

Social Questions Bulletin

Seeking Global Justice through the United Methodist Church

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Sticking with Love

Kathryn Johnson, Editor

A year ago, I wrote in this column about the inauguration of our new president and the sense of hope and excitement in the air. That feels like a very long time ago. It has been a difficult year for our nation.

I wrote: *No leader of a nation or a government can create fundamental change by themselves. They can ignite our imaginations with their vision; they can make sound decisions in the midst of crisis; they can surround themselves with persons of integrity, knowledge, experience and wisdom. But in the end, it is up to the people of our nation to join our new national leadership in doing the hard work that lies before us.*"

I knew it would be hard work, but I hadn't imagined how vehement would be the resistance to change, how virulent would be the racial overtones and how hostile the personal attacks against the President. It has been utterly disheartening to watch members of Congress hold tenaciously to uncompromising, partisan stands, even in the face of crisis. If our lack of a working health care system in the United States isn't a crisis, then I don't know what is.

In another article in that same newsletter I pledged to:

- Use all means available to encourage people to open their hearts and minds to possibilities;
- to pray for the nation's leaders each day that they might act with compassion, conviction and wisdom;
- to practice nonviolence in my speaking and living.

I have done my best to honor these pledges, sometimes successfully, sometimes not.

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Reflections: On Parking Lots, Shelters and Vineyards

by Jennifer Mihok

It's a cold and rainy November morning. I'm up as usual at 6:30 a.m., out the door shortly after 8:00. Overnight, a wintry chill has moved in. Though I'm dressed warmly, my un-gloved hands are numb before I'm halfway to the Metro station. I can't very well get to my pockets as I manage an umbrella in one hand and my lunch in the other—leftovers from last night's dinner. On this nearby day I'll be able to enjoy a warm midday meal of spaghetti and meatballs—comfort food, we call it. But physically, I'll be plenty comfortable at my desk in a heated office, sitting in a cushioned swivel chair with lumbar support. Comfort food for what discomfort?



At the same moment that I'm becoming conscious of my numbing fingertips, my eyes fall upon three figures in the distance. Two, like me, are huddled under umbrellas. The third has his hands in the pocket of a hooded gray jacket and is shuffling back and forth in front of the Home Depot sign. Like me, these men are halfway to work; unlike me, they don't know where they're going, if anywhere.

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The State of Martin Luther King Jr.'s Dream in 2010

January 14, 2010

By Dedrick Muhammad

Racial inequality is a reality we still need to address four decades after MLK's assassination.

Over 40 years after Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination, his words still speak to the social conditions that so many Americans face. Our unemployment rate is hovering at 10 percent, and the wealthiest 10 percent of us control over 70 percent of the nation's wealth. Economic inequality remains a barrier to greater racial equality. The national commemoration of King's birthday, therefore, is more for reflection than celebration.

During one of the worst economic crises seen



in this country, black/white economic inequality is still a vast and greatly under-recognized challenge for this country. Two generations past the 1960s civil rights movement, African Americans make less than 60 cents

on every dollar of income for whites. Their unemployment rate stands at 150 percent of the national average.

As King fought to end this country's racial divisions, he recognized that economic inequality was as great a barrier to his vision of a more racially inclusive America as Jim Crow

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MLK'S DREAM

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segregation laws. Many forget that the March on Washington, where King delivered his famed "I Have a Dream" speech, was actually called the "March on Washington for Freedom and Jobs." When one of the last great symbols of political hope, President John F. Kennedy, was in the White House, King called hundreds of thousands to come to the nation's capital to fight for an America that would reflect its best values rather than its greatest fears. "We called our demonstration a campaign for jobs and income because we felt that the economic question was the most crucial that black people, and poor people generally, were confronting," he told *Look Magazine* in 1968.

In 2010, after the first challenging year of the presidency of another man who came into office riding a wave of hope, Americans can honor King's legacy by advancing a contemporary agenda of jobs, wealth building, and peace.

King and other civil rights leaders advocated progressive economic reforms with such proposals as the Bill of Rights for the Disadvantaged and the Freedom Budget of 1966. A new report from *United for a Fair Economy* that I co-authored builds on that work by advocating bold and progressive economic reforms to meet today's challenges. Reforms proposed in this report, titled "State of the Dream 2010: Drained," include a major jobs creation program, strong investment in job training, an equity assessment of federal spending,

and returning the tax system to one where those with the most concentrated wealth provide greater investment in the public good.

A rededication to King's vision can redirect the United States back to the path of greater equality, and a stronger economy for the middle and working classes. Martin Luther King, Jr. didn't believe in the trickle-down philosophy that has run our economy for the past three decades. Instead, his "liberation theology" analysis called for siding with and addressing specifically the challenges of the most disenfranchised to advance society as a whole.

History witnessed this strategy's success with the results of the civil rights movement of the 1960s. All Americans—women, immigrants, the disabled, the elderly, the young and the poor—benefited from the vast social programs and protections that resulted from that struggle. As the nation continues to heal from an economic and financial crisis caused by unregulated greed, we'll find racial inequality unchanged and overall economic inequality at unprecedented heights. It's time to finally make a unified thrust to bridge racial and economic inequality. ❖

Dedrick Muhammad is a research associate for the *Inequality and the Common Good* project at the Institute for Policy Studies.

The curse of poverty has no justification in our age. It is socially as cruel and blind as the practice of cannibalism at the dawn of civilization, when men ate each other because they had not yet learned to take food from the soil or to consume the abundant animal life around them. The time has come for us to civilize ourselves by the total, direct and immediate abolition of poverty.

Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?*, 1967.

**prophet
driven**

What Does the Lord Require of Us?

The most recent economic crisis laid bare yet again the failures of our current system — a system that elevates profit above the needs of individuals, communities, and God's good creation.

As Christ's followers we are called to transform the world and proclaim a new order centered on the wisdom of the prophets, not the false idols of the market.

2010 presents an opportunity for us to put our faith into action — and to give life to the social teachings of The United Methodist

Church — as we advocate for those whose lives have been ravaged by our profit-driven economy.

The media are full of stories heralding signs of a potential recovery. The painful truth is that many of our sisters and brothers were suffering long before the financial crisis became the top news story. They are likely to continue suffering long after economists and politicians proclaim a recovery unless we act now.

Join the **"prophet driven" campaign** of the **General Board of Church and Society (GBCS)** to put those on the bottom of the economic ladder at the top of the economic agenda.

Visit the website of the GBCS to learn how you can take action as part of the Prophet Driven Campaign at www.umc-gbcs.org

Every 33 seconds a child is born into poverty in the United States.

—Children's Defense Fund (2008)

With Sighs too Deep for Words: A Prayer for Haiti

The suffering in the nation of Haiti is indescribable. Even those who make their living with words - reporters and journalists - are at a loss as they survey the destruction and immense loss of life surrounding them. I am reminded of the words of Paul in the Letter to the Romans:

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.” (Romans 8:26)

With sighs too deep for words. We find ourselves not even knowing how to pray. We invite the Spirit to intercede, to move through us

As the Spirit touches us in our grieving, may we be generous in our giving, to help in providing the essentials of food, water and shelter to the people of Haiti. May we continue to give into the future as resources are needed for rebuilding both buildings and lives.

As the Spirit touches us in our speaking, may we be bold to stand up in opposition to the poisonous and hateful things that have been said by some about the people of Haiti and the leaders of the United States. May we ask forgiveness for any racism we find in our own hearts and be bold to respond when we find it in others.

As the Spirit touches us in our understanding, may we be vigilant in our study of the history of Haiti, open to learning the strands of Haiti's history that laid the foundation for the current nation. May we especially seek to understand the ways in which our own country has intervened, sometimes for good, often for ill. May we speak with clarity to our own leaders, calling upon them to take action in the best interest of the Haitian people.

As the Spirit touches us in our hearts, may we be reminded that the same Spirit we experience in our own lives, the Spirit of love, justice, strength and wisdom, moves through the land of Haiti this day.

And then perhaps we will know how to pray after all. The Spirit moving through our lives

reminds us of, and binds us to, the people of Haiti in our common humanity. Suddenly, the prayers we utter for the motherless child crying in the rubble of Haiti become as urgent as the prayers we pray for our own children when they are in need. Suddenly our rage at injustices we have experienced in our own lives finds utterance in our prayers that justice might be done in Haiti where such oppression has reigned. Our prayers open our eyes: we find the words we must speak and the steps we must take, comprehending not the whole journey, but seeing what we need to do today and tomorrow in response to the tragedy that has occurred.

May our sighs turn into words and our words into action as we give thanks for the presence of God's Spirit in our lives. ❖ **KJ**

UMCOR: An effective way to give to the People of Haiti

Among the most effective ways of supporting relief efforts in Haiti is to give through the **United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR)**.

Online: Gifts to Haiti can be made online by visiting www.umcorhaiti.org.

By mail: For gifts by mail, checks should be made payable to UMCOR and mailed to UMCOR, P.O. Box 9068, New York, NY 10087. Indicate *Haiti Emergency, UMCOR Advance #418325* on the memo line of your check.

By phone: Credit card donations are accepted via the telephone by calling 1-800-554-8583.

One hundred percent of gifts made to this advance will go to help the people of Haiti.

Additional Resources can be found on the web page **Haiti Earthquake** <<http://new.gbgm-umc.org/umcor/work/emergencies/ongoing/haitiearthquake/>>

This UMCOR web page provides the latest news and information on UMCOR's relief efforts in Haiti. This page also contains the following:

- a church bulletin;
- a PowerPoint slide show;
- a poster; and

- a link to offering envelopes, which churches can use to collect a special offering for Haiti survivors.

UMCOR is exempt from tax under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of the U.S. and qualifies for the maximum charitable contribution deduction by donors. ❖



REUTERS/Eduardo Munoz/Courtesy of www.Alertnet.org

Becoming a JUSTICE SEEKING Congregation: Responding to God's Justice Initiative

William K. McElvaney.
Bloomington: iUniverse, 2009.
150 pp.

MFSA member William McElvaney has published a new book, *Becoming a Justice Seeking Congregation*, an invitation and challenge to wrestle with the Church's God-given justice vocation. Both a theological reference and a practical guide to doing justice, the book asserts that justice is:

- (1) basic to the Christian Gospel,
- (2) necessary for the world's future and
- (3) possible to be demonstrated by committed Christians.

The first section of the book lays the groundwork for faith-filled discussion of the source and implications of justice.

Chapter One begins in a conversational manner, inviting readers to contemplate how their own stories have drawn them to seek justice.

Rev. McElvaney approaches various Scripture passages in both the Old and New Testaments for insight into the source and call of justice for people of faith.

The second chapter places justice work in context by exploring the world in which people of faith are called to seek justice today. Writing primarily for US-American readers, Rev.

McElvaney draws attention to the evil of empire in all its forms—a system in which the most vulnerable become the most expendable (p.13). This frames the discussion of the inevitability of combining faith and politics, as McElvaney expands the phrase, "if you want peace, work for justice" to include "and if you want justice, work for human political decisions serving the common good" (p. 23).

Chapter Three moves beyond the foundation of the written word into connecting elements of worship, liturgy, preaching and sacrament to the justice vocation of local congregations. The arts - visual, written, and performed - and their creators are also lifted up as powerful sources of revelation, compelling viewers to look critically at contemporary hindrances to freedom and justice.

The second half of the book moves from theory to practice as the author shares selections from his own journey and points to nine of his colleagues who in turn share their stories of congregational justice-seeking. Prominent in the author's story is the move of Northhaven UMC in Dallas, TX, to become a reconciling congregation.

Stories from today's "company of prophets" include congregational responses to urban violence, environmental degradation, sweatshops, islamophobia, poverty, hunger, and community neglect of HIV/AIDS patients. Among these stories is the one of Lauren Eckdahl, who received the first ever Iowa MFSA "Social Justice Award" in 1978 for his work in forming and leading the Siouxland Religious Committee for Community and Justice in response to a labor dispute that resulted in a 14-month strike of Iowa Beef Processors.

Becoming a Justice Seeking Congregation is a great tool for small group study. Questions for reflection and discussion are provided at the end of each of the book's five chapters in addition to those in the body of the text itself, making for an approachable, conversational introduction to congregational justice work.

Rev. McElvaney suggests that this resource be used by justice-seekers at all points in the journey. For MFSA chapters, this book can serve as a great tool for translating chapter discussions of justice into congregational action. Consider reading and discussing the book as a chapter and then identifying congregations among your membership where such discussions might take root. This will

provide an opportunity not only to share MFSA with new folks, but also to learn just how justice-inclined many church members already are.

Book is available on iUniverse.com, BarnesandNoble.com and Amazon.com.

Discounts for congregations and tax-exempt organizations are available through iUniverse (1 800 288 4677 x5022).

For more information contact:
franbillmc@sbcglobal.net

Author's proceeds from the sale of this book will support:

Organization for Development of the
Indigenous Maya (ODIM), Guatemala

and

The Dallas Peace Center.

STICKING WITH LOVE continued from page one

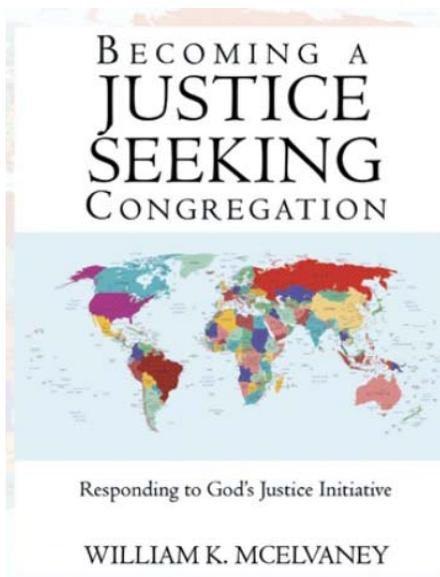
I have received some quizzical looks, for example, when people glance at my computer's desktop and see a picture of President Obama and family peering back at them. This has reminded me several times a day to lift President Obama and other leaders of our country in prayer.

It is not easy to pray, remain open, and encourage others given the rancor and viciousness of so much public discourse. But as I look back at my conclusions from last year, I see no other course. Our national leaders need each and every one of us to join them in their efforts. Supporting them when we believe they have chosen the right course. Challenging them when we believe they haven't. But whether we agree with a particular stance or not, reminding them that our task is to seek the common good and working *with* them to reach that end.

I don't know how we have come to this place. Perhaps it is the last gasps of unjust systems dying, people grasping the known, no matter how bad, for fear of new life in the future.

Whatever the case, I have decided I will stay the course. I find myself agreeing with the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. when he says, "I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear."

I don't know what the future holds, but I have decided to stick with love. ❖

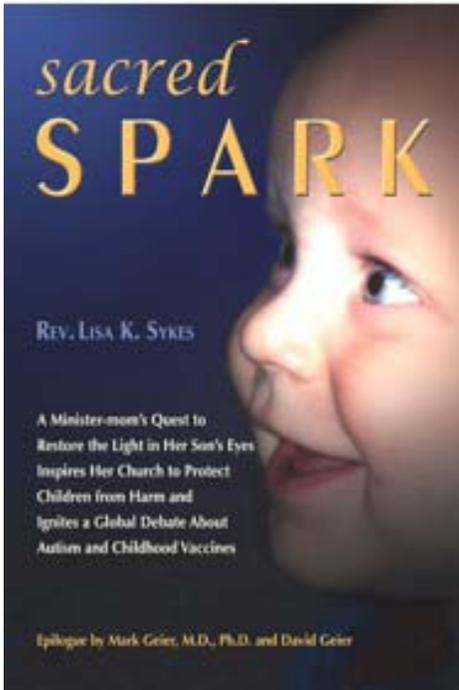


sacred SPARK

Rev. Lisa K. Sykes

4th Lloyd Productions, 316 pages

See www.sacredspark.org for details on how to purchase.



The book *Sacred Spark* by the Rev. Lisa Sykes, is the compelling story of a mother's love for her son. I found myself sharing Rev. Syke's anguish as her active, alert and charming toddler descends into the silence and withdrawal of autism. I shared her outrage when she discovered that her son was suffering from mercury poisoning, the same mercury that is present in the vaccines she had been given while pregnant with Wesley and that Wesley had received as an infant during routine visits to the pediatrician. I shed tears of joy when, after years of isolation, fear and frustration, Wesley is finally able to take his first steady step and speak his first words. Once started, this is a difficult book to put down.

But this book is so much more than a story of a mother's love. Upon discovering that mercury poisoning was at the root of Wesley's autistic behavior, Rev. Sykes goes on to learn absolutely everything she can about mercury poisoning, mercury in vaccines and the larger issues involved. Upon discovering that mercury continues to be used in vaccines to this day, Rev. Sykes takes her concern and outrage to another level, determined to share her knowledge with others and to hold the U.S. government and pharmaceutical companies accountable for continuing to use this known toxin in vaccines.

The description of the book on the website www.sacredspark.org says it well:

Sacred Spark is a pragmatic and compassionate call for putting the well-being of children first. Parents and physicians demanding safer vaccines will find clarity to support their informed choices, as well as inspiration and guidance to become advocates for children.

Rev. Sykes weaves into a seamless whole several strands of fast-paced and engrossing narrative: her family's horror in witnessing their happy toddler slip into autism; her victories in appropriate and landmark biomedical treatments for her son; her attempts to find precious allies against a corrupt and protected industry; the success of empowered parents to enact state bans on mercury and to approach Attorneys General across the country; and her own family's lawsuit defeat on a procedural technicality against a pharmaceutical company.

Readers are taken behind the scenes – from the Simpsonwood United Methodist Retreat Center in Norcross, Georgia, (where a closed-door meeting between government officials and pharmaceutical companies was convened one week before congressional investigations into conflicts of interest between the two began in 2000) – to the floor of the Institute of Medicine meetings in Boston and Washington, DC, where Rev. Sykes passionately challenges committee members to abandon their blind trust in how vaccines are manufactured and approved and embrace instead the clarity of medical ethics that would put children first.

Cited extensively throughout the book are scientific studies supporting mercury's causal role in autism, as well as the internal transcripts from the IOM and Simpsonwood meetings and government emails (available through the Freedom of Information Act).

This book could not be more timely and Rev. Sykes raises critical justice issues throughout. The delegates present at the United Methodist General Conference in 2008 agree. At that gathering in Fort Worth, Texas, a resolution was passed advocating the elimination of mercury from medicine. ❖

Protecting Children from Mercury-Containing Drugs

The Resolution adopted by the United Methodist Church in 2008 states:

Be it resolved that The United Methodist Church support all efforts to protect the public, especially children, from mercury-containing drugs by calling on the World Health Organization, international and national health officials/agencies, including the US Secretary of Health and Human Services, the US Food and Drug Administration and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to:

Immediately prioritize mercury-free stocks of vaccines and other pharmaceutical products for pregnant women, newborn infants and children,

Provide "the opportunity of informed consent" and promote product education to individuals about mercury exposure through their pharmaceutical products or vaccines, detailing the known risks of toxicity and Federal Safety Guidelines for exposure to mercury; and

Ban the presence of any mercury compound in pharmaceutical products or vaccines, prescribed or over-the-counter.

And be it further resolved, that, until mercury is banned from medicine, the medical missions, hospitals, clinics and ministries of The United Methodist Church strongly encourage mercury-free vaccines over mercury-containing ones. Acknowledging the difficulties in some contexts, we strongly urge that other organizations who are responsible for immunization efforts to prevent disease such as the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunizations, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Rotary International, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation as well as any other organization from which vaccines are purchased join the United Methodist Church in the education of and advocating for mercury free drugs and vaccines. ❖

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REFLECTIONS ON PARKING LOTS continued from page one

Their job “security” involves waiting in a parking lot, hoping that someone will need a hand with a home improvement project they’re tackling this Veterans’ Day.

As I continue on my way to the Metro, the parable of the laborers in the vineyard comes to mind for the hundredth time since moving to this Northeast, D.C. neighborhood. How I long to be able to come home on a day like today and play the role of the compassionate owner—rewarding a full day’s wages to all those seeking work. My head tells me that such charity is unsustainable, that what needs to be addressed and dismantled are the systems of injustice that allow this 2,000-year-old parable to have contemporary relevance. It is for that very reason that I’ve been so vocal in promoting immigration reform, health care reform, and an end to wage theft. But in this moment my righteous anger falls to the wayside. My heart breaks as I sense what can only be a small fraction of their vulnerability, a feeling that echoes an experience I had two weeks earlier in a completely different world.

2,500 miles from my Washington, D.C. home lies the once-sleepy town of Altar, Mexico. The mass migration occurring over the past twenty-five years has brought a whirl of activity to the area. People from throughout Central America are passing through; some are on their first journey to the United States, but for many, the trek through the desert has become all too commonplace. During our visit* to Altar, I spent the night at a small migrant shelter run by a Catholic congregation. For no cost, sojourners can get a warm supper, a place to sleep and bathe, a change of clothes if need be, and a warm breakfast for up to three nights, though extensions are granted under extenuating circumstances.

Those seeking refuge at CCAMYN (*Centre Comunitario de Atención al Migrante y Necesitado*, or the *Attention Center for Migrants and those in Need*), however, are rarely first-time travelers. Most have already been deported from the United States—some multiple times over—and know about the shelter only because it’s not their first time

traveling through the region. Migrants on their first journey are more likely to seek assistance from *coyotes*, guides who will see them at least part of the way to the border, but who are also likely to exploit, rob, or even physically harm the migrants—who often spend nearly all, if not everything, they have on the journey. In many cases, migrants cannot afford to pay the full price of a *coyote*, and must agree to pay off the debt for years to come, once they’ve crossed the border.

During dinner at CCAMYN, I found myself sitting next to Juan. He couldn’t have been



that much older than I am, but the thousands of miles separating our birthplaces have taken their toll. I’ve spent the past five years on the move—mostly traveling to, from and within Europe—accessing countless destinations with the click of a mouse. Juan’s been traveling too, spending the better part of the last ten years trying repeatedly to reach my place of departure. Temporary success has been his at least a dozen times, but that night he was on the road again. He has family in the States now, and they have papers. But he cannot risk seeing his own nieces out of fear that his sister might be charged with “harboring.” His hope is to cross and lay low for a few months; maybe then he can figure out a way to spend Christmas with the only family he has.

Juan was the first to push back from the large table where about thirty of us had eaten. The inches between us became miles again, as he embarked—under the cover of darkness—on a journey I’d have no trouble making in broad daylight two days later. Security checks of our 14-passenger van lasted no longer than

a minute; I couldn’t help but assume that our group’s fair complexion was an expediting factor.

Weeks have passed since I spent a night on CCAMYN’s tile floor. Back in the office, I heat up my leftovers and recline in my chair, watching the rain. I wonder where Juan is, whether the laborers have landed a job today, when the policymakers in the buildings outside my window will respond to the widespread, highly-organized advocacy efforts surrounding immigration reform. I wonder if members of my own family, congregation, and

circle of friends will be ready to hear the stories of my trip to the border without writing me off as “partisan,” or naïve to the “complexities” surrounding the situation. But what is so complicated about the desire of parents to feed their children, of young adults to seek a better life for themselves, of people of faith to advocate for those on the margins and in the shadows?

I put down my empty dish and sink answerless into my chair. It’s not as if these questions haven’t entered into the debate before, so what is to be done? I remember the feeling that rose in my chest as I observed

the day laborers that morning: the horrific heartbreak, the longing for an outpouring of compassion, the urgency for justice to be realized on earth. A glance at my inbox tells me that I’m not the only one experiencing this urgency. Articles, reports, action alerts, prayer requests, invitations to conference calls and prayer vigils—a whole movement is at my fingertips. I push back my plate, sit up, roll in my chair, and reach for the mouse, returning to the vineyard where new laborers are always welcome.

(Endnotes)

* In late October I traveled with a 10-member OnFire team to the US-Mexico border. We participated in a 3-day border justice immersion experience through the popular education organization BorderLinks. OnFire is a network of young adults within the Methodist Federation for Social Action, a national grassroots organization that promotes social justice in and beyond the United Methodist Church. ❖

An "Elder Brother's" Thoughts

WRITTEN ON THE EVE OF PRESIDENT OBAMA'S STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS

By the Rev. Gilbert H. Caldwell

The comment by President Obama about being, if necessary, a one-term rather than a two term President, prompts these words from an "Elder Brother" to a "Younger Brother"

The resistance to and the seduction of, being "the first"

I, like many readers of these words, have been "the first Black" in churches and as a United Methodist District Superintendent, etc. There is among some, a reluctance to be led by "the first", and some "firsts" are seduced by their "firstness". Neither of these responses promotes a fulfillment of the mission of the Church or anything else.

The seduction of "being first" is that it can prompt a kind of caution by the "break-through" person that puts longevity higher on the priority list than accomplishment. That is why I am intrigued and impressed by the "one-term" (if necessary) language.

A reluctance to be led by "the first"

Branch Rickey, the major figure in choosing Jackie Robinson to enter major league baseball, understood this reluctance and responded to it by telling Robinson to subdue his aggressive personality with a kind of passivity that would not "fire up" those who were displeased with his presence.

This unaccustomed passivity took a personal toll on Jackie Robinson and did little to quiet those who resisted his entrance into major league baseball.

Jackie Robinson entered major league baseball 63 years ago (1947). The nation has had its Jackie Robinson, who despite the meanness of others and the restrictions imposed upon him, was an amazing success. President Obama, a majority of the nation voted for you. You have been empowered to be that that Robinson was kept from being. Be who you are whether some in the nation are "ready or not."

Hindsight suggests to me and others that we were too passive in our response to the attacks upon Rev. Jeremiah Wright, Trinity United Church of Christ, the Obama's Church, and upon President Obama because of his relationship to Wright and Trinity. He and his family are

now without a church home and they are therefore deprived of being nourished and nurtured by the unique characteristics of the black community and the culture and community the black church provides. Particularly, for those who spend their working hours, being the "pepper" in a sea of "whiteness."

Earlier I suggested that if Barack Obama had been a member of a Church pastored by Martin Luther King, Jr., he would have been assaulted by his critics for being in a religious institution that was less-than-patriotic. These critics have not yet understood that the black church-led Civil Rights Movement was more committed to the values and principles of the nation than are many of them.

A friend in a marvelous paper about President Obama has suggested that he has not been connected to the wisdom, history and heritage that was at the heart of the southern freedom movement. Its struggle fed and led reality, and provides a foundation for those today who must continue to work toward enabling the nation to be what it is still in the process of becoming. This Obama disconnect with that history is not his fault. Rather, generational differences, the silence of those of us whose lives were re-shaped by that history, and the dissonance and discord of this moment, explain how and why President Obama may not be the beneficiary of a history that he and all of us need today, more than ever.

Audre Lorde has spoken words that I paraphrase: "You do not tear down the Master's house using the Master's tools." A more appropriate phrasing of those words for President Obama might read like this: "You do not change and/or re-direct the culture and practices of governmental Washington, and the economic forces that influence that culture and those practices, by using the tools that you found when you took residence in the White House." President Obama, your wisdom in recently reaching back into the nuts and bolts of your successful campaign to bring forth human and other resources for use as you govern is an act of significance. Those who say that it is impossible to govern as you campaigned, may unconsciously be suggesting that if you do, CHANGE will become a reality, and they are not sure they are ready for that kind of

change. Some want change, without changing. And others are described by a paraphrase of the Spiritual: "Everybody talkin' about CHANGE, ain't really ready for change."

President Obama, many of your "elder" brothers and sisters will be listening to you tonight and tomorrow and in the next days, reviewing the reviews of your State of the Union address. Remember that reviews of movies, plays, restaurants, concerts and even State of the Union addresses often say more about the reviewer than of that they have reviewed. Baseball often embraces the idea that second year players sometimes suffer from the "sophomore jinx." You are not a baseball player, you are "the one many of us have waited for;" some like me, for 76 years.

Willie Mays struck out a number of times before he got his first hit in a major league baseball game. Mays was criticized because as an outfielder, he popularized the "basket catch," a different and unorthodox way of catching a fly ball.

There have been times in this first year when you have struck out. You have gone about the process of leading in ways different from your predecessors. Don't worry about your strikeouts and more importantly, dare to play your position as our President, using the unique talents that you have. We voted for you, not as a "mediocre President" whose mediocrity might guarantee two terms, but rather as "a young man who had visions" (Joel 2: 28b), of what the USA and the world might become in the 21st century. Do not allow your vision of "what ought be" to be tarnished by what you have found in your first year as President.

I close with an idiom from auto racing: "Mr. President, (re)-start your engine."

Rev. Gil Caldwell, Asbury Park, New Jersey





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In this issue:

Parking Lots, Shelters and Vineyards
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Dream
GBCS "Prophet Driven" Campaign
Recommended Books
Prayer for Haiti
An "Elder Brother's" Thoughts

January-February 2010

<http://www.mfsaweb.org>

Thank You For Your Generosity

We couldn't have done it without you! It took some hard work but MFSA ended 2009 in the black! We wish to express our deep appreciation for the many people that made this possible.

- ❖ **Thanks** to each and every member of MFSA.
- ❖ **Thanks** to the many MFSA Chapters who made special gifts to support the national program.
- ❖ **Thanks** to big donors who went the extra mile.
- ❖ **Thanks** to all who have supported the Faithful Witness Campaign.
- ❖ **Thanks** to the MFSA staff who picked up the extra work when their number was decreased by one.
- ❖ **Thanks** to the MFSA Finance Committee for their careful planning, monitoring and fundraising.

In these difficult economic times, it is no small thing to be able to continue the important justice ministries of MFSA.

Thanks to all for your support!

from the MFSA Staff and Board of Directors



Just One More SQB.....

...IN PAPER BEFORE WE GO DIGITAL!

Starting with the summer issue, the *Social Questions Bulletin (SQB)* will be sent out electronically. This decision has been long-discussed and long-debated, but the time has come.

The *SQB* will be sent out via e-mail at approximately the same increments that current issues are published (4 to 6 issues a year). It is important that our e-mail database is complete and that it is kept up-to-date. If you aren't sure that we have your email address, please send it to us at mfsa@mfsaweb.org.

As is currently the case, all future *SQB*s will also be available on the MFSA website: www.mfsaweb.org.

If you do not have an e-mail address or internet access, please inform your chapter leaders so they can make arrangements for you to receive the *SQB*.