

Social Questions Bulletin

Seeking Global Justice through the United Methodist Church

JANUARY - MARCH 2007

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Come to Washington D.C. on March 16th, 2007 to participate in "A Christian Peace Witness for Iraq" or join in a local event in your area.

Thousands of Christians—Evangelicals, Protestants, and Catholics— from across the country will worship together on **March 16th** to mark the fourth anniversary of the Iraq War with public prayer, a candlelight procession through the center of the nation's capital, vigils in cities and towns throughout the country and a protest culminating with 1500 Christians surrounding the White House with the light of peace. **The Christian Peace Witness**, organized by a broad cross section of Christian denominational peace groups and organizations, including MFSA, is expected to be the largest peace gathering of Christians expressing opposition to the war since it began four years ago.

Schedule

- 7:00 pm Service at the National Cathedral** with speakers:
Jim Wallis, of Sojourners/Call to Renewal
Celeste Zappala, a peace activist and United Methodist mother whose son was killed in Iraq in April 2004
Dr. Bernice Powell Jackson, President for the North American Conference of the World Council of Churches
Rev. Raphael Warnock, Pastor, Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, Ga.
- 9:00 pm Procession down Mass. Avenue to the White House**
- 10:30 pm Public Witness at the White House**

This is the Work of Justice

by Amy Stapleton, National Organizer

People often refer to their time in the Holy Land as the "run where Jesus walked" experience. My recent trip to the West Bank could better be described as the "go where Jesus wept" encounter, for there is no doubt that Jesus, a man who lived under occupation, grieves the humanitarian crisis in the land we call holy.

I traveled with nearly 50 other United Methodists, including many MFSA members, from 16 annual conferences, on a "seeking peace, pursuing justice" pilgrimage to Israel and the West Bank from January 15th through the 28th. Coordinated by Rev. David Wildman of the General Board of Global Ministries, and endorsed by MFSA, this was the second GBGM trip with this focus to the region. Another trip is being planned for January 2008.




Amy Stapleton stands in front of the United Methodist Cross and Flame on "The Wall" just outside of a Jerusalem checkpoint.

The first indication of how things had changed since my last trip to the region in 1998 occurred while in JFK airport in New York. When I tried to check in with Delta I found out—much to my dismay—that I had been transferred to EL AL airlines, the official airline of Israel. EL AL agents wanted to know the exact reason for my visit, the locations inside the country (presuming I would only visit Israel) that I would be visiting, and the purpose of my previous visit. Honestly I don't remember what I said except that I was a United Methodist. I was then escorted through security, to the gate and even on to the plane. If I was suspicious, I can only imagine what the experience is like for those who are Muslim and those of Arab descent.

Once in the Middle East, highlights of the trip included a meeting with Archbishop Elias Chacour of the Melkite Church and

continued on page two



VOICES OF FAITH 2007

Make Plain the Vision

Updated information on MFSA's 100th Anniversary Conference can be found on pages 4 and 5 of this newsletter. Added information includes schedule and workshop topics and leaders.

What? You haven't registered yet? Time is running out. Register today at www.mfsaweb.org

The Work of Justice

Continued from previous page

the students at Mar Elias Educational Institutions. These institutions now have more than 4,500 students, representing all major religions and ethnicities in Israel. An advocate of non-violence, Archbishop Chacour is the recipient of the World Methodist Peace Award and the Niwano Peace Prize. He is simply referred to as "another man from Galilee." Archbishop Chacour reminded us that in Aramaic, the word translation for "blessed" or "happy" in the beatitudes is **ashre** or **tuvahun**. The translation means, "Be aligned. Straighten up! Get up! Get moving! Get your hands dirty!" This is not a passive reading where Jesus is blessing particular groups of people. Peace, we were reminded, needs action not contemplation.

In the West Bank we met with organizational, community and church leaders at



Watch Tower outside of Rachel's Tomb, open only to Jews and tourists though a holy site of Christians, Muslims and Jews.

places such as the *Wi'am Conflict Resolution Center*, the *Greek Catholic Infant Welfare Clinic*, *Princess Basma Hospital*, *Sabeel Liberation Center*, the *Rapprochement Center*, *B'tselem* (Israeli human rights organization), the *Israeli Committee Against Home Demolitions* and the *Arab Association for Human Rights*.

Our time was enriched by prophetic speakers like Rabbi Arik Ascherman from *Rabbis for Human Rights* and Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb pastor of the Christmas Church in Bethlehem. Raheb, author of the book *Bethlehem Besieged*, spoke of how Christians are taught to read the scriptures in ways that lead to an understanding of Palestinians as "less than." Scripture read in this way lead to ongoing racism. Jenan

Senan, Program Coordinator for *Sabeel Nazarath* and an Arab Palestinian Christian with an Israeli passport, addressed the complexity of identity that exists within the Palestinian community.

Amid the powerful presentations, there is, as Paul Harvey would say, "the rest of the story." These stories are of the people of the land. Stories shared after countless conversations with families living in refugee camps, former Israeli soldiers, with strangers on the streets, Bedouin women in Hebron and store vendors and who had not been open for business for months because of nearly non-existent tourism industry. People shared a longing for peace not violence. I did not hear any bitterness or a desire for vengeance as the media portrays, but yearning for basic human rights and a right to return to their homes and villages.

I had the privilege of staying with a Muslim family in Aida refugee camp, a camp of over 5,000 people. The camp was established as a temporary refuge for Palestinians from 45 villages west of Jerusalem and Hebron who fled during the 1948 war. After years of living in tents, families now live together in block-shaped houses. I was embraced with open arms and fed well. We spoke honestly about the policies of governments, Israel, Hamas, Fatah, and the US. We talked about how governments, not people, are standing in the way of peace. As I was leaving, I was told, "You are our family. Our home is your home." Yet I wondered how long there would be a home. The ghettoization of Palestine continues. Currently 102 illegal settlement/outposts still exist in the West Bank. Though the orders to evacuate six outposts were extended in 2006, calling for the outposts to be dismantled, expansion was noted in five of them.

The most dramatic and visible sign of the occupation is "The Wall" that surrounds much of the West Bank. To date, 703 kilometers of "The Wall" are completed at a financial cost of two million dollars per kilometer. Four hundred and eight more kilometers are planned. Parts of the "security barrier" are a fence-like structure, 25 feet high with rolls of razor wire four meters deep. The barrier, affecting an estimated 497,820 Palestinians, surrounds 12% of the West Bank. While I was in the West Bank and Israel, former President Jimmy Carter's book was receiving much



Mono Ob (far right), a sophomore at Mar Elias High School along with two other students.

international press for naming of the occupation as apartheid. For those who claim that such government sanctioned economic and political discrimination, physical restriction of movement, and the creation of a separate not equal infrastructure is not apartheid, I challenge them to go and see "The Wall," wait in line at a security checkpoint and walk through a security terminal for themselves.

Rev. Dr. Mirti Rahab in his concluding remarks, was asked, "Where are the signs of hope?" He replied, "It is difficult to specify, but you've met and seen many in the last few days. It is important not just to **see** signs of hope, but to **create** and **be** signs of hope. To move beyond paralyzing guilt, apathy and being overwhelmed by the work of justice." This is the work of justice. Get up and go!

Sources: United Nations Office for the coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, January 2007, B'TSELEM - The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights, Peace Now Settlement Report, and Applied Research Institute of Jerusalem. ❖

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US Religious Delegation Finds Hope in Iran

A U.S. delegation of faith leaders visited Iran from February 17-25, meeting religious and political leaders in the hope of improving relations between the people of Iran and the U.S.

The 13 member delegation organized by the Mennonite Central Committee and the American Friends Service Committee included Jim Winkler, General Secretary of the General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church. Upon their return the trip participants issued the following statement.

STATEMENT:

As Christian leaders from the United States, we went to Iran at this time of increased tension believing that it is possible to build bridges of understanding between our two countries. We believe military action is not the answer, and that God calls us to just and peaceful relationships within the global community.

We were a diverse group of Christian lead-

ers that included United Methodist, Episcopal, Catholic, Baptist, Evangelical, Quaker, and Mennonites who have 17 years of on the ground experience in Iran. We were warmly welcomed by the Iranian people, and our time in Iran convinced us that religious leaders from both countries can help pave the way for mutual respect and peaceful relations between our nations.

During our visit we met with Muslim and Christian leaders, government officials, and other Iranian people. Our final day included a meeting with former President Khatami and current President Ahmadinejad. The meeting with President Ahmadinejad was the first time an American delegation had met with a sitting Iranian President in Iran since the Islamic revolution in 1979. The meeting lasted 2.5 hours and covered a range of topics including the role of religion in transforming conflict, Iraq, nuclear proliferation, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

What the delegation found most encour-

aging from the meeting with President Ahmadinejad was a clear declaration from him of no intention to acquire or use nuclear weapons, as well as a statement that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can only be solved through political not military means. Finally, he said, "I have no reservation about conducting talks with American officials if we see some good will."

We believe it is possible for further dialogue and that there can be a new day in



Jim Winkler (right), representing The UMC, and the Rev. Ron Flaming, of the Mennonite Central Committee, take part in a Feb. 26 news conference in Washington after their trip to Iran. A UMNS photo by Jay Mallin.

U.S. – Iranian relations. The Iranian government has already built a bridge toward the American people by inviting our delegation to come to Iran. We ask the U.S. government to welcome a similar delegation of Iranian religious leaders to the United States.

As additional steps in building bridges between our nations, we call upon both the United States and Iranian governments to:

- ◆ Immediately engage in direct face-to-face talks
- ◆ Cease using language that defines the other using "enemy" images
- ◆ Promote more people to people exchanges including religious leaders, members of Parliament/ Congress, and civil society.

As people of faith, we are committed to working towards these and other confidence building measures, which we hope will move our two nations from the precipice of war towards a more just and peaceful settlement. ❖

**END THE
OCCUPATION**

**JUNE 10-11, 2007
RALLY, TEACH-IN AND
LOBBYING DAY
WASHINGTON, DC**

Join the **US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation** and **United for Peace and Justice** for a massive rally, teach-in, and grassroots lobbying day in Washington, DC, June 10-11, 2007!

In four months, thousands of people will gather in our nation's capital to protest the 40th anniversary of Israel's illegal military occupation of the Palestinian West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza.

More than 80 organizations, including MFSA, already have endorsed the political demands of the mobilization, which are:

- ◆ An end to US military, economic, diplomatic, and corporate support for Israel's illegal military occupation of the Palestinian West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem.
- ◆ A change in US policy to one that supports a just peace between Palestinians and Israelis based on equality, human rights and international law, and the full implementation of all relevant UN resolutions.

Visit the **End The Occupation** web site at www.endtheoccupation.org to view the list of endorsing organizations and sign a petition to be delivered to congress.

For more information contact: US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation, PO Box 21539 Washington, DC 20009 202-332-0994
<http://www.endtheoccupation.org>



VOICES OF FAITH 2007

CELEBRATING THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE METHODIST FEDERATION FOR SOCIAL ACTION

What: A Gathering of Justice-Seeking United Methodists

Why: Celebrate, Organize, Take Action, *Be The Church*

When: April 13-15, 2007

Where: Hyatt Regency Hotel in Crystal City, VA

Time is Running Out!!!
What are you waiting for?
Go to www.mfsaweb.org
and click on Register Now!



Dr. Diana Butler Bass

Celebrate 100 years of justice action!

The Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA) was founded in 1907 in Washington, DC. We will recognize and honor the leaders of MFSA on whose shoulders we stand.

Sing, Worship and Listen to Great Preaching!

Dr. Marcia McFee will guide us in worship and **Rev. Dr. Traci West** and **Bishop Minerva Carcaño** will preach the truth of the Gospel for the current day. Join with hundreds of energized United Methodists singing songs of justice, peace and power as we experience the gift of community together.



Dr. Brian Blount

Have Fun!

Let the music of African American Women's a capella group, "**In Process**," nurture our souls and give us strength for the journey.

Recall our Faith Roots!

New Testament scholar, professor and author, **Dr. Brian Blount**, of Princeton will ground us in the soil of Biblical justice in which we are rooted.

Learn and Respond!

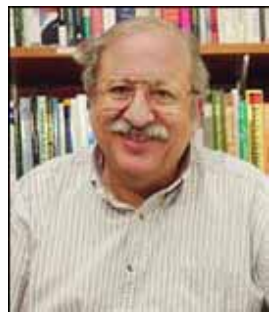
Author of *Christianity for the Rest of Us*, **Dr. Diana Butler Bass**, will point to signs of hope and vitality within the church. Workshops, speakers and resources will be available on a wide variety of **topics**.

Organize!

Former director of organizing for Cesar Chavez's United Farm Workers and currently lecturer at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, **Dr. Marshall Ganz**, will help us understand how being people of faith and good organizers go hand in hand. Impressed with John Wesley's organizing skills, Prof. Ganz will help us hone our own skills as we prepare for **General Conference 2008** where we intend to be a mighty force!

Witness!

On Sunday afternoon we will travel to the **White House** and raise our voices in song, prayer and witness, bringing our message of peace, justice and liberation as we challenge the current administration to live up to the highest ideals of the Gospel and of our nation.



Dr. Marshall Ganz



Bishop Minerva Carcaño



Rev. Dr. Traci West



Dr. Marcia McFee

SCHEDULE AND WORKSHOPS



FRIDAY APRIL 13TH, 2007

9am-5pm -- Registration Open

2pm-5:30pm

The Journey of Justice: Setting the Stage

A Celebration of 100 years of MFSA
(with music, spoken word and historic presentations)

7:30pm-9:00pm

Rooted in Faith: Called Into Action

Dr. Brian K. Blount, Professor of New Testament Interpretation,
Princeton Theological Seminary

SATURDAY APRIL 14TH, 2007

8am-Noon -- Registration Open

8:00am -10:00am

Worship and Biblical Engagement

Dr. Marcia McFee and Rev. Dr. Traci West, Drew Theological
Seminary

10:00am-Noon

Organizing Progressive Methodists: Developing Leaders

Engaging Members and Changing the World
Dr. Marshall Ganz, Kennedy School of Government

Noon – 1:130

Lunch on your own

1:30pm- 3:00pm

Workshops Group I

1. **Creating “A Land Twice Promised”:** Performance
Process of an Israeli and Palestinian Dialogue — Noa
Baum, Artist and Storyteller

2. **If We Can Risk Nuclear War, We Can Risk Disarma-
ment** David Culp, Friends Committee on National Legislation
and Chair, Interfaith Committee for Nuclear Disarmament

3. **Immigration: A Theological Response**
Bill Mefford, General Board of Church and Society, Allison
Rutland Soulen, Director of Legal Services and Rob Rutland-
Brown, Executive Director, Just Neighbors Ministry

4. **Consumerism: Heaven’s Wealth and Earthly Treasures**
Rev. Marti Zimmerman, former MFSA staff and Clergy in the
Rocky Mountain Conference

5. **America’s Disgrace: Incarceration and the Death
Penalty** -- Rev. Sala J. Nolan, Minister of Criminal Justice and
Human Rights, Justice and Witness Ministries, UCC

6. **Living the Questions: Engaging Progressives in Study**
Rev. Jeff Procter-Murphy and Rev. David Felten, authors of
Living the Questions

7. **Possibilities in Being Church in the 21st Century**
Dr. Diana Butler Bass, author, *Christianity for the Rest of Us*

8. **Faith in the Age of Empire**, Rev. George McClain, MFSA
Executive Director Emeritus

9. **The Problem of Evil and the Goodness of God** --
Bishop Roy Sano

10. **Worship and the Arts: Moving Beyond
Words** -- DeLyn Celec, Musician and Panel

3:15pm- 4:15pm

Christianity for the Rest of Us

Dr. Diana Butler Bass

4:30pm- 6:00pm

Workshops Group II

Same as Group I

SATURDAY EVENING, APRIL 14TH

6:30pm - 9:30 pm

And the Journey Continues: A Banquet of Thanksgiving

Entertainment: *In Process* (Women’s Acappella Group)
Former Senator John Edwards, invited

SUNDAY, APRIL 15TH, 2007

8:00am-9:00am

Morning Centering

9:15am-10:45am

Workshop Group III

1. **Economic Divestment as a Tool to Impact the Occupa-
tion of Palestine** — Elizabeth Corrie, End the Occupation

2. **Ending the War NOW: Next Steps for Organizing** - TBD

3. **Common Cause: Intersections of Oppression**

Rev. Troy Plummer, Director of RMN and Panel

4. **Nonviolence Training: A Basis for Action** -- Janet
Chisholm, Peace and Justice Coordinator, Kirkridge Retreat
Center

5. **Popular Education: Finding Our Voice**
Tufara Waller Muhammad and staff, Highlander Center

6. **Working for a Living Wage: Economic Engagement** --
Rev. Osagyefo Uhuru Sekou, Executive Director of the Inter-
faith Worker Justice Center of New Orleans

7. **Emerging Faith Communities: What We Need to
Know** - TBD

8. **Organizing for Social Transformation** TBD

9. **Middle East Opportunities for Action**
Ashley Wilkinson, US Campaign to End the Occupation and Jim
Vitarello, President of Sharing Jerusalem USA

11:00am-12:30pm

Organizing for Action

Option One: MFSA Organizing for General Conference

Option Two: Organizing for the Public Square and the Role of
People of Faith

1:30pm-3:00pm

Worship and Witness: Stepping Out and Stepping

MFSA will remember the prophetic past when the founders
gathered at the Willard hotel and then walked to the White
House for a meeting with the President. After a worship
service at Church of the Epiphany near the White House, we
will process to the White House where Bishop Minerva Carcaño
will send us forth into action.

John and Pat Schwiebert Pay the Price for Peace

John and Pat Schwiebert have long provided a powerful witness for peace. This witness includes refusing to support the waging of war. Thus, for many of the last 30 years, they have not paid Federal Income Taxes.

John currently serves as pastor of Metanoia Peace Community United Methodist Church. Pat is employed as a full-time volunteer director of Grief Watch, a mission of the congregation. John and Pat have been MFSA leaders: within their local MFSA chapter, by serving on the MFSA national Board of Directors, and by volunteering with MFSA at General Conference.

NOTICE OF LEVY

In December 2006, John and Pat received a letter from the General Board of Pensions and Health Benefits (GBOPHB) of the UMC notifying them that the IRS was putting a lien on John's UM pension for payment of federal taxes for the years 2002-2003.

Payment of these taxes by the GBOPHB would reduce John's monthly pension benefit by more than 52% until the taxes were paid. John contacted the legal department of the GBOPHB and requested that the staff delay the honoring of the Notice of Levy by not forwarding to the IRS a portion of his pension benefit for January 1, 2007. The delay would have allowed all concerned parties within the UMC to take time to consider arguments against the honoring of this Notice of Levy. A representative of the legal department informed John that the General Board has a policy that includes the honoring of all IRS levies.

John and Pat subsequently requested an opportunity to address the Board of Directors of the GBOPHB to ask them not to

honor the levy. They did so at a Board in Hollywood, Florida on January 26, 2007.

BACKGROUND

The amounts that the IRS is seeking to collect by means of this Notice of Levy, are not amounts that the Schwieberts have kept back by fraud or neglect. Rather they are amounts that the two quite openly refused to pay for the tax years 2002 and 2003 because of religiously based conscientious objection to the primary purposes for which the money was to be used, namely U.S. military violence, including the illegal and immoral war against, and subsequent occupation of, Iraq, with its devastating toll of human life.

The Schwieberts decision to withhold federal income tax is consistent with numerous other conscientious acts of civil disobedience or non-cooperation they have undertaken over the past 30 years, and for which both have incurred penalties including the seizure of personal savings and property. In some years they have forfeited more than double the amount of the income tax owed because they "redirected" the amount owed to non-profit agencies that (unlike the U.S. government) are not engaged in the business of killing.

In several cases the IRS seized that same amount anyway, along with additional monetary penalties, using the means of expropriation granted to it by statute.

During more recent years John and Pat managed to owe nothing to the Federal Government by choosing voluntary poverty and learning how to live on a less-than-taxable income.

Neither John nor Pat has derived any financial benefit from their conscientious refusal to pay the war taxes that the IRS claims that John currently owes. Instead the Schwieberts took the entire amount that they refused to pay (\$7,500 for the tax years 2002 and 2003) and donated that amount to the government of Multnomah County, Oregon. This was their way of affirming that they were not attempting to evade their responsibility for supporting the common good through the payment of taxes (the county government bears the brunt of the cost of local human services), but that they could by no means agree to pay taxes that would be used for the propagation of military violence.

Pat Schwiebert tells of her experiences ministering to grieving parents

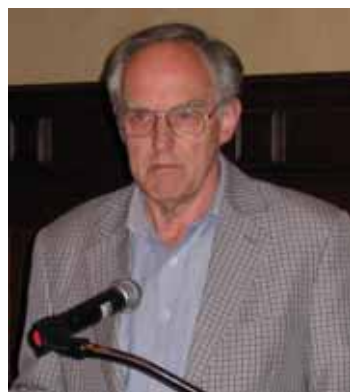


In their nearly thirty-year odyssey of military tax resistance, Pat and John have enjoyed the support and cooperation of the Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference. As an example, for some 15 years prior to John's retirement the Annual Conference Executive Session voted each year to allow John to work full-time in pastoral ministry (and to garner pension credit for that full time ministry) while receiving a less-than-full time salary, in order that Pat and John might live below a taxable income and thus avoid participating in the funding of U.S. military violence. This situation prevailed until John retired and his pension benefit raised their joint income above a taxable level.

The Social Principles of the UMC state that "we reject war as an instrument of national foreign policy," and "we assert the duty of churches to support those who suffer because of their stands of conscience represented by non-violent beliefs or acts."

It would be strange indeed, and perhaps an admission of the captivity of the United Methodist Church to the principalities and powers of this world, were the GBOPHB to offer nothing more than sympathetic verbal support to one of its own participants, while actively collaborating with a government agency to penalize that participant and his family because they put their non-violent faith into action.

There are church-state issues that are raised when the IRS demands that a church body serve as its collection agent, especially when an act of conscientious civil disobedience is involved. The American Friends Service Committee, a Quaker agency has won concessions from the IRS, which has agreed not to pressure the agency to join in actions that violated the peace witness of its employees who were *bona fide* conscientious objectors, based upon their Quaker heritage. The GBOPHB owes it to its participants to explore such possibilities for United Methodist conscientious objectors.



Rev. John Schwiebert speaks to the board of the General Board of Pensions and Health Benefits

**Presentation to the Board of Directors of the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits of the UMC
by John and Pat Schwiebert
January 26, 2007**

In early December, when your staff informed us that our monthly pension benefit would be reduced in order to comply with a Notice of Levy from the Internal Revenue Service, we immediately asked the staff to delay any decision to honor the levy in order to allow time for all concerned parties within the United Methodist Church to consider the appropriateness of compliance with this IRS order.

We then described several compelling circumstances that the Board and the larger Church might want to consider before automatically bowing to the demands of the IRS.

We were informed by the staff that it is the policy of the Board to honor all levies by the IRS, and that the staff could not therefore grant our request even under the most unusual of circumstances.

We then resolved to confront you, the Board of Directors who, we presume, are responsible for making policy and who are therefore able to change the policy or to authorize an exception to the policy when it is in the best interest of the Board and of the larger UMC to which it is accountable.

Circumstances did not allow for a meeting with you before your staff proceeded to act as a collection agent for the Federal government by diverting 52% of our January 1 pension benefit to the IRS.

Unless the Board instructs the staff to do otherwise, the staff will continue to collaborate with the IRS until the Levy is satisfied, reducing our monthly benefit by more than half for the next 5 or 6 months.

We are not here today to ask you to make a final decision not to act as a go-between between the two of us and the IRS, although that is ultimately what we think would be the most appropriate action for the followers of Jesus Christ.

What we are asking you to do *at this meeting* is to instruct your staff to delay any immediate further implementation of the current levy, to give you on this Board and the leadership of the larger UMC an opportunity for prayerful spiritual discernment around the serious theological and

moral issues raised by this current circumstance.

We further ask that you direct that the money in question be set aside and given neither to the IRS nor to us while the discernment is in process.

Questions to be considered during this discernment process would certainly include the following:

1. Is it ever appropriate for the church to act as an agent of the Federal government in resolving an issue between the Federal government and members of the church who are acting out of conscience and in the Spirit of Christ, and who stand in the great historical tradition of civil disobedience?
2. Should not a general agency of the UMC at least challenge the assumption that church and state will automatically act as partners in punishing persons who put their non-violent faith into action consistent with the social principles of the UMC?
3. Are there times when a general agency of the UMC must choose a particular path even though it may involve adverse financial risks, because as followers of the Christ we are called to serve God rather than Mammon?
4. Is the UMC called to be a leader in active opposition to war as an instrument of U.S. foreign policy, as stated in the Social Principles, or does it merely make statements, leaving it up to individual United Methodists to take up the cross of non-violent action, while the denomination itself watches from a safe distance?
5. What message does the church send to the general public when, after two of its members have successfully diverted tax money from the making of war to the promotion of God's peace, that same church then takes money already committed to the promotion of God's peace, and sends it to a government which clearly intends to use it for the furtherance of military violence?

Today we are not asking you to do anything for our personal benefit. We expect to continue to say no to war through acts of civil disobedience, and to pay the penalty for so doing, as we have for the past 30 years, regardless of what you decide today.

Our proposal to you today is not about us

and what we need, but about the faithfulness of the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits and the witness and integrity of the United Methodist Church.

(The above remarks were read by John and followed by some strong personal words by Pat. Then Kathryn Johnson, Exec. Director of the MFSA made a presentation in support of the above request.)

CURRENT STATUS

In a press release following the board meeting the GBOPHB said:

The Board of Directors honors the Schwieberts' conviction and appreciates their ministry and the time they took to share their views. It is the established policy of the Board of Directors to comply with all laws in carrying out the mission to care for the clergy and lay workers of The United Methodist Church.

In a letter dated January 31, 2007 to Kathryn Johnson, Bishop Ben R. Chamness who chairs the board of the GBOPHB wrote:

...it is customary for us to hear such reports and to remand them to one or more of the Board's Committees for further study and discernment about our response. That was done in this case.

As the GBOPHB continues to deliberate they also continue to act as an agent of the state in withdrawing and forwarding money to the IRS from the Schwiebert's pension funds. John has written that he is grieving for "the lack of prophetic imagination in the GBOPHB."

ACTION

The action of the GBOPHB board has resulted in a significant loss of income each month for John and Pat.

You can express your support for them and this powerful witness by sending a check to them as follows:

John and Pat Schwiebert
2116 N.E. 18th Ave.
Portland, OR 97212

The GBOPHB is genuinely struggling with the issues raised by this challenge. It presents a good opportunity for all of us to reflect, personally and corporately, about how to make a prophetic witness for peace and what risks we are willing to take individually and as a denomination.





MFSA's New Office Manager

Welcome Rob Walty

In September 2006, MFSA welcomed Rob Walty as our new office manager. We figure it's about time we introduce him through the ***Social Questions Bulletin!***

Rob hails from the Boston area in New England and grew up in Quincy, Massachusetts. Rob's undergraduate degree was in geology, followed by three years in the U.S. Army where he inspected meat bought on contract for the military.

Between his time in the military and his current job with MFSA, Rob spent twenty years in materials engineering, also in the Boston area, and then followed a calling

to become a United Church of Christ pastor. After receiving his M.Div. at Andover Newton Theological Seminary, Rob served as a pastor in Frederick, Maryland for eight years.

Rob has three children, two of them grown and one who is currently nine. He says he loves being an "older" parent.

Rob reports that he now "works happily" at the national office of the Methodist Federation for Social Action and follows his heart by working with people interested in the causes of justice. ❖



...and How are the Children?

MARCH 9-12 WASHINGTON, D.C.

ABOUT THE CONFERENCE:

This will be the fifth annual Ecumenical Advocacy Days conference. The theme, "and how are the Children?" will guide and inspire this gathering of over 1,000 religious advocates. Experts will train participants on advocacy and policy issues, and on Monday, the conference will conclude with lobby visits on Capitol Hill.

SPEAKERS:

Rev. Clifton Kirkpatrick

Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches

Mrs. Marian Wright Edelman

Founder and President of the Children's Defense Fund (CDF)

Mrs. Mercedes Roman

The Latin American Coordinator for the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) and the UN Representative for Defence for Children International (DCI)

REGISTRATION INFORMATION:

Register online at www.advocacydays.org or for more information contact Michael Neuroth, Conference Coordinator, at info@advocacydays.org or call (202)470-0127

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In this issue:

Christian Peace Witness for Iraq

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Schedule and Workshops**

**Schwieberts Challenge UMC on
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US Delegation Visits Iran

**Trip to Israel/Palestine, "Seek Peace
and Pursue It"**