day.

Part 2, posted on February 19, 2007

The Federal Budget: A Human Needs Budget?

Funding for Hunger and Nutrition Programs, Home Energy Assistance, and Conservation

As discussed in the Witness in Washington Weekly on February 12, 2007, the federal budget is more than just thousands of pages of numbers, tables and graphs. Rather, it is a document that shows what this nation values as a community. Where we choose to spend our money shows what we value most as a society. President Bush’s Fiscal Year (FY) 2008 budget proposal outlines his priorities for the nation, but people of faith, who are called to speak out in defense of the poor, cannot choose the same priorities. In this article, we will examine in more detail the President’s proposed funding levels for nutrition and hunger programs, energy assistance programs and conservation programs.

When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not glean what is left; it shall be left for the alien, the orphan, and the widow. – Deuteronomy 24:21

From our earliest laws, people of faith have been concerned about making sure that the poor people in their communities have enough to eat. In the ancient world, it was unlawful to reap the entire harvest from a field. Instead, farmers and their workers intentionally left the crop at the edges of the field, and it was the right of the poor to glean, or collect that crop to feed themselves and their families. We no longer have gleaning laws, but we have put in place service programs that intend to address the same need. The Food Stamp Program, the Commodity Supplemental Food Program, and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) all provide indispensable nutrition assistance to families who routinely have to choose between paying their bills and buying groceries.

Food Stamps: In the FY 2008 budget, the President proposes to cut about 329,000 low-income people from the Food Stamp Program by eliminating the option for states to provide automatic Food Stamp eligibility for families that are receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) services. This loss of Food Stamps would mean that children in the affected families would lose their automatic eligibility for free school breakfast and lunch programs as well. In a positive change, the President proposes removing retirement and education savings from the assets that determine whether a family is eligible to receive Food Stamps, which would mean about 98,000 new enrollments in the program, but overall, enrollment in food stamps will drop by 231,000 people due to the changes mentioned above.

The Commodity Supplemental Food Program gives special help to low-income seniors as well as to some families on the WIC program. Essentially, this program provides a food package worth less than \$20 each month to these households. In FY 2005, this program served an estimated 459,000 low-income older adults and more than 50,000 pregnant women and young children. The FY 2008 budget proposal would eliminate this program entirely.

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for **Women, Infants and Children (WIC)** ensures nutrition assistance and education for low-income women who are pregnant, breastfeeding and post-partum, and to infants and children. Currently WIC serves 45 percent of all infants born in the United States, according to the Federal Food and Nutrition Service. The President’s proposed funding level is at least \$175 million short of the nearly \$5.6 billion needed to cover all eligible WIC applicants. WIC is one of the most effective programs for reducing hunger and malnutrition in children and must be funded adequately.

According to America’s Second Harvest 2006 Hunger Survey, nearly 42 percent of the households served by this nationwide system of food pantries had to choose between paying their utility bills in the winter and putting food on the table. As the nation is gripped by bone-freezing temperatures and crippling snow storms, poor families turn to the **Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)** for help in heating their homes. The FY 2008 budget proposal cuts funding for LIHEAP by 44 percent, from \$3.2 billion in FY 2006 to \$1.72 billion in FY 2008.

And the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and to tend it.
– Genesis 2:15

In the opening story in Genesis, God creates the earth and everything in it. Then God makes human beings, and puts

them in the world to care for it and be good stewards of its resources. In the FY 2008 budget proposal, environmental programs would sustain some of the deepest cuts. The budget proposal cuts the overall funding for programs in the **Natural Resources and Environment** budget by \$2.5 billion in 2008 and by \$20.1 billion over the next five years, after accounting for inflation. Every subcategory of this line item in the budget would feel the effects of this cut, including water resources, conservation and land management, recreational resources including national parks, and pollution control and abatement. In particular, pollution control would be cut by \$706 million in 2008 and by \$1.4 billion, 15.7 percent, in 2012.

If the federal budget reflects the priorities of the nation, this budget must not pass! Help for women, children, seniors, and poor families is at the core of Jesus' call to care for "the least of these." As Congress now sets out to create its own budget for FY 2008, advocates must contact their legislators and urge them to set the overall spending cap high enough that human needs programs will not be squeezed. When the spending cap is set too low, these programs and their advocates will have to fight with each other for adequate funds for the common good of all. Send a message to your members of Congress in support of a budget spending cap higher than the President's, high enough to fund human needs programs without cuts.

Part 3, posted February 26, 2007

Budget Cutting: Federal Juvenile Justice Programs

At a time when we need Juvenile Justice Programs more than ever, the Administration's budget is projecting reduction in vital programs. President George Bush's recent budget request includes drastic cuts to dedicated funding for federal juvenile justice efforts. These cuts would be reflected in the State Formula Grants, Title V Local Prevention Grants, and the Juvenile Accountability Block Grant. As the former Office of Juvenile Justice Department Program Administrator under President Clinton, Shay Bilchik, says "This budget includes the elimination of funding for the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, which if sustained, would be a grievous error in judgment which will jeopardize the gains we have made in reducing youth crime."

In particular, the 'Fight Crime: Invest in Kids' organization, has reported that the Fiscal Year 2008 budget proposal has just \$254 million in a new program entitled "Child Safety Initiatives Block Grants" that will go to states instead of

funds allocated specifically for Gang Prevention; State Challenge Grants; Mentoring Programs or other endeavors. This projected allocation is less than half the funds previously given for such programs in the 2002 budget. At their high point, these juvenile justice programs received a combined total of \$546.9 million in Fiscal Year 2002; \$451.4 in 2003; \$306.7 in 2004; \$338.7 in 2006; and are scheduled for \$338.7 in 2007 as well.

The House Judiciary Committee held hearings on Youth Violence and Gang Interventions. Below is the link to view the Video Webcast of these hearings entitled "Making Communities Safer: Youth Violence and Gangs Interventions that Work." You can click on the names of the witnesses to read their testimonies.

< <http://judiciary.house.gov/oversight.aspx?ID=272> >

We have recently reported on how Juveniles are now being placed in adult jail facilities and not juvenile centers. Without these vital programs, fewer children will have opportunities to avoid crime and even more will become subject to the adult justice system. Advocates may want to check how juveniles are treated in your state system and impress upon both your state and federal officials the importance of these Juvenile Justice Programs.

Deuteronomy 24: 17-18 :

You shall not deprive a resident alien or an orphan of justice; you shall not take a widow's garment in pledge. Remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this.

To send a message to your members of Congress, go to <http://capwiz.com/pcusa/issues/alert/?alertid=9383911&type=CO>

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Who Cares about the Iraqis?

Headlines don't convey their immense suffering

by Victoria Furio

The author served for 15 years as mission personnel for the National Council of Churches and The United Methodist Church in Latin American human rights programs and is currently on staff at Union Theological Seminary in New York.

Market blasts. Roadside bombs. Thunderous explosions send smoke high above the Tigris. Militias exchange mortar attacks. Foreign troops lash out blindly like cats in a sack. Deadly violence is Iraq's daily bread and now completely engulfs the country. The alarming increase of deaths in recent months has caused the media to give more detail on the attacks themselves, but for more than three years, they have doled out casualty figures – 23, 10, or 75 dead – like a daily dose of novocain. The numbing, routine sound bites, stripped of wider context, prevent us from feeling any pain. And rob us of our humanity. As their country and lives are shattered beyond recognition, the sorrow of the Iraqi people has been kept invisible.

How can we understand what 655,000 dead means? In US terms, these estimated casualties¹ would be the equivalent of 7,860,000 deaths in three and a half years. If we don't hear of the countless innocents dying at checkpoints or under aerial bombardment of their homes, of entire families killed in house raids, of death squads leaving tortured and executed victims along roadsides every day, can we share their pain? If we do not see floor after floor of mangled, cluster bomb survivors in the pediatric hospital, or the wounded children languishing for lack of simple medicine and supplies, can we feel the desperation of parents and physicians who cannot save them? The piles of corpses in Baghdad's morgue are so high that bodies are being buried before

anguished relatives manage to identify their loved ones. We could not see this with our own eyes and not perceive the horror, but the media blackout preempts the most basic human compassion, paralyzing us. First one thousand, then two thousand, now over three thousand a month are perishing. In October alone, the figure reached 3,709 civilians dead due to the war.² Can this really be the price of democracy? Or written off as the fault of inherently uncivilized Iraqis?

Tracing the roots

The two uncontrollable forces now ripping the country apart were seeded in the March 2003 invasion itself. The insurgency against US troops – that has so vexed the Administration – cropped up as soon as the Sunnis were displaced from power. But why would the planners think this group, afforded absolute control for some 70 years, first by the British and then by the US, would now just go away on their say-so? Much less with a 400,000-man army disbanded by decree but not disarmed!

The same concept, that a country's rulers can be reshuffled like game board pieces, also characterized the next fatal mistake: pre-determining who would hold power. US policy-makers chose the SCIRI (Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq), a faction of fundamentalist Islamist Shiites (and former anti-communist ally à la Afghan *muja-hideen*), as the group that would consent to overall US plans if allowed

to run the nation's business. After all the trauma of wars and Saddam, the Iraqi people were not permitted to think, to heal and to decide, but rather found themselves once again under an imposed government. When the United States set up interim governments along sectarian lines, the stage was set for division. Even the army and police were granted sectarian battalions. Most Iraqis have always considered themselves Iraqis first and only second, a member of any particular group. The interim governments did not reflect an Iraqi national identity, only the self-interest of their members, and would become a detonator for the bloody, sectarian strife, now spiraling out of control.

Adding fuel to an already explosive mix, the United States not only allowed the SCIRI to keep their militia, the Badr Brigade, but helped the other parties to create their own paramilitary forces. With Allawi as interim prime minister, a whole new set of illegal commandos was created in collaboration with the CIA, then funded and armed by the Pentagon.³

And the bodies began to appear on the streets. Instead of dismantling them, many commandos were incorporated into the police. Before long, marauding death squads, often still in official uniform, would go on the prowl as soon as the sun went down.

We looked the other way while Shiites kidnapped, tortured and murdered Sunnis until it splashed onto the front pages. By early 2005, 1,000 bodies a month were arriving at Baghdad's morgue. The Shiite militias were out of hand, and the insurgency was gaining strength, joined by increasing numbers of those resisting foreign occupation. In secret negotiations, US Ambassador Khalilzad, attempted to reach the "perfect" solution: support Sunni insurgents (our mortal enemy) to go after Shiites in exchange for a cease-

fire! But when the Sunnis made withdrawal of US troops a condition, the deal was scuttled.⁴ All Khalilzad could do now was call for the Shiites to curb their militias, pinning the blame on them for their existence.

Chaos and mortal anarchy

It's not hard to see why chaos reigns, with parallel military forces unchecked, official security forces riddled with death squads, armed resistance to foreign occupation, and massive military might being thrown at anything that moves. If you add to that US designs on Iraq's economy and oil, you have a perfect hell. The feeble attempt to invite Sunnis back into the nation's governance in 2005 would not stick: too little too late.

U.S. policy is stoking the fires of civil war. Militias are fighting militias, fully armed with weapons and revenge. Sectarian violence skyrocketed after the Samarra mosque attack in February 2006. By October, the monthly number of civilian deaths had doubled, jumping to 3,709, the highest monthly total in the war so far.

To paint the battle against the insurgency in altruistic terms, of good versus evil, is a deliberate distortion and selective use of truth. And to sell a simplistic reason for this war to our *troops* is the ultimate disrespect and disregard for their lives. How can you separate disenchanted Sunnis and/or Saddam loyalists from the fact that they served a man that we brought on the scene?

Our Central Intelligence Agency sought out the cutthroat and thug named Saddam Hussein to help assassinate a prime minister who thought that Iraqi oil should belong to Iraq, until then solely in British, U.S. and French hands. That was 1959. This particular attempt failed, but Prime Minister Kassem was eventual-

ly murdered in 1963, in a CIA coup that paved the way for Saddam's rise to power.⁵

So it is no exaggeration to say that the Iraqi people suffered 40 years under Saddam courtesy of the United States. All of his massacres and repression throughout the '60s, '70s and '80s were well known to us, yet we treated and defended him as a friend and ally. And throughout the 1980s, we also helped him acquire the material, financing and technology for the world's most powerful and deadly weapons. All in the name of assuring US access to Persian Gulf oil.

Historical amnesia

We need only recur to our current Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, and his predecessor, Donald Rumsfeld, for information on their direct participation in arming Iraq in the 80s. Which is when, among many other atrocities, Saddam had 148 Shiite inhabitants of Dujail killed, for which he was condemned to death. Despite having eliminated some 300,000 Iraqis during his reign of terror, the United States never had a bad word to say in those days about the merciless tyrant.

Only when his formidable arsenal – built up by the West – meant that Saddam could be independent, did US rhetoric shift overnight (1989) from calling him a “force of moderation” to “one of the worst dictators to have ever darkened the face of the earth.”⁶ And Kuwait was enlisted to provoke an invasion that would allow us to teach him a lesson. It then fell to the United Nations to disarm him, which they effectively accomplished.

But through the 12 years of crippling sanctions, it was the Iraqi people who suffered. The bombings and economic hardships made daily life a *via crucis*. In the humanitarian crisis considered “collateral damage” by the Pentagon,

one-half million children had needlessly perished by 1996 from preventable diseases and lack of food. When asked about this number, representing more children than had died in Hiroshima, our then-UN Ambassador, Madeleine Albright replied, “we think the price is worth it.”⁷ This same callous sentiment was recently echoed by Secretary of State Rice, quoted as saying that Iraq is “worth the investment” in American lives and dollars.⁸

A country in collapse

But Iraqis don't think it's so worthwhile: a State Department poll taken this summer showed that nearly 75% of Baghdad residents want all foreign forces out, with 65% favoring an immediate withdrawal.⁹ After almost four years, basic services remain below pre-invasion levels: they are living with less than 10 hours of electricity a day, insufficient drinking water and sewage disposal, with raw waste pouring into streets and rivers, non-functional hospitals, and only 1 of every 3 children in school due to the lack of security. By December 2004, UNICEF reported that the number of children suffering acute malnutrition had doubled since the March 2003 invasion; some 400,000 children suffered from “wasting,” a condition characterized by chronic diarrhea and protein deficiency. Over six million Iraqis were dependent on government food rations; they have now been cut by order of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as a condition for loans to the government.

For gasoline to be in short supply in Iraq is the ultimate irony. Reconstruction was a colossal failure, with billions pocketed by US corporations, leaving only ruins behind. The country fell into economic chaos when Coalition Administrator Bremer fired hundreds of thousands of state workers indiscriminately, resulting in 60%

unemployment. In addition, he rewrote all of Iraq's laws, without consulting the population, fully intending to privatize everything possible and open the economy to foreign ownership. Under his watch, \$8.8 billion, nearly half of the Development Fund for Iraq's oil money, went unaccounted for, vanished without a trace. And US Ambassador Khalilzad worked hard to re-write the Constitution in order to make way for up to 80% of the country's national wealth – its oil – to pass into foreign hands.

Tens of thousands are fleeing their homes and becoming destitute. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), some two million have now left the country, and another 1.7 million are displaced internally.¹⁰ More than twice as many Iraqis have already died with the US in control than in the four decades under Saddam! A once modern country is turning to dust.

One thing is certain: *no one cares about the Iraqi people.*

Possessing the earth

With demonic obstinacy, the Administration insists on pursuing "victory," i.e., bringing Iraq under US dominion, come hell or high water. As if all human lives were expendable, it matters not how much destruction is needed to achieve a permanent US military presence in the region: bases in Iraq, regime change in Iran and Syria, and a launching pad to "trouble spots" in Asia and Africa, likely sites of the next resource wars.

Heeding at least one of the Baker Commission's recommendations—not to leave without the oil—the house-to-house sweeps of the "surge" are aimed at eliminating as many Sunnis and Shiites opposed to the US occupation as possible, to create the "security" environment necessary for

British and US oil companies to step into their inheritance. Iraq's parliament is expected to approve a new hydrocarbon law in March, which will grant foreign oil companies some 75% of all oil profits for an indefinite period.

"Victory" may very well be at hand, and is indifferent to the corpses – US or Iraqi – piling up.

Need for the press

If the real dramas unfolding at every level had been reported, detailed and trumpeted day after day by the press, would we not have been able to stop this lunacy? Seeing even this thumbnail sketch, there would surely be no numbness! The good citizens of this country would have long ago called for a halt to the madness. Indeed, had the truth been told, this war would never have been allowed to start!

Only by keeping the American people in the dark, denying our right to know and to feel, can such a ghastly and immoral project advance. It is urgent that we broaden and deepen our knowledge. Our church leaders, civic and elected officials have a sacred responsibility to see that their people become fully informed. To restore our own humanity, we must have the veil of falsehood lifted from our eyes, and the shield from our hearts. Only when we can weep for and with the Iraqis will we hasten the day of their release from the endless inferno.

February 2007

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Endnotes

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Theological musings

A Pretty Good President

A regular column by Dr. Douglas F. Ottati,
Professor of Theology, Union Seminary/PSCE

It's February 2007. *The New York Times* is already saying that conservative Republicans are looking for Mr. Right – a hero for the 2008 campaign. Making allowances for the fact that their Mr. Right may be a Ms., liberal Democrats appear to be doing the same. Not surprisingly, both sides are meeting with mixed results – even before rivals begin deconstructing each other in earnest.

I wish we wouldn't look for heroes because I think the net result is that significant numbers of voters become disillusioned, and then imperfect but better candidates find it more difficult to prevail. As I see it, anyway, the idea is to elect a president, not a savior. Not only that, but it seems that great presidents are comparatively rare. So, after six years of W., the bottom line is that I'd settle for electing a pretty good one. Herewith a few reflections on some qualities that may help to make a president pretty good.

-1-

Maybe you recall a United States Army recruiting commercial from a few years back. A young man is talking to his father, and then his father says, "Well, son, so you're going to be a soldier. Be a good one."

I expect most of us have some idea what of the father means. If you are a soldier, lots of people depend on you – from your fellow citizens and comrades in arms to enemies and noncombatants in the lands where you

may fight. This is why it is a matter of moral importance that you be a good one. (If you are having trouble thinking of the stakes enemy soldiers and noncombatants may have in this, consider the importance of treating prisoners humanely, as well as what

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often happens to civilians at the hands of poorly trained, undisciplined, and unrestrained militias.)

There is a general point in this about people and their responsibilities, and it was not lost on earlier Puritans who wrote directions for people on how to be faithful in their varied callings as doctors, lawyers, teachers, soldiers, etc. According to William Perkins and Richard Baxter, a calling or vocation is a particular line of responsibility by which a person may serve God and the public good. For example, Baxter said that a physician's calling has "the saving of men's lives and health" as its primary responsibility, and that the chief end of a lawyer's calling is justice and the cause of the innocent. He also noted that inordinate pursuit of wealth and reputation may deflect doctors and lawyers from their chief responsibilities. And so, he proposed certain "tests" for physicians and lawyers, among them the willingness to help the poor as well as those who are able to pay, and a willingness to refer persons to others where a given case goes

beyond one's own particular expertise.

But it is another point Baxter insisted upon that I want to emphasize here. *If you take up a calling that entails weighty responsibilities to others, it is a matter of moral importance that you be good at it in the sense of being competent or even accomplished.* Why? Because other people (the public good) depend on your competence and skill, and because it is God's will that the needs and well-being of others be looked after. Thus, for example, if you are going to be a physician, it is a matter of moral importance that you be a good one. The world doesn't need an incompetent doctor; it needs a physician who can

provide good quality medical care. (Indeed, even if we want to raise some questions about contemporary medical training, we probably also believe that it ought to be rigorous. So, if you are on a medical school admissions committee, it is a matter of moral importance that you admit persons whom you believe to have the requisite intellectual abilities and gifts to become good physicians, and that you turn down those whom you believe do not. If you are a medical student, it is a matter of moral importance that your courses be rigorous and that you study hard.) Essentially, of course, the same point holds true for auto mechanics. My family doesn't need a questionably competent mechanic working on my car. It needs a good mechanic who knows how to fix my brakes properly.

In sum, if you are a physician, a lawyer, a mechanic, or a soldier, it is important that you be honest and fair. It is also important that you not be puffed-up. Moreover, particularly if you are a physician or a lawyer, the nature of your responsibilities is such that you

should care for the poor as well as the wealthy. That is, we judge it important that persons in many walks of life possess and cultivate traits that we generally consider moral qualities. But it is also a matter of moral importance that people cultivate and maintain other qualities and skills that contribute to their good performance in their lines of responsibility. It is also a matter of moral importance that they cultivate and maintain qualities and skills that we do not think of as explicitly *moral* ones, but that contribute significantly to someone's competence and facility in the performance of certain tasks.

-2-

Which brings me – if you will allow a leap – to the current American president. I don't think that, when measured against many other presidents, W. is especially dishonest. In fact, he can be admirably direct, even in the face of significant political opposition. I don't think he is morally vicious (although I admit to believing that he is ideologically misguided). He even has some pretty good and humane ideas on what to do about undocumented immigrants. However, I do think that, in ways finally proven to be of considerable moral importance, he is not a good president.

The fundamental problem, I think, is the lack of a certain sensibility and accompanying skill. W. (and, by extension, also his broader administration) seems unable to grasp thoroughly a maxim for living in a world of extensive interdependent interrelations. The maxim is this. *Actions and policies that appear to be sensible and to advance our interests when considered from within narrow and short-term frames of reference often have consequences that actually harm the very interests we*

seek to advance. This is so because narrow and short-term frames of reference fail to relate our decisions to larger, relevant, and more complicated contexts. They fail to account for too many relevant factors and conditions, and so they often backfire.

A good president will recognize that we inhabit a multilateral world where the United States may be the lone superpower, but where there are also many other powers. There are substantial ones, such as China, Russia, and India, which are not now peer competitors but may become so. There are mid-sized and regional

Herewith a few reflections on some qualities that
may help to make a president
pretty good.

powers, such as Iran, South Africa, and Brazil, as well as important international associations, such as the European Union, the African Union, the Atomic Energy Agency, and the United Nations. Moreover, within nations, there often are different ethnic and religious groups jostling for position and competing for dominance. Thus, significant instabilities emerge when powers and interests that once were held in check by the other powers, such as the Soviet Union or Saddam's dictatorship, find themselves in more flexible international and domestic contexts and with new opportunities for self-assertion. (Remember Yugoslavia? Ponder Iraq.) In addition, today we are also acutely aware that even smaller nations and non-national groups may acquire comparatively inexpensive and highly destructive weapons, e.g., North Korea, Al Qaeda.

The upshot is that the U. S. has uniquely significant capacities to act as

well as uniquely important responsibilities to deploy its capacities in ways that may help to shape a tolerably just and stable international order that benefits both itself and others. An accurate and unromantic appreciation for this point can be the difference between responsible international involvement and irresponsible isolationism.¹ Nevertheless, our powers are not unlimited and we do not control all relevant outcomes. Thus, the success of American efforts at shaping helpful international environments – from strategies to limit terrorism, to developing international markets, cultivating democratic institutions, discouraging nuclear proliferation, and supporting humanitarian interventions – depends to a significant degree on whether or not other powers cooperate. An accurate appreciation for this point can be the difference between naively activist idealisms (whether of the right or the left) and international engagements that are both realistic and positive.

So, here's the thing. It is a matter of moral importance that a president of the United States in our time not only possess and cultivate the sensibilities needed to recognize these subtleties concerning our place in the world, but that she or he also possess and cultivate the skills to act effectively in this environment. Why? Because where these sensibilities and skills are absent, the costs both to ourselves and to others – this time in something other than medical malpractice or failed brakes – are simply too dear.

-3-

Which brings me to the rather long run-up to November 2008 that you and I seem fated to endure. Hillary, Joe Biden, Rudy Giuliani, Barack Obama, John McCain, John Edwards, Mitt Romney, Chuck Hagel, and who knows who else? The field of

candidates is large and still growing for what promises to be the most wide-open presidential contest in recent memory. As usual, there is no shortage of voters on both the right and the left who appear to view the field almost entirely in immediately moral terms. Which candidates share my values and ideals? Which candidates truly inspire? Fair enough. These things are genuinely important, and I can get as excited as the next person about some of the more immediate moral qualities and commitments of one or another candidate.

But, after six years of W., I also can't shake the feeling that we would do well to be on the lookout for some additional qualities. Does one or another candidate have the sensibilities it takes to picture realistically our place in an interdependent, dynamic, and difficult world? Does she or he have the skills to act effectively in concert with these sensibilities? Whatever the trials of an elongated campaign, it ought to give us an extended opportunity to find out. Maybe then we can elect a pretty good president.

¹ In fact, on this score, there is no such thing as a "free pass." Even if an American administration did nothing with respect to international trade, for example, the American economy as well as policies already in place would continue to shape the international order as well as the economic prospects of many other societies.

An invitation to join the New Sanctuary Movement

Hospitality – the offering of rest and shelter to those who lie outside the circle of kinship – is a core value of every faith tradition. It could even be said that it represents the core of our humanity as well since hospitality effectively transforms the "other" into family.

Sanctuary is perhaps the most significant form of hospitality – a welcoming of the rejected – people whose very humanity has been called into question. Increasingly, the impulse to offer Sanctuary is becoming the response of faith communities nationwide to recent immigration raids that have resulted in the deportation of parents whose citizen children often find themselves on their own or sent to live with strangers.

The New Sanctuary Movement then, is a coalition of religious leaders and their participating congregations who feel called to respond actively and publicly to the serious injustices currently suffered by our undocumented sisters and brothers residing in the United States. This response includes the provision of a safe space to families who are being torn apart in the name of an immigration law that everyone acknowledges is broken.

We base our actions on these principles: that every human person, regardless of national origin, has basic rights including 1) the right to earn a livelihood; 2) the right to family unity; and 3) the right to physical and emotional safety. These rights are being violated under current immigration law. We can no longer ignore the suffering of children, many of whom are U.S. citizens, being separated from their undocumented parents through unjust deportation. We can no longer ignore the intolerable exploitation of the immigrant workforce.

And so we commit ourselves to: 1) Take a public, moral stand for immigrants' rights 2) Reveal through education and advocacy, the actual suffering of immigrant workers and families under current and proposed legislation 3) Protect immigrant workers and families against hate, workplace discrimination, and unjust deportation.

If you would like more information on the New Sanctuary Movement, please contact the Rev. Trina Zelle at Interfaith Worker Justice of Arizona, 480-522-4707.

Interfaith Worker Justice

email: tzelle@iwj.org
 phone: (480)522-4707
 web: <http://iwj.org>

New Wineskins considers “two faithful options” by Gene TeSelle

The New Wineskins movement met in Orlando in February. Recognizing that its adherents had different views about leaving the PC(USA), the leadership offered a choice, “two faithful options.” Some may decide to stay within the PC(USA) and make their witness here. Others may want to realign with other Presbyterians. According to a story by Leslie Scanlon (*Presbyterian Outlook*, January 29, 2007), co-moderator Dean Weaver estimated that a third may be “already out the door,” a third are “never going to leave,” and a third need to “discern what they’re going to be called to do.” The larger congregations, it appears, intend to stay and pursue their own independent course within the PC(USA), funding their own para-church organizations and sending out their own missionaries.

For those thinking of departure, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church has already extended a welcome; its leadership has even proposed a new option (which must be voted on by the EPC’s General Assembly in June of 2007) that harmonizes with what New Wineskins has already been saying — non-geographical “transitional” presbyteries into which congregations could move together and which would last for five years, enabling all parties to see where they will go from there.

The EPC meets many of the expectations of evangelicals in the PC(USA), because it ordains women but has strict ordination standards when it comes to doctrinal matters. This is what many conservatives have been calling for in the wake of the 2006 General Assembly’s approval of an authoritative interpretation (AI) that allows for variations from the constitution of the church as long as

they do not involve “essentials.” At least sixteen presbyteries have adopted resolutions saying that no exceptions, no “scruples,” will be allowed, and that the “essentials” are stated in the constitution of the church.

When there is talk about withdrawal by anyone — right, left, or center — there will be at least the passing thought that it would be “good riddance.” But this is likely to be followed by the feeling that, no matter how much we disagree, we have grown accustomed to each other and may even like each other. Departure is always interpreted as a sign of failure — somewhere, somehow.

But let’s notice that departure to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church would not be to a group that is alienated from the PC(USA) to the extent of anathematizing it. The EPC is in communion with us. We might think of those who withdraw to it as being in a “holding tank,” an interim situation while they think things over. They might even decide to return to the PC(USA), especially if the EPC gets tangled up in debates over women’s ordination. When you think you’re escaping to a purer and more homogeneous communion, you may find that you are only increasing the number of disputes to be worried about.

And then what about those big congregations that seem to be leaning toward staying inside the PC(USA)? It is difficult to know all their motives, but one expressed motive is to use their financial power to strengthen organizations that are not under the jurisdiction of the General Assembly. This again expresses an attitude we can find across the spectrum: stay

inside in order to advocate your position, agitate, be a burr under the saddle. It is not a sure-fire way to gain influence in the church. Many Presbyterians are reluctant to elect ministers and elders from such congregations to major positions or to make them commissioners to the General Assembly.

When we think about consequences like those, do we really think it would be better for all of us if they stay in? It looks as though their adherence would be merely formal, based on historical nostalgia and perhaps, in some strange way, on mutual affection. But I’m not sure that this scenario is better than the other one of exodus and return. Those who depart might be told, in effect, “Blessings on your way. We hope you’ll come back again, chastened by your experience.”

Continued from Social Creed, page 9

our living together as a human family,” what steps should be taken next, and so on.

Brian Sarrazin, who managed the discussion process, reports that participants engaged with each other in groups of six, for periods of two hours. The documents produced by the first round were then refined by leaders selected from each group. The results of the whole process are posted at http://socialcreed.org/?page_id=14. While the results of the discussion may not have a great effect on the draft of the Social Creed, they are important in another way, as commentary and further reflection on important issues of our time, which is one of the purposes of the working group.

New Wineskins – some background and reflections

by Gene TeSelle

The New Wineskins group was formed several years ago by evangelicals “envisioning a new denominational reality for the 21st century from within the PC(USA).” (For updates, check their web site, <http://www.newwineconvo.com/>).

Some features will sound familiar, especially the emphasis that “the church does not exist for itself but as a servant for ministry and mission.”

This is very much like the “functional” view of the church that was pressed during the Fifties and Sixties by Johannes Hoekendijk, Paul Lehmann, and Arend T. van Leeuwen, and for a time by Lesslie Newbigin. It is the tone of much that the Presbyterian Church said and did during the Sixties, expressed in the Confession of 1967. “To be reconciled to God *is* to be sent into the world as God’s reconciling community,” it says (C-9.31, italics added; see also C-9.32 and 9.37). In those years, it was progressives who were talking about “church renewal.”

In keeping with that emphasis, the New Wineskins movement calls for a connectional structure that is “defined by relationships more than by structures,” based on “organic relational networks,” providing “active support” for the clergy, and “centered on serving and equipping the local congregation for contextually relevant ministry and mission.” Staffing and structure are to be minimal, “set in place only to support the ministry and mission of the local church and its leaders.”

When it comes to “national church networks” (meaning the General Assembly), this is to be “an alliance of like-minded churches” in relationships of “trust and mutual accountability.” “A dramatically downsized national staff will feature mission specialists operating on a convene-and-deploy model . . . “ Polity will be “permission-giving, not

regulatory,” designed to “foster, not hinder, ministry and mission.”

Similarly in “international church networks” (missions), the emphasis is on networks and alliances “with other connectional structures, organizations, and ministries for the sake of effective cross-cultural Kingdom ministry.”

This kind of language is appealing. But it also raises a number of questions.

1. The emphasis on leaner structure that will “foster, not hinder, ministry and mission” may build on stereotypes about “the structure” as it is now, i.e., Louisville, bureaucracy, captivity to alien forces, and all of that. These themes are repeatedly voiced by the right wing of the church, but votes at the General Assembly and opinion around the church do not seem to agree. Most Presbyterians are impressed with what the General Assembly agencies are able to do (and help them to do at the local or regional level) and are not inclined to make drastic changes. We often say that we should emphasize what unites, not divides us, and most segments of the church support programs like Hunger and Peacemaking.

2. We must ask what would happen with what we call the “ecclesiastical” functions of ordination and discipline that fall under the office of the Stated Clerk, in contrast with the “program” agencies dealing with worldwide, national, and congregational ministries. These “ecclesiastical” functions are an intrinsic part of the activities of presbyteries.

3. The New Wineskins answer to this question is that all governing bodies would look more like the current “affinity groups” or “parachurch organizations” that are united by common commitments and purposes. Evangelicals in the church often look to

these as the focus of their activities; at least since Matt Welde they have compared these with the “religious orders” in the Catholic church. The Catholic religious orders do indeed have considerable independence from the bishops, except where pastoral “care of souls” is involved. They do exhibit a special zeal in carrying out their particular callings. But religious orders are not immune against power struggles. Human realities have a way of catching up with even the most dedicated.

4. The problem of potential divisiveness is dealt with in the New Wineskins “design” — but in a way that has the potential to divide more than unite. A major emphasis is that the various “networks” are to include only those persons who can subscribe to “defined theological and ethical boundaries,” an “unambiguous, biblically-derived statement of orthodox and reformed faith essentials,” a “new and concise statement of theological essentials “ to which all participants would subscribe. At the same time it is to be made clear that “property will belong to the local congregation.” The connectional system is to be characterized not by solidarity but by voluntary association — and the freedom to divide.

The New Wineskins movement’s enthusiasm for ministry and mission does not manifest sufficient concern for due process in governing bodies, making it all the more likely that “networks” at all levels would be riven by disputes when they arise. And insofar as it would be able to achieve national unity, the price would be uniformity and enforcement of the sort that we have seen in the last two decades in the Southern Baptist Convention.

The New Wineskins group is to be thanked for getting us thinking. But its “design” is not likely to be the answer, both because of its uniformity and because of its lack of attention to dealing with differences.

New Wineskins or Simply Whining?

Opinion and Response by John E. Harris

(While John is an elected officer of the Witherspoon Society, his opinions and comments do not necessarily represent the collective views of the Society or its officers.)

According to *Outlook* national reporter Leslie Scanlon, the New Wineskins Association (NWA) of Churches voted unanimously February 9 to ask the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) to create a new, non-geographic presbytery to which congregations that want to leave the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) could be dismissed. The vote represents both the height of hypocrisy and ignorance of ecclesiastical and theological history. To me, at least, this vote seems hypocritical, because it is so seriously inconsistent with the stance of NWA on a number of important questions. And it seems to show regrettable ignorance of our history and theology as Presbyterians.

According to Scanlon's report, the approximately 600 self-selected registered participants at the NWA February 8-9 meeting included representatives from 130 of the 151 endorsing churches. Even if all 151 endorsing churches had been represented, their number would account for less than 1.4% of all PC(USA) congregations, less than the number of congregations with elder Commissioners to the most recent General Assembly and far less than the number that will be present for the 2008 GA. In addition, since they were self-selected, the participants would have been far less diverse and inclusive than General Assembly commissioners at any recent or future GA. Thus, while the NWA has a right for their voice to be heard, they are only a loud voice because they are whining loudly, not because of the strength of their numbers.

To its credit, the NWA passed a motion asking its leadership team to affirm and outline the biblical basis for women serving as pastors, elders and deacons. Was this issue not settled for most Presbyterians a generation ago? Never-

theless, some in the New Wineskins Association have stated that the EPC must agree to women's ordination or that would be a "deal-breaker" for Wineskin congregations thinking about jumping ship to the EPC. Is this not the height of hypocrisy? Have NWA type evangelicals not been the main stumbling block to the full inclusion of Gay, Lesbian, Bi-Sexual and Transgender (GLBT) Presbyterians within the PC(USA), including ordination? It seems that the NWA is demanding that the EPC accept the full inclusion and ordination of women. Does the NWA not understand that many of the arguments they have been using to argue against the ordination of GLBT Presbyterians are strikingly similar to arguments used a generation ago, and even more recently, to deny ordination to women?

According to Scanlon, at least one participant at the recent NWA meeting raised concern about the makeup of the New Wineskins strategy team, which consisted of nine white males. Have women in the NWA forgotten their church history? Racism and patriarchy may be dying but they are breathing their last gasps within the NWA. Responding to such criticisms, NWA co-moderator Carmen Fowler responded that seven of the nine strategy team members were chosen from nominations made at the NWA meeting in July 2006. "If you want different people you have to nominate different people" Fowler is reported to have said. Does Fowler not understand the doctrine of total depravity and that both the sins of racism and sexism, not to mention homophobia, are institutional as well as personal? It seems that the NWA has no problem pointing out the splinters in the PC(USA)'s eyes while ignoring the log in its own eyes.

According to Scanlon's recent *Outlook*

report, NWA participants at their recent meeting referred over and over to the flashpoints of frustration in the PC(USA) – including the controversial report of the Theological Task Force on the Peace, Unity, and Purity of the PC(USA), which some contend could give local congregations and presbyteries leeway to ordain sexually-active gays and lesbians. Yet as previously mentioned, many in the NWA have problems with the fact that regarding women's ordination, the EPC allows it only as a local option. Does the NWA not see the their demanding leeway for their congregations within the EPC to ordain women, is no different from GLBT Presbyterians asking for the "local option" to ordain sexually active GLBTs practicing both fidelity and chastity in committed and covenanted monogamous relationships?

In conclusion, Scanlon's report notes that the NWA has said there are two faithful options, to go to the EPC or stay in the PC(USA) and work for change. While many individual progressive Presbyterians have chosen to leave the PC(USA) for more open and affirming churches such as the United Church of Christ and the Metropolitan Community Church, others have chosen to leave the church altogether because they have grown weary of the struggle for justice in a church where so many of the members have not yet "gotten it." Meanwhile the Witherspoon Society, as well as other progressive affinity groups such as the Covenant Network, More Light Presbyterians, and That All May Freely Serve, have never once advocated that any individual abandon the PC(USA), let alone planned for entire congregations to desert our expression of the Body of Christ. Rather, the Witherspoon Society has committed itself to remaining a faithful part of the PC(USA) while holding before our beloved but often distracted church the full gospel and working for, as part of our church's progressive witness, the full inclusion of all God's children within both its membership and leadership.

Witherspoon News



BECOMING NEIGHBORS: An Invitation to Global Discipleship

A Witherspoon conference
on global mission and justice
September 16 - 19, 2007
Louisville, Kentucky

Globalization, America's new imperialism, terrorism, a widening rich-poor gap, and so much more going on. How are we to understand our calling as Christians in the challenging new world of the 21st century? And more than understanding, how are we to live out that calling?

Our keynoter, Stated Clerk Clifton Kirkpatrick, will be with us wearing his hat as President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and speaking on their Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth Project. We hope to have someone else from WARC as well, who will represent the non-North American majority of the world.

Dr. Chris Iosso, Coordinator for the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, will be discussing the new Social Creed; we hope to have a panel of members of the drafting committee as well.

We plan to have someone address the exciting formation of a New Sanctuary Movement as well. (See p. 19.)

As in our "Dancing with God" conference at Stony Point in September of 2005, we will be inviting and encouraging the participation of Young Adult Volunteers in Mission, who will bring their own reflections from experiences around the world.

The conference will be held at the Hampton Inn in downtown Louisville, not far from the Presbyterian Center at 100 Witherspoon. The room rate will be \$89 per double room (whether occupied by one person or shared by two), with breakfast included; the registration fee will be under \$200 (we're still working out the details), and will cover two lunches, two dinners and (of course!) a party.

We will inform you of further details as soon as we can – on our website and in a special mailing with a conference brochure and registration form.

By the way, we've noticed with appreciation that the theme for the One Great Hour of Sharing this Easter is "**Who is my neighbor?**"

Other events you'll want to know about

March 16 — Christian Peace Witness for Iraq in Washington, DC.

Go to www.christianpeacewitness.org to learn more and register online. If you are willing to help organize in your church or Presbytery or on your campus, please contact the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship at ppfcpw@gmail.com.

**March 15 - 18 — Ecumenical
workshop on developing welcom-
ing ministry** for LGBT persons/
families. Chicago. Co-sponsored by
More Light Presbyterians. More
information at [http://
www.witherspoonsociety.org/2007/
welcoming_church_workshop.htm](http://www.witherspoonsociety.org/2007/welcoming_church_workshop.htm)

**June 16 – 19 — Interfaith Worker
Justice** – 2007 National Conference
— "Come Walk With Us: Welcoming,
Struggling and Organizing for Worker
Justice" — Chicago. More informa-
tion <http://www.iwj.org/>

To receive
regular
e-mail notes of
additions to the
Witherspoon website,
just send a note to
dougking2@aol.com



Please put "web updates" in
the subject line.

A note from Rick Ufford-Chase about the “Week of Peace” seminars at Ghost Ranch

Witherspoon Friends,

This is the year to make it a priority to come to Ghost Ranch for the “Week of Peace.” Over the last few years many of you have attended the seminars that have been jointly sponsored by Witherspoon, The Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, and Presbyterians for Restoring Creation. Each has been quite powerful, and as we brainstormed together last summer, we agreed to invite new partners to join us to create something of a “Cowboy Camp Meeting” feel for the event this year.

The dates of the conference are Monday, July 30 through Sunday morning, August 5. Each evening we will worship together in the beautiful new facility that looks out over the Pedernal Mesa. The conference preacher will be Roberto Jordan, an Argentine theologian who was deeply involved in crafting the Accra Confession of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in 2004.

Roberto’s reflections on peacemaking and care for creation in light of global economic realities will focus the themes of conference workshops to be offered by:

- Sara Lisherness and the Presbyterian Peacemaking staff with workshops on Peacemaking 101 for those who are just starting out as well as how to sustain peacemaking as a life-long commitment,
- Chris Iosso on advocating for Peace and Justice within the PC(USA),
- Joel Hanisek on peacemaking at the UN,
- Larry Rasmussen and John Preston on the environment,
- Carol Wickersham on stopping torture
- Rick Ufford-Chase and other Peace Fellowship folks on nonviolent direct advocacy and accompaniment, and
- Elizabeth and Marthame Sanders on Israel/Palestine.

Also, I’ll be hosting a “camping community” this year for those who would like to cut costs by staying in the campground and sharing meals. We hope to hit 200 participants for the Week of Peace events, and the Ranch will offer its normal array of other workshops that week for family members who might like to do one of those.

There has never been a more important time than right now to equip ourselves for the hard work of transforming the church for peacemaking and the care of creation. Please check out the website and register soon for this important week.

Rick Ufford-Chase

For details of the Week of Peace events, see pages 27-28.

Let’s keep in touch!

If you’re a Witherspoon member, we would like to include you on our special e-mail list for members.

You’ll receive only occasional notes – perhaps 10 or 12 a year – whenever we have a special bit of information or matter of concern to share with you.

Just send a note to Doug King at douging2@aol.com, and you’ll be added to the list.

We welcome your comments, essays, news and announcements for the next issue of *Network News*.

The deadline for submissions is

April 20, 2007

Please let us hear from you!

Network News Editor

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A feast for minds and spirits ...

A WEEK FOR PEACE, GLOBAL JUSTICE AND CREATION

Ghost Ranch, July 30-August 5, 2007

This coming summer the Witherspoon Society is joining with the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, Presbyterians for Restoring Creation and the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, along with Ghost Ranch, to provide Presbyterians with a rich selection of leaders and topics centering on just what the title says: peace, global justice, and the creation.

The groups collaborating for this week together share concern for how we, among the privileged of the earth, can live as Jesus taught, while so much of the world suffers extreme poverty, disease, homelessness, violence and exploitation of God's good earth. Evening sessions will be in plenary worship and time with Argentine pastor Robert Hugh Jordan, who has served Presbyterian and Reformed churches in Buenos Aires. Reverend Jordan has been active in ecumenical work since his teens in the Latin American Council of Churches, the World Council of Churches, and most recently as a member of the Executive Committee and Moderator of the Communication Committee of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. His time with us will focus on the WARC statement, "Accra Confession on Economic Justice," which he helped draft in Accra, Ghana, in 2004. Saturday evening we'll gather to remember those who perished when atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and to renew our commitment to work for a world free of nuclear weapons.

Morning sessions are planned as skills workshops led by the sponsoring Presbyterian justice, peace and environmental groups. Indicate your choice from the following on the registration form.

Advocating for Justice and Peace

How we frame the call for peace and justice matters. Behind words like "terrorism," "globalization," and even "development" lay different visions of community and social order. Many Christians share some distinctive visions of human purpose and, within the PC(USA), tested policies for advancing social witness concerns. We will look at strategies such as a new "social creed" for achieving gains for justice and peace in church and society.

Leader: Chris Iosso, Coordinator of the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy for the PC(USA), former Issues Analyst for The Witherspoon Society and pastor in New York State.

Earth-honoring Faith

What if we did our theology as if creation mattered? What if creation care determined our daily habits and practices? What if all issues (water, wealth and poverty, peace, e.g.) were all informed by Earth-honoring worship? What can we learn from faith communities of eco-justice ministry? This triad—theology, issues, worship, all in community—will create the week together.

Leaders: Larry Rasmussen, Reinhold Niebuhr Professor Emeritus, Union Theological Seminary and author of *Earth Community, Earth Ethics*, and PRC member John Preston, author of *Wrestling Until the Dawn: The Fight for Biblical Justice in a Postmodern World*.

The Israel/Palestine Conflict

This unresolved tragedy is not only globally divisive but also denominationally as faith communities debate divestment, Christian Zionism, anti-Semitism, settlements, occupation and terrorism. Participants will be helped to sort out the issues that dominate headlines and explore avenues of faithful action.

Leaders: Marthame and Elizabeth Sanders, PCUSA missionaries for three years in the Northern West Bank working in ecumenical support of local Christian Ministries. Information about them and their documentary film series, "Salt of the Earth: Palestine Christians in the Northern West Bank," can be found at www.saltfilms.net.

Speaking Truth to the Powerful and the Not so Powerful

This workshop offers an opportunity to learn how to talk about tough and controversial issues with neighbors and family, in our churches and in halls of power. The new and growing faith-based movement against torture has developed skills, both practical and spiritual, for building solidarity across theological and political fault lines. Insights will be drawn from history, law and social movement theory, scripture, prayer, theology and ethics for the skills, insight and strategies necessary for work on issues of torture and violence.

Leader: Carol Wickersham, PCUSA pastor, a coordinator of the NO2Torture movement advocating humane treatment of detainees.



Peacemaking 401

Presbyterian Peace Fellowship has for more than 60 years supported the promotion of nonviolent alternatives to war. This experience will facilitate an active search for genuine security in an age of violence. The week will help participants discern their own calling to risk-taking through peace vigils, direct actions, faith-based civil disobedience, and non-violent intervention such as accompaniment in defense of human and ecological rights.

Leaders: Rick Ufford-Chase, Executive Director of the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, Moderator of the 216th General Assembly, and PPF members.

Building a Culture of Peace: Exploring the Terrain and Practice of Reconciliation

Peacemaking, building community, animating interfaith and ecumenical relationships are among the various paths of discipleship we can follow to respond to our call to be reconciling agents in our world. In this workshop we will explore how these paths are interrelated, and ways to help people become involved in them. Along with Bible study and discussion of the theological grounding for this work, we will look at specific techniques and approaches, such as conflict transformation, analysis of power dynamics, constructive mapping of one's situation to address a problem, and how to help ourselves and others discern our calling in relation to the gospel's call.

Leaders: Sara Lisherness, Presbyterian Peacemaking Program; Jay Rock, Interfaith Relations Office, PC(USA).

Discover the Vision, Discover the World: The Presbyterian Church and the United Nations

Did you know the Presbyterian Church has an office at the United Nations? Do you know what that office does? In this workshop, we will explore the basic history of the UN and the Presbyterian Church's part in this history. We will look at the work of the UN and how the Presbyterian United Nations Office bears witness to Jesus Christ by equipping Presbyterians for discipleship in the global arena and advocating the concerns of Presbyterian General Assemblies to the UN.

Leader: Joel Hanisek, Presbyterian Representative to the UN.

The Journey Continues: Peacemaking as a Life-Long Commitment

Do you want to reenergize your peacemaking ministry? Do you want to build the peacemaking ministry of your congregation? For individuals and congregations, the work of peacemaking is more than just a one-time activity; it is a life long journey following the nonviolent Jesus. Through Bible study, personal reflection and group interaction, participants on all stages of the peacemaking journey will explore ways to sustain our personal commitments to peacemaking and to nurture peacemaking ministries in our congregations.

Leader: Mark Koenig, Presbyterian Peacemaking Program.

To get more information, and to register

For any new information, you can go to our website: http://www.witherspoonsociety.org/2007/ghost_ranch_2007.htm

The Ghost Ranch catalog has been sent to those on the mailing list or you can read it all online, including the registration form. Just go to the Ghost Ranch website <<http://www.ghostranch.org/>> and find your way from there.

Or to jump to the seminar listing and details, go to <http://www.ghostranch.org/index.php?option=com_oscommerce&osMod=index&cPath=93>

For details on registration, accommodations, transportation and more, go to <http://www.ghostranch.org/component?option,com_docman/task,doc_view/gid,6/Itemid,37/>

For the registration form go to <http://www.ghostranch.org/component?option,com_docman/task,doc_download/gid,8/Itemid,59/>.

Registering early helps assure your housing choice. We hope to see you at Ghost Ranch on July 30th.

Questions? Contact Jane Hanna, Coordinator – Phone (505) 466-8755. E-mail mjhfos@aol.com

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You can help Witherspoon grow!

The Witherspoon Society, like any other group, needs to keep attracting new members to grow both in size and in effectiveness.

You can help us gain new members by

- encouraging friends to read

Network News, or visit our website, and to consider joining

- giving them gift memberships for a year
- creating a group of progressive Presbyterians in your area, and using Witherspoon as a basis for coming together, thinking and acting.

We want to help in any way we can!

Contact Membership Coordinator John Harris, or Membership Secretary Doug King (see above) for suggestions, free brochures or copies of *Network News*

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Ghost Ranch seminar: A Week for Peace, Global Justice and Creation, July 30 - August 5
Louisville conference on global mission and justice, September 16-19

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