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The Progressive VOICE

United Methodists in Action for Justice

(Formerly published as the *Social Questions Bulletin*)

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Going..... going..... going..... GREEN!



This is it: the last **paper** copy of the MFSA newsletter! Beginning with the next issue, you will receive the newsletter via email. Please be sure that

we have a current email address for you so that future newsletters and other MFSA information will continue to reach you. Not sure if we have your address? Email our office manager, Rob Walty at mfsa@mfsaweb.org, with your preferred email. Include your snail mail address and phone number as well should we need to be in touch via those means.

You'll also note that with this issue the title of the newsletter has changed from the *Social Questions Bulletin* to *The Progressive Voice*. See page 3 for details on the name change. ❖

Connecting Voices

**Progressive United Methodists
coming together
conversing
connecting faith and action**

Are you feeling unheard? Have more questions than you do answers?

Have you experienced isolation when your own understanding of faith didn't match that of those around you?

Is your faith calling you to act boldly, but you're not sure where to start?

Come connect with other progressive Christians in the MFSA movement. Join us in transforming passionate convictions into effective action.

For the next four months (starting with Annual Conferences and ending October 31st), MFSA will be sponsoring the **"Connecting Voices"** initiative. We are inviting progressive UMs to meet-up (or tweet-up) in groups of 5-10 to reflect together on the role of faith in their lives and their experiences living out that faith as United Methodists. We will collect the reflections from groups across the country and then let you know what progressive folks within the denomination are thinking and sharing and feeling.

Interested? We hope so. Information about how to participate or host a group will be available on the MFSA website www.mfsaweb.org by the end of May. Contact Jennifer Mihok at Jennifer@mfsaweb.org for more information.



MFSA: Where Progressive United Methodists Connect and Put their Faith into Action

STRATEGIC PLAN WELL UNDERWAY

For the last several months, the MFSA board has been developing a Strategic Plan to guide MFSA in its work as we move into the future. Here you'll find a summary of the board's work-to-date.

VISION: MFSA envisions a healed, renewed and fully inclusive United Methodist Church, that embodies God's transforming love and grace in the world.

MISSION: To mobilize, lead and sustain a progressive United Methodist movement that energizes people to be agents of God's justice, peace and reconciliation.



Board members Betty Kobata (l) and Rachel Harvey (r) confer during MFSA board meeting in Omaha, Nebraska.

SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION: MFSA is grounded in God's all-inclusive love and open to the Spirit's leading in the current age. Acting out of a deep spiritual yearning for justice and peace, we follow the radical teaching and example of Jesus.

GUIDING VALUES

1. Actions are grounded in faith

MFSA will ground all we do in the justice imperative of the Gospel in a way that inspires communities and activates members' spiritual desire to do justice in the world. Inspired by the advocacy of Jesus for the least, the last and the lost, we will participate in

continued on page two

MFSA: STRATEGIC PLAN continued from page one

God's ongoing creation through doing justice in the world.

2. The prophetic tradition of Christianity is given voice

MFSA will give voice, clearly and without apology, to the prophetic message of a holistic Gospel that honors the dignity and value of every human life. MFSA will deepen its understanding of the prophetic tradition by listening attentively and carefully to those on the margins of the church and of society. MFSA will speak and act in ways that honor truth over fear and integrity over comfort.

3. Inclusivity and radical welcome are embodied in MFSA

MFSA will be fully inclusive and radically welcoming in our own practices and will work for this in the church and in the world. MFSA is committed to being agents of reconciliation in the journey towards full inclusion.

4. Oppression in all its forms is resisted

MFSA will work nonviolently to end economic injustice, institutional racism, sexism, homophobia, militarism, and the degradation of the environment. These commitments will guide MFSA's selection of issues and organizing strategies. We understand that work against injustice in any one of these areas brings us closer to justice in every one of these areas. As such we will work at the intersections of oppression, refusing to pit oppressed persons and groups against one another.

5. MFSA's work takes place at the level of changing systems

MFSA is committed to bringing about systemic change and creating long-term solutions in ways that bring healing and hope to the church and the world.

6. Actions of the organization have integrity

MFSA is committed to operating internally in a way that mirrors the change we hope to create in the world. Towards that end, we commit to integrity, kindness, creativity, and self-care in all organizational practices. We will engage in self-examination and reflection as individuals and as an organization.

STRATEGIC ORGANIZING CRITERIA

Within the UMC: MFSA will provide a theologically grounded progressive vision and will

organize to provide avenues for progressive United Methodists to transform the church.

Within society: MFSA will identify places where speaking from a progressive faith perspective can make a difference in public policy. MFSA will provide avenues for action for progressive United Methodists to bring about cultural and societal transformation.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

The following Strategic Directions will guide MFSA's work and priorities over the next year. These strategic directions will be considered in developing the organization's program priorities and annual budget.

Theological Articulation and Grounding: Create and utilize theological articulation and grounding to produce inspiring progressive Methodist spiritual framework that guides all of MFSA's policy work.

Chapter Development and Base Building: Develop the quantity and capacity of MFSA chapters to act as key centers in a renewed and revitalized United Methodist movement for justice. Develop new chapter structures, remove geographic barriers and nurture solidarity and relationship-building.

Young Adult Outreach, Diversity and Inclusion: Continue to focus on outreach to young adults, listening to the wisdom of the next generation. Develop members with an intentional emphasis on leadership development and full inclusion including people of color and sexual minorities at every level of MFSA's work.

Communication Infrastructure: Continue to modernize MFSA's communication



MFSA board members Jan Nelson, Vicki Woods, Cliff Ives and Debra McKnight at a recent board meeting in Omaha, Nebraska.



Members of MFSA's OnFire young adult network join with tens of thousands of others on March 21st in Washington, DC, calling for comprehensive immigration reform.

by expanding the use of Facebook, Twitter, multimedia and other communication mechanisms that promote more active communication to disseminate MFSA's perspective, reinforce its collective identity, and promote avenues for action.

Enhance MFSA's Organizational Effectiveness and Sustainability: Working together, the board, staff, and chapter leaders will commit to honestly and professionally assessing MFSA's capacity to carry out our mission and programs and to identify potential barriers to our collective success and achievement. This will include, but not be limited to, increased integration of MFSA's fundraising and organizing strategies and nurturing a climate of self care (Sabbath practice) and joy for staff, board, and members.

MFSA currently has four Strategic Direction Teams meeting regularly by phone to put these values and strategic directions into action. The four committees are: Theological Articulation and Grounding; Young Adult Outreach and Inclusivity; Chapter Development and Base-Building; and Communication. We invite anyone with passion, interest, time and/or energy in one of these areas to contact the national office to determine how we can plug you in! ❖

If it weren't so corny we'd say MFSA is going places! But since it is, we'll just say welcome and invite you to become involved.

What's in a Name? The SQB turns into *The Progressive VOICE*

In its 99 year history, the newsletter of MFSA has had only two names. From 1911 through 1933 it was the *Social Service Bulletin* and from 1934 through 2010, the *Social Questions Bulletin*. With the meeting of the MFSA Board of Directors in Omaha, NE in April, the MFSA newsletter has acquired its third name: *The Progressive VOICE* with the subtitle, *United Methodists in Action for Justice*.

Some history: In 1911, the four-year-old Methodist Federation for Social Service launched the *Social Service Bulletin*. Harry Ward, MFSS Executive, with Grace Scribner and Winifred Chappel, MFSS Associates, wrote piercing analyses of workers' conditions, child labor, racial discrimination, the economic order and the role of churches. During this period, the *Social Service Bulletin* was published as many as 7, 8, or even 9 times a year and was read widely by the leadership of the Methodist Church.



In 1933, in the midst of the depression, the publication name was changed to *The Social Questions Bulletin*, better known as the *SQB*, and began to focus heavily on the MFSS emphasis on replacing the profit system with one that is based on the obligation of mutual service. This made the MFSS and its publication a target of reactionary forces including the Hearst Press. The *SQB* began to draw attention to the unrest and wars starting in Europe and countering the anti-Semitism in Germany. Even as the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) arose in Congress, the *SQB* reflected the MFSS decision to continue calling for economic justice, the right to unionize, full civil rights for people of color, and an end to racism in the agencies of the Methodist Church.

Following WWII, the name of the organization itself changed to the Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA), but the publication retained the name of the *Social Questions Bulletin*. The circulation increased along

with the increase in membership and continued until the McCarthy era when reactionary forces within the Methodist Church and outside of it used scare tactics to nearly shut down the organization. For more than a decade, the *SQB* was the main product of the MFSA.

From 1974 to the present, under the leadership of George McClain and Kathryn Johnson, MFSA has carried on the name of the *SQB* even as the program, actions and membership shifted to carrying out activities and actions of social justice.

Today, in recognition of the changes in the organization, and with a commitment to reach out to new generations of United Methodists, the name of the MFSA publication is changing to *The Progressive VOICE: United Methodists in Action for Justice*.

This change is not made lightly, but with conviction. MFSA is fully committed to providing a means for progressive United Methodists to connect with one another, to make their voices heard, to strengthen their influence through joint action and thus to influence both the UMC and the world.

As we discussed what name might best characterize the current identity of MFSA, some questioned what it means to call oneself "progressive."

No one questioned the fact, however, that the title, *Social Questions Bulletin*, no longer conveys the essence of what we are about. While we honor the long and amazing history of the *SQB*, it's time for a change.



January - February 1999

So why "*The Progressive VOICE*?" The descriptor "progressive" was prominent during the early years of the twentieth century, the time when MFSA was founded. Progressivism, a reform movement that arose in response to the vast changes brought about by modernization, focused in part on the growth of corporations and fears of corruption in government. Among the concerns of progressives at the time were the pressing

need to enact child labor laws and the need for legal reforms that would support labor unions. Those who know the history of MFSA know that these were among the highest priority issues for the founders of MFSA.

There have been at least four waves of progressive movements over the last century, each with its own characteristics. Currently the word "progressive" is used to describe a number of social, political and religious movements. An internet search will produce a rich variety of references, articles, descriptions of organizations and movements.

Specifically, when one searches for "Progressive Christianity" one finds a wealth of information. I was interested to find that the definition given in Wikipedia, not my usual source for things theological, is rather helpful.

Progressive Christianity, according to Wikipedia, is the name given to a movement within contemporary Protestant Christianity characterized by willingness to question tradition, acceptance of human diversity with a strong emphasis on social justice or care for the poor and the oppressed and environmental stewardship of the Earth. Progressive Christians have a deep belief in the centrality of the instruction to "love one another" (John 15:17) within the teaching of Jesus Christ. This leads to a focus on compassion, promoting justice and mercy, tolerance, and working towards solving the societal problems of poverty, discrimination, and environmental issues.

While not entirely comprehensive, this seems like a good place to start the conversation. And having a conversation is exactly what MFSA is suggesting. On the front page of this newsletter you will find information on a new MFSA initiative entitled, "Connecting Voices: Progressive United Methodists in Conversation." We encourage people to join in the conversation. What does the word "progressive" mean to you? And what do you hope to find on the pages of future issues of *The Progressive VOICE*? Log onto MFSA Facebook group and let us know what you think!



January - March 2007

The Stones Will Cry Out

by Scott Campbell

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, order your disciples to be quiet.' He replied, 'I tell you, if they keep quiet the stones will cry out.' Luke 19:39-40

Amy D. is a United Methodist bishop's worst nightmare. This is not because Amy isn't a good pastor or a good preacher or a good person. She is all of those things and more. Amy scares bishops to death because she views the *right now* from the perspective of the *not yet*.

In that regard she is a bit like John of Patmos, author of the book of Revelation. John has been exiled to an island. He is living in a time when Christians are being strung up, hung up and torn apart for who they are. When he talks about the great tribulation in his extraordinary vision, he is not speaking of some future event; he is talking about the lived experience of his community. Christians are dying for being faithful. They are crying out in anguish to their God.

"I see what is coming," John tells these persecuted people. The day is coming when all this sorrow will be no more, when the bloodstains will have been washed clean and only joy and justice shall remain. "I see it coming. In that day every tear shall be dry."

John's idea of how that day will come is a little different than the one that many within The United Methodist Church hold. Those of us who live in places of privilege tend to think that if we just keep doing our part, that gradually, imperceptibly maybe, things are going to improve. Little by little, we believe, the world is on its way to getting better—it's making progress. One day, certainly not in our lifetimes, but one day, we'll all get there.

John sees things differently. For John, only the intervention of God is going to set things right. John is not a gradualist. He's been exiled to an island. He knows a thing or two about the way the powerful use their power. John knows that without God barging in and turning over some tables, business as usual will be just that.

Five years ago Amy was exiled to an island. Because she is an out lesbian in a denomination that says we will not ordain, appoint or consider the candidacy of self-avowed, practicing homosexuals, she could no longer serve a local church. So Amy lost her appointment and her health insurance and took another job. But the powers that be didn't

want trouble. They didn't charge her with anything. They said "Keep your orders. You can still be a minister, but we can't have you doing it in a local church." Surely they believed they were doing the right thing for all concerned. For many years, decent people in authority who don't agree with the church's position have been looking the other way. This has, in fact, enabled many to continue in ministries that they would otherwise have been forced to abandon. At the same time, looking the other way has meant these authorities didn't have to acknowledge their part in the sin in which the whole church participates.

What they didn't count on was that Amy had seen the same thing John of Patmos saw. Amy had glimpsed a vision of a world in which there were no more tears, a world with no more persecution, no more lies, winks and nods, no more easy shuffling of folks off to less visible places, no more space for bish-

Amy, somewhere along her journey with Jesus, had brushed up against against hope, and when hope comes into the world the timid had better bar their doors and shutter their windows.

ops and superintendents and pastoral colleagues to pretend that gradually things would get better so it's okay to ignore God's ultimate outcome and concentrate instead on human progress. Amy saw what John saw and she believed it. A bishop's worst nightmare.

Amy, somewhere along her journey with Jesus, had brushed up against hope, and when hope comes into the world the timid had better bar their doors and shutter their windows. When human beings suspect that God will not finally let suffering go unredeemed, they are empowered to proclaim a radical new world and to live as if it were already here.

So Amy, not deprived of her orders you remember, was asked last summer to preside at a service of holy commitment. That's one of the things that pastors do. They represent the church at critical moments in people's lives, times of sorrow or celebration, times of beginning or ending, times of covenant or crisis. Amy, of course, agreed to respond to the pastoral need of the people who came to her. The church had told her, after all, that she was still a pastor.

That would have been fine, but The United Methodist Church has another rule. When

institutions are afraid that compassion for people will trump good sound judgment and doctrinal uniformity, when they fear that pastors might start acting in response to the leading of the Holy Spirit instead of following *The Book of Discipline*, they become anxious. Their nervousness sometimes leads them to try to make their rules more intimidating. They might even decide to criminalize conscience. Here is what this particular rule says:

Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches.

And just to make sure that all pastors get the point, doing such ceremonies or conducting same gender marriages is listed among the "chargeable offenses" in *The Book of Discipline*.

In November of 1999, the Rev. Jimmy Creech was tried for conducting a same-gender

blessing, found guilty and expelled permanently from the United Methodist ministry. He was given the ecclesiological death penalty for the offense of conscience.

So, knowing all this, Amy did the ceremony. She blessed, on behalf of the church, the loving commitment of two people who happened to be of the same gender. And then, at the end of the year, she sent to her bishop, as is required by *The Discipline*, an accounting of her pastoral activities. She could have written that in the summer of 2009 she performed a wedding and let it go at that. That would have fudged things a bit, because in her state gay marriage is not an option. But Amy is out of patience with truth-evading little lies. She wrote to the bishop that she conducted a same-gender covenant ceremony. And she sent copies to her district superintendent, the board of ordained ministry, the secretary of the annual conference and the superintendent who oversees extension ministries -- as required by *The Discipline*. There was no place left for the hierarchy to hide. Truth came out of the closet.

"Are you trying to provoke a trial?" the bishop's assistant asked. "No," Amy said. "I'm just trying to be faithful."

continued on page seven



Creating a Culture of Peace

*learning to use our power
for nonviolent personal and social change*

by Barbara Gessner

During the last few days of January 2010, in the offices of MFSA, the Board of Directors for the Creating a Culture of Peace program (CCP) was born!

Kathryn Johnson and the staff of MFSA assisted in the delivery through their gracious gifts of hospitality to our group, who gathered together in Washington, DC from all over the country. We arrived as members of the National Steering Committee of CCP and left as the organization's new national Board of Directors. The primary person responsible for the bonding that resulted in this event was also changed – Janet Chisholm, former Coordinator of CCP, is now the organization's Executive Director.

Thank you, Kathryn, for addressing our group and describing for us the inspiring history and current work of MFSA. We value MFSA's continued endorsement of CCP as a training resource for your members and chapters, and we look forward to an even stronger relationship in the future.

Creating a Culture of Peace is a non-profit, educational program whose mission is "learning to use our power for nonviolent personal and social change by:

- **sharing wisdom**
- **practicing skills,**
- **analyzing social change,**
- **building community,**
- **planning projects, and**
- **honoring diversity."**

We are somewhat of a "sibling organization" of MFSA, doing much of the same kind of work.

The innovative design of the CCP program provides a holistic and practical foundation in active nonviolence which is a spiritually-grounded, peaceful and powerful process for bringing about change. It urges respectful engagement with opponents, instead of confrontation that polarizes and demonizes. It holds that all violence is connected and we can learn how to respond constructively. Since

its beginnings, CCP has been offered in 40 states and Palestine, and has prepared over 350 CCP Trainers across the U.S. The program has been adopted by numerous national and regional organizations, including the Methodist Federation for Social Action.

In 2002, Janet Chisholm established **Creating a Culture of Peace** when she was serving as Executive Director and Training Coordinator at the Fellowship of Reconciliation in Nyack, New York. At the time, she was also serving as Chairperson of the National Episcopal Peace Fellowship. In 2007 she moved with the CCP program to become Peace and Justice Coordinator at Kirkridge Retreat Center in Bangor, Pennsylvania. In May, Janet and the national office will move to Minnesota and we will be working to further develop and expand the program. To contact CCP and arrange training, contact:

Janet Chisholm, CCP Executive Director,
Phone: 845-641-3648

janet.chisholm@creatingacultureofpeace.org,

After the conclusion of our meetings, several of us from the CCP Board participated in a public witness in front of the White House. We joined the Peaceable Assembly Campaign, opposing the war in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan and calling for an end to U.S. support of the continued occupation of the Palestinian territories. The PAC campaign is sponsored by the group, Voices for Creative Nonviolence. ❖

Barbara Gessner bgessner@verizon.net is the secretary of Creating a Culture of Peace

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The Rev. Kathryn J. Johnson is Executive Director and Editor. The national office is at 212 East Capitol Street, NE, Washington, DC 20003 (202/546-8806). E-mail: mfsa@mfsaweb.org.

"Imagine if the Tea Party Was Black"

by Tim Wise

Let's play a game, shall we? The name of the game is called "Imagine." The way it's played is simple: we'll envision recent happenings in the news, but then change them up a bit. Instead of envisioning white people as the main actors in the scenes we'll conjure - the ones who are driving the action - we'll envision black folks or other people of color instead. The object of the game is to imagine the public reaction to the events or incidents, if the main actors were of color, rather than white. Whoever gains the most insight into the workings of race in America, at the end of the game, wins.

So let's begin.

Imagine that hundreds of black protesters were to descend upon Washington DC and Northern Virginia, just a few miles from the Capitol and White House, armed with AK-47s, assorted handguns, and ammunition. And imagine that some of these protesters — the black protesters — spoke of the need for political revolution, and possibly even armed conflict in the event that laws they didn't like were enforced by the government. Would these protesters — these black protesters with guns — be seen as brave defenders of the Second Amendment, or would they be viewed by most whites as a danger to the republic? What if they were Arab-Americans? Because, after all, that's what happened recently when white gun enthusiasts descended upon the nation's capital, arms in hand, and verbally announced their readiness to make war on the country's political leaders if the need arose.

Imagine that white members of Congress, while walking to work, were surrounded by thousands of angry black people, one of whom proceeded to spit on one of those congressmen for not voting the way the black demonstrators desired. Would the protesters be seen as merely patriotic Americans voicing their opinions, or as an angry, potentially violent, and even insurrectionary mob? After all, this is what white Tea Party protesters did recently in Washington.

Imagine that a rap artist were to say, in reference to a white president: "He's a piece of shit and I told him to suck on my machine gun." Because that's what rocker Ted Nugent said recently about President Obama.

continued on next page

IMAGINE

continued from previous page

Imagine that a prominent mainstream black political commentator had long employed an overt bigot as Executive Director of his organization, and that this bigot regularly participated in black separatist conferences, and once assaulted a white person while calling them by a racial slur. When that prominent black commentator and his sister — who also works for the organization — defended the bigot as a good guy who was misunderstood and “going through a tough time in his life,” would anyone accept their excuse-making? Would that commentator still have a place

And this, my friends, is what white privilege is all about. The ability to threaten others, to engage in violent and incendiary rhetoric without consequence, to be viewed as patriotic and normal no matter what you do, and never to be feared and despised as people of color would be, if they tried to get away with half the shit we do, on a daily basis.

on a mainstream network? Because that’s what happened in the real world, when Pat Buchanan employed as Executive Director of his group, America’s Cause, a blatant racist who did all these things, or at least their white equivalents: attending white separatist conferences and attacking a black woman while calling her the n-word.

Imagine that a black radio host were to suggest that the only way to get promoted in the administration of a white president is by “hating black people,” or that a prominent white person had only endorsed a white presidential candidate as an act of racial bonding, or blamed a white president for a fight on a school bus in which a black kid was jumped by two white kids, or said that he wouldn’t want to kill all conservatives, but rather, would like to leave just enough—“living fossils,” as he called them, “so we will never forget what these people stood for.” After all, these are things that Rush Limbaugh has said about Barack Obama’s administration, Colin Powell’s endorsement of Barack Obama, a fight on a school bus in Belleville, Illinois in which two black kids beat up a white kid, and about liberals generally.

Imagine that a black pastor, formerly a member of the U.S. military, were to declare, as part of his opposition to a white president’s policies, that he was ready to “suit up, get my gun, go to Washington, and do what they trained me to do.” This is, after all, what Pas-

tor Stan Craig said recently at a Tea Party rally in Greenville, South Carolina.

Imagine a black radio talk show host gleefully predicting a revolution by people of color, if the government continues to be dominated by the rich white men who have been “destroying” the country, or if said radio personality were to call Christians or Jews non-humans, or say that when it came to conservatives, the best solution would be to “hang ‘em high.” And what would happen to any congressional representative who praised that commentator for “speaking common sense” and likened his hate talk to “American values?” After all, those are

among the things said by radio host and bestselling author Michael Savage, predicting white revolution in the face of multiculturalism, or said by Savage about Muslims and liberals, respectively. And it was Congressman Culbertson, from Texas, who praised Savage in that way, despite his hateful rhetoric.

Imagine a black political commentator suggesting that the only thing the guy who flew his plane into the Austin, Texas, IRS building did wrong was not blowing up Fox News instead. This is, after all, what Anne Coulter said about Tim McVeigh, when she noted that his only mistake was not blowing up the New York Times.

Imagine that a popular black liberal website posted comments about the daughter of a white president, calling her “typical redneck trash,” or a “whore” whose mother entertains her by “making monkey sounds.” After all that’s comparable to what conservatives posted about Malia Obama on freerepublic.com last year, when they referred to her as “ghetto trash.”

Imagine that black protesters at a large political rally were walking around with signs calling for the lynching of their congressional enemies. Because that’s what white conservatives did last year, in reference to Democratic party leaders in Congress.

In other words, imagine that even one-third

of the anger and vitriol currently being hurled at President Obama, by folks who are almost exclusively white, were being aimed, instead, at a white president, by people of color. How many whites viewing the anger, the hatred, the contempt for that white president would then wax eloquent about free speech, and the glories of democracy? And how many would be calling for further crackdowns on thuggish behavior, and investigations into the radical agendas of those same people of color?

To ask any of these questions is to answer them. Protest is only seen as fundamentally American when those who have long had the luxury of seeing themselves as prototypically American engage in it. When the dangerous and dark “other” does so, however, it isn’t viewed as normal or natural, let alone patriotic. Which is why Rush Limbaugh could say, this past week, that the Tea Parties are the first time since

the Civil War that ordinary, common Americans stood up for their rights: a statement that erases the normalcy and “Americanness” of blacks in the civil rights struggle, not to mention women in the fight for suffrage and equality, working people in the fight for better working conditions, and LGBT folks as they struggle to be treated as full and equal human beings.

And this, my friends, is what white privilege is all about. The ability to threaten others, to engage in violent and incendiary rhetoric without consequence, to be viewed as patriotic and normal no matter what you do, and never to be feared and despised as people of color would be, if they tried to get away with half the shit we do, on a daily basis.

Game Over. ❖

Tim Wise is among the most prominent anti-racist writers and activists in the U.S. Wise has spoken in 48 states, on over 400 college campuses, and to community groups around the nation. Wise has provided anti-racism training to teachers nationwide, and has trained physicians and medical industry professionals on how to combat racial inequities in health care. His latest book is called [Between Barack and a Hard Place](#).

This article can be found on a number of websites including www.timewise.org

Reflections on Being Global

by Jan Nelson, Oregon-Idaho Chapter and National MFSA Board Member

At the last General Conference I loved observing the diversity of God's creation, people from around the world identifying themselves as United Methodists. It is thrilling to see this global enthusiasm in being the church together. The growth of the churches of the Central Conferences, especially those in Africa, is truly amazing.

But when it comes time to vote on justice issues, specifically on the justice issue of making the church inclusive for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people, it doesn't feel so good.

I have found myself looking at US-based denominations and I can't help but wonder if we could make more progress on LGBT equality in the church if we did not have global partners outside of the US.

In October I had an opportunity to find out something for myself about the church in Africa. Our conference sponsored a UM Volunteers-in-Mission trip to the South Congo Annual Conference in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Our leader was Eastern District Superintendent Bob Flaherty, who had arranged the trip with Jerusalem District Superintendent Leonard Kabwita Kayombo. Bob and I had both met Kabwita at the General Conference in Fort Worth, and the trip grew from the meeting of those superintendents.

It was not your typical UMVIM trip. We spent very little time doing physical work on a project; instead, we spent most of our time meeting with people from the church in the DRC. Each day of our trip we ate meals in the homes of lay and clergy leaders who had volunteered to host us. And with food there naturally flowed conversation. We had amazing discussions about church issues and concerns for the larger society. The sharing was informal and spontaneous, whatever was on the minds of hosts or guests.

It would be wrong to generalize my observations, made in one district of one conference. I speak neither Swahili nor French, the two primary languages of the area around Lubumbashi, and that was a disadvantage that may have led to some misunderstandings. But overall, I was very encouraged and hopeful about what I saw there and about what I did not see.

I did not see Christians who are rigid in their



Jan Nelson makes new friends in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

faith. The one conversation about homosexuality was initiated by a Roman Catholic, not by a United Methodist. With so many varied conversations, I had to conclude that this was not a primary issue for them. The church leaders we talked with were much more concerned about the health of the US church and our perceptions of the African church. The conversations about church restructuring revealed to me a concern about connection and support of the US churches, not about any one social issue.

More importantly, I saw a church that was busy being the church. From our conversations it was clear that their primary concern was for meeting the needs of as many people as possible. In places like the DRC, the needs are many and could be overwhelming. We saw church-based schools, clinics, orphanages, and gardens where clergy were teaching people to grow their own food. We saw worship that was crowded and joyful. We saw large churches expanding, and we helped a small church in a very poor neighborhood put a concrete floor in their very basic building. One of our hosts pointed out that in addition to making a better place to worship, the new floor and plastered walls would enable the building to be made clean enough to host an immunization clinic.

There is much work to be done before we can share the same view on some justice issues. I am convinced that most of that work needs to be done at the level of one-to-one relationships.

Not all of us will have the opportunity to visit United Methodists in another country. But if you do, be sure to talk to them. Share your story, and listen to theirs. As much as lan-

guage permits, try to get below the surface conversations to what is really important about being the church. If you are not able to travel, look for opportunities to talk with people who are visiting here.

As a global church, we United Methodists have a unique opportunity to change the world. Our church provides us with a shared structure to deal with the problems that face all of us. And our faith gives us all a passion for God's justice that can be the basis of solving many problems. Let's work to get beyond the stereotypes and what someone else has told us about people far away. Let's share our stories about justice issues that burn in our hearts. Let's not miss an opportunity to listen to people whose experience is very different from ours. It's all about relationships, and from those relationships we will build God's kingdom. ❖

THE STONES WILL CRY OUT continued from page 4

"You've tied my hands" the bishop said. "No, I haven't," Amy said. "You can decide to be faithful too. You can stand with me in telling the truth and let them do to us what they will."

As this article goes to press, the machinations of the church are gearing up to do their grinding. A letter of complaint is being drafted and charges will undoubtedly be filed. Most likely the bishop just wishes it would all go away, because she really, in her heart, can't find any fault in the woman before her. But rules are rules and if she doesn't enforce them, someone else will, and what good would it do for there to be two needless sacrifices? Things will get better if we're just a bit more patient, a little less confrontational.

Amy will go on trial. The church will spend a lot of time, money and energy. Another faithful pastor will be judged. But who knows? Maybe this time the trial court (the jury) will see the same thing that Amy has seen and John of Patmos has seen, and they will grasp that we are called to live right now in response to what God has already done in Jesus Christ and will complete one day in the human community. Maybe the penalty they will mete out for the offense of love will be to require that Amy tell her story in a hundred places. Wouldn't that be something? Wouldn't it be something if the church finally understood that if it tries to silence the ones who welcome Jesus into their midst, the very stones will cry out? ❖

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In This Issue:

- **Newsletter Changes Name and Goes Green**
- **MFSA "Connecting Voices" Initiative**
- **Strategic Plan on Its Way**
- **The Stones Will Cry Out**
- **Creating a Culture of Peace**
- **Imagine**
- **Reflections on Being Global**

March - May 2010

www.mfsaweb.org

Welcome to the MFSA Movement !

We extend a warm invitation to those who've been members of MFSA for years and to those who are just now learning about MFSA: welcome to the MFSA movement! Below you'll find lots of ways to become involved. We look forward to "meeting" you whether it be in person, on-line, through Facebook, LinkedIn, or on the phone.

GET INVOLVED...

ON THE GROUND

- **Connecting Voices**—progressive Methodists in conversation and action. More info on page 1 of this newsletter and at www.mfsaweb.org. To host a meet-up or find one in your area, contact Jennifer Mihok [jennifer@mfsaweb.org].
- **Chapters**—Chapters organize, educate and take action on issues pertinent to the local communities. To connect with a chapter, or start one in your area, contact the MFSA office at mfsa@mfsaweb.org.

ONLINE

- **Website**—information on MFSA's program priorities, chapters, publications and more: www.mfsaweb.org
- **Facebook Group**—converse with MFSA members from around the country (search "Groups" for Methodist Federation for Social Action)
- **MFSA Lectionary Planning Facebook Page**—for sharing progressive worship resources and reflection.
- **LinkedIn**—for sharing MFSA with your professional networks (search "Groups" for Methodist Federation for Social Action)



THROUGH MFSA PUBLICATIONS

- **The Progressive VOICE** - quarterly MFSA online newsletter (formerly published as *the Social Questions Bulletin*).
- **MFSA E-news**—biweekly update including opportunities for action and reflection
- **Social Justice Prayers**—monthly prayers for reflection written by Eddie Harris
- **OnFire blog**—Read the reflections of OnFire members (MFSA young adults) at umonfire.blogspot.com

Contact the national office at mfsa@mfsaweb.org to add your name/email to the distribution lists for the above publications.

BECOME A MEMBER OF MFSA!!

Visit the MFSA website www.mfsaweb.org and click on "GET INVOLVED" and then "MEMBERSHIP." We look forward to getting to know you!