

Social Questions Bulletin

Seeking Global Justice through the United Methodist Church

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Repent! The Kingdom of God is at Hand!

by Kathryn Johnson, Editor

Listening to conversations among progressive Christians these days, one would be forgiven for thinking that the Second Coming has arrived and we will all soon be saved by the messiah in the person of Barack Obama.

And it's not just in Christian circles that this view is surfacing. It has become something of a joke in the Co-Housing Community where I live. As of late, whenever we encounter a problem - the furnace stops working or we're having trouble getting a budget passed - someone inevitably pipes up to say that we can relax, after January 20th all will be well!

Well, just as followers of Jesus were deeply disappointed that Jesus did not turn out to be the great political and military leader they expected, I'm pretty certain that Barack Obama is not going to turn out to be the messiah some of us are beginning to fashion in our minds.

Which isn't to say that the Kingdom of God isn't at hand. Indeed, if we know anything as Christians, it is that the Kingdom is *always* at hand. We are called everywhere and at all times to work for the realization of that Kingdom here on earth.

So, we've got our work cut out for us. The articles you'll find in the newsletter this month have been chosen with that in mind. In *Note to Self*, I reflect on some of the commitments I'm ready to make at this exciting moment in history and invite others to reflect as well. In both *Pride and Prejudice* by Michael Gross and *Open Letter to My White LGBT Sisters and Brothers* by Dianne Finnerty, we are invited to examine the intersections of racism and heterosexism and the new opportunities we have to work for justice in both arenas. *Crisis in Gaza* gives us solid analysis

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Note to Self

by Kathryn Johnson

To say that President Obama's "In Box" will be full on January 21st is to state the obvious. Indeed, President Obama bears some responsibility for this as he has invited people to write his administration with their ideas at www.change.gov.

And everywhere one looks one finds "Memos to President Obama." It would appear that everyone and her third cousin has ideas about what issues should be given priority attention and just what the new president should do to solve the problems at hand. Having read many of



these memos I take heart at the creative thinking going on in such critical areas as health care, education, civil rights, foreign policy, nuclear deterrence and the environment.

As the inauguration draws near, I admit to finding myself wanting to join in, to set the new President down for a chat perhaps. Dreams that I have struggled to keep alive for these past years, sometimes by sheer willpower it seems, suddenly find themselves nourished by the fertile soil of the incoming president's vision and energy, and I want to share my ideas with Mr. Obama, his cabinet and the new Congress.

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Pride and Prejudice

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The night before Election Day, a black woman walked into the San Francisco headquarters of the **No on Proposition 8** campaign. Someone had ripped down the **No on 8** sign she'd posted in her yard and she wanted a replacement. She was old, limping, and carrying a cane. Walking up and down the stairs to this office was hard for her.

I asked why coming to get the sign was worth the trouble, and she answered, "All of us are equal, and all of us have to fight to make sure the law says that." She said that she was straight, and she told me about one of the first times she ever hung out with gay people, in New Orleans in the 1970s. "I thought I was so cool for being there, and I said, 'You faggots are a lot of fun!' Well, ... I learned my lesson. A gay man turned on me and said, 'A faggot is not a person. A faggot is a bunch of sticks you use to light a fire.' "

The next day, Barack Obama was elected president, and gay marriage rights in California were taken away. At the same time, Arizona voters amended their state constitution to preemptively outlaw gay marriage. Florida went further, outlawing any legal union that's treated as marriage, such as domestic partnerships or civil unions. Arkansas passed a vicious law denying us adoption rights.

The combination of Obama's win and gay people's losses inflicted mass whiplash. We were elated, then furious. I'd spent the week in the **No on Prop. 8** office in the Castro, a neighborhood where our defeat was existential. For the next few days, wherever I went — barbershop, grocery store, gym, bars — I heard people talk of almost nothing else. Incredibly, strangers on the street walked up to me and started conversations about Prop. 8.

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NOTE TO SELF

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I believe that it is a measure of the possibilities we sense at this historic moment that release within us a desire to share our own perspectives and to challenge the new administration to act in ways that we believe will lead to a more just and peace-filled world.

Even as I dare to hope that fundamental change may occur in the actions and direction of our nation, it occurs to me that challenging the incoming administration and hoping and expecting them to take action, is only a part of the picture, perhaps the smallest part.

It is as true now as it ever was that 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.

So, in addition to the list of ideas I have to share with President Obama, should he ever stop by my office to ask for my advice, I have written the following "Memo to Myself" to clarify what it is I'm willing to do. Perhaps you'd like to join me in considering your commitments.

Memo to Myself

Standing in the midst of a time of tremendous peril and possibility, I know that it is up to me and others like me to join with the new administration in bringing about fundamental change in our nation. Those of us who have a passion for peace and an understanding of justice that calls us to move our nation in new directions must take the opportunity presented to us in this historic moment to lend our energies and efforts to make this happen.

TO THIS END I PLEDGE THAT I WILL DO THE FOLLOWING:

PREACH AND TEACH. I pledge to use all of the means available to me to encourage those around me to open their hearts and minds to the possibilities before us as a nation.

This is a time not only of new ideas, but of building new frameworks to hold those ideas. Yes, healthcare should be a "right" for every citizen but I pledge to go beyond that. I will work with others to build a framework in which we put as much energy into providing the means for all citizens to live vibrant, health-filled lives as we do into responding to illness.

Yes, we must bring an end to the illegal and immoral war in Iraq which we have waged for lo these many years, but I pledge to go beyond. We must build a framework in which we focus first on how to exert influence and protect our nation by means other than military might, creating a world where the waging of war becomes unthinkable.

Yes, we must restore the civil and human rights that have been eroded in recent years within our country, but I pledge to go beyond that to build a framework where we not only *protect* the rights of marginalized groups, but we *celebrate* and *honor* the diversity of humanity.

PRAY AND SEEK TO UNDERSTAND. I pledge to pray for the leaders of this nation each day that they might act with compassion, conviction and wisdom on the momentous issues before them.

I will make it a daily practice to pray for the leadership of the nation. The yoke we have placed upon their shoulders is heavy. Insofar as prayer serves as a way to share that burden, I will do so daily on their behalf.

When I disagree with decisions made by the President and other leaders, I pledge to seek to fully understand and appreciate the basis of their actions. This does not mean I will never voice dissent. Indeed I understand that as my duty. It *does* mean that when I do so, I will seek not to distort the positions of those with whom I disagree and that I will speak with respect and offer clear and positive alternatives to the actions with which I disagree.

I pledge to extend this understanding to those in advocacy groups that hold positions different from my own. I will look for the underlying intentions and commitments of those groups and seek to build bridges of understanding wherever possible.

PRACTICE NONVIOLENCE. I pledge to practice nonviolence in my speaking and living. We cannot afford to tear one another down in efforts to advance our own agendas. There is too much at stake.

Violence permeates our society in profound ways. I pledge to continue my journey in understanding and putting into practice nonviolent ways of speaking and living.

This memo to myself and the pledges I have made do not detract from the "to-do" list that I have ready for President Obama. If you

happen to see him, be sure to let him know that I'd like to speak with him. ❖

The Gaza Crisis: December 2008

By Phyllis Bennis

(28 December 2008) — *The death toll in Gaza continues to rise. The carnage is everywhere — city streets, a mosque, hospitals, police stations, a jail, a university bus stop, a plastics factory, a television station. It seems impossible, unacceptable, to step back to analyze the situation while bodies remain buried under the rubble, while parents continue to search for their missing children, while doctors continue to labor to stitch burned and broken bodies back together without sufficient medicine or equipment. The hospitals are running short even of electricity -- the Israeli blockade has denied them fuel to run the generators. It is an ironic twist on the legacy of Israel's involvement in an earlier massacre — in the Sabra and Shatila camps, in Lebanon back in 1982. It was the Israeli soldiers who lit the flairs, lighting the night sky so their Lebanese allies could continue to kill.*

But if we are serious about ending this carnage, this time we have no choice but to try to analyze, try to figure out what caused this most recent massacre, how to stop it, and then how to continue our work to end the occupation, end Israel's apartheid policies, and change U.S. policy to one of justice and equality for all.

- The Israeli airstrikes represent serious violations of international law — including the Geneva Conventions and a range of international humanitarian law.
- The U.S. is complicit in the Israeli violations — directly and indirectly.
- The timing of the air strikes has far more to do with U.S. and Israeli politics than with protecting Israeli civilians.
- This serious escalation will push back any chance of serious negotiations between the parties that might have been part of the Obama administration's plans.
- There is much work to be done.

VIOLATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL LAW

The Israeli airstrikes on the Gaza Strip violate important tenants of international humanitarian law, including violations of the Geneva



Paelstinian Woman Weeping

Conventions. The violations include both obligations of an Occupying Power to protect an Occupied Population, and the broader requirements of the laws of war that prohibit specific acts. The violations start with collective punishment — the entire 1.5 million people who live in the Gaza Strip are being punished for the actions of a few militants.

Israel's claim that it is "responding to" or "retaliating for" Palestinian rocket attacks is spurious. The rocket fire as currently used is indeed illegal — Palestinians, like any people living under a hostile military occupation, have the right to resist, including the use of military force against the occupation. But that right does not include targeting civilians. The rockets used so far are unable to be aimed with any specificity, so they are in fact aimed at the civilians who live in the Israeli cities and towns, and so are illegal. The rocket fire against civilians should

be ended — as many Palestinians believe, because it does not help end the occupation, but also because it is illegal under international law. However, that rocket fire, illegal or not, does not give Israel the right to punish the entire population for those actions. Such vengeance is the very essence of "collective punishment" and is therefore unequivocally prohibited by the Geneva conventions.

Another Israeli violation involves targeting civilians. This violation involves three aspects. First, Israel claims the airstrikes were targeted directly at " Hamas-controlled " security-related institutions. Since the majority Hamas party controls the government in Gaza, virtually all the police departments and other security-related sites were hit. Those police and security agencies are civilian targets — not military. They are run by the Hamas-led government in Gaza, an institution completely separate from Gaza's military wing that has carried out some (though by no means the majority) of the rocket attacks. Second, some of the attacks directly struck incontestably civilian targets: a plastics factory, a local television broadcasting center. And third, the incredibly crowded conditions in Gaza, one of the most densely populated sites in the world, mean that civilian casualties on a huge scale were an inevitable and predictable result. Such targeting of civilian areas is illegal.

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Donate to Humanitarian Relief for Gaza

The need for humanitarian assistance in Gaza is critical. MFSA suggests making donations through the following channels:

UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief) <http://new.gbgm-umc.org/umcor>

UMCOR, a United Methodist agency uses 100% of donations for aid. You can donate online and learn more about UMCOR by going to <http://new.gbgm-umc.org/org/umcor>. The UMCOR Advance number for the Gaza Crisis/ Middle East Emergency is Advance #601740. Another Advance project in the region is the Department of Services to Palestinian Refugee. The Advance number for that Department is #14908A.

ANERA (American Near East Refugee Aid) www.nera.org

Another organization, one of the few actually on the ground in Gaza, is ANERA. ANERA is a 40-year-old non-profit organization, providing humanitarian relief aid to Palestinian refugees and people in the West Bank, Gaza, Jordan and Lebanon. Of the money given, 96% supports on the ground program work. ANERA has been known throughout Gaza since the early 1980s, when they began working to stimulate job creation and develop sustainable projects. In 1985, ANERA opened a relief office in Gaza with just three staff members. Humanitarian aid projects focused largely on agriculture, a major source of livelihood in the region. The ANERA website, www.nera.org, has stats on life in Gaza before and after the bombing began. The website also includes reflections "Letters from Gaza," which are written by ANERA staff on the ground living through this experience.

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE continued from page three

Taking the long view, some found hope and consolation: 52.3% of Californians voted against us, but 47.7% voted with us, which was the closest we've ever come to winning a ballot measure for marriage equality in the state. Other election results were even more encouraging: In New York State, where a marriage bill is pending, we won enough legislative seats to secure a pro-equality majority; Connecticut voters rejected a constitutional convention that could have reversed that state's legalization of marriage.

Still, the election was a blindsiding reminder that the majority of voters, even in a state as liberal as California, still see gay people as second-class citizens. These past few years we've made so much progress that we'd begun to think everybody saw us as we see ourselves. Suddenly we were faced with the real-

The combination of Obama's win and gay people's losses inflicted mass whiplash.

ity that a majority of voters don't like us, don't think we're normal, don't believe our lives and loves count as much or are worth as much as theirs.

History compounds the insult and suggests hypothetical scenarios rendering the mixed result of this election even more absurd. If the California supreme court and the U.S. Supreme Court decisions overturning anti-miscegenation laws — *Perez v. Sharp* and *Loving v. Virginia* — had been blocked by popular vote, Barack Obama might never have been born. His parents would not have been able to marry in several states (although Hawaii, where they were married, had never enacted a law against interracial marriage).

The morning after the election I wanted to celebrate for Obama, and I also felt an awful sense of loss. Then it hit me that my own angry confusion was nothing compared to what my black gay friends were probably feeling. Moreover, their wound was inflamed by ugly speculation about the racial implications of Prop. 8's passage, which began that day. Many commentators noted that 70% of gays voted for Obama but 70% of blacks voted for Prop. 8. From this fact, some drew a race-baiting, false conclusion that blacks lost the election for us. Yet African-Americans represented just 10% of Californians voting, and the difference between full equality and ab-



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ject disappointment here was so small — 2.3% of the total vote — that it would be possible to blame almost any group of voters for it. Prop. 8 won by vast majorities in many places south of San Francisco and among Republicans; and according to figures available at press time, less than two thirds of registered voters in San Francisco and Los Angeles even bothered to show up to vote, because polls so unambiguously predicted Obama's win.

Moreover, at the eleventh hour, the "Yes" folks flooded black communities with literature and phone calls falsely suggesting that Barack Obama supported Prop. 8 (though accurately stating that he is opposed to gay marriage), adding significant confusion to an already confusing ballot question. Some of my most liberal straight white friends in San Francisco still weren't clear the day before the election that "Yes" meant "No," that a vote for Prop. 8 was a vote against marriage equality.

To blame this loss on black people would be a terrible mistake, and it would only increase

To blame this loss on black people would be a terrible mistake, and it would only increase enmity between gays and blacks.

enmity between gays and blacks. African-American leaders in the Congressional Black Caucus — particularly Barbara Lee — and state leaders such as former San Francisco mayor Willie Brown worked hard on our behalf; many of them were quicker to come to our defense than their white peers. And they did this even though white gay people have never, en masse and in force, showed up to support them and their issues. The work of our black allies created an immense reservoir of opportunity and possibility for the movement going forward. It should not be squandered for the cheap satisfaction of finding a scapegoat.

It's impossible not to imagine what might have happened if the civil rights of African-Americans, Hispanics, women, or any other minority had been reversed by public referendum. If any other group of people in America had their fundamental rights subjected to popular vote, there would be universal outrage in this country.

We voiced our rage ourselves. In the days following the election there were protests, including some involving minor violence, in places as small as Laguna Niguel, as large as Los Angeles, and many other locations, including San Jose, Oakland, Sacramento, Palm Springs, Long Beach, Santa Barbara, San Diego, several Orange County communities, and Salt Lake City. At press time, another was planned to take place outside the Manhattan Mormon Temple in New York City. Like the protests at temples in Los Angeles and Salt Lake, this was aimed at heightening awareness of the role of Mormon money in this race. (Reliable estimates suggest that more than 40% of the funding for Prop. 8

came from Mormons, and much of that money came from Utah.)

In San Francisco the protest on November 7 was oddly joyful. It came together virally on Facebook and via blogs, and drew a crowd of people who were on the surface pretty much

indistinguishable from what you'd see in any suburban church on Sunday. News reports mostly showed the same types of images the media insists on using when covering gay pride parades. A marching band played show tunes — "If My Friends Could See Me Now"

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— and a drag queen screamed, “The problem with living in a bubble is that bubbles burst!” She was fierce, and I was moved, but I also wondered why she was the one on the news that night, why this movement still doesn’t have a Martin Luther King Jr., a telegenic, brilliant spokesperson to whom all of America can relate. The dedication of movement organizers has brought us a long way, but we are now in desperate need of a willing leader with solid media sense, a palpable inner core, an ability to navigate the game of hardball politics, and the balls to step forward and be our public face.

Whoever you are, it’s time to come out. Because, as I was reminded the morning after the election, it’s faces — not arguments — that will close the deal on marriage equality. I was in a taxi on Market Street, and as we passed City Hall the driver mentioned the protest and asked me what I thought of gay marriage. I flipped the question back to him. “I used to be against it,” he answered, “and then I saw it. When I saw it I understood.”

The driver, whose name was Ali, told me he was from Yemen and he’s straight. When a friend recently came to visit him, the two went sightseeing. “I took him to City Hall and we saw all these people getting married. We saw men marrying men and women marrying women,” Ali said. “I was really surprised. They were so happy.”

His voice was low and unsentimental, but the first syllable of “happy” was so full of amazement it shot almost an octave higher than the second. The word seemed to crash down through a roof. He kept repeating it. “I have seen a lot of things,” he went on. “I have seen bisexuality, gay, lesbian. The sexy parts. I had never seen the love before. But I saw these two guys get married and I realized, This is their happiness.” As he turned onto Castro Street, Ali said, “Everybody has a right to their happiness. Nobody should have the power to take your happiness away.”

We gave into another post-election temptation too. Many drew a simple parallel between our struggle and the black civil rights movement. Signs at protests said, “I have a dream too,” “Welcome to Selma,” and “Gay is the new black.”

There’s something to this, but it’s dangerous territory, and we have to be careful not to lose our bearings here. Gay is the new black

in only one meaningful way. At present we are the most socially acceptable targets for the kind of casual hatred that American society once approved for habitual use against black people. Gay is the dark pit where our society lets people throw their fears about what’s wrong with the world. (Many people, needless to say, still direct this kind of hatred toward black people too. But it’s more commonly OK to caricature and demean us in politics and the media in ways from which blacks are now largely exempt.) The comparison becomes useful, though, in forcing us to consider the differences between our civil rights struggle and theirs.

Except in a few statistically insignificant cases (the gay kid who happens to be the child of gay parents), being gay begins with recognizing your difference from the people with whom you have your earliest, most intimate relationships. As such, it’s an essentially isolating experience and therefore breeds in many gay people certain qualities — such as independence and perfectionism — that can undermine our ability to cooperate and compromise with others. Though some of us were lucky enough to find role models, mentors, or gay friends early in life, we weren’t born into the kind of beloved community that the African-American church aspires to be. Today, the church is still the strongest black American institution, and though it is far from a perfect place, for its members it’s a cradle of love and shelter from oppression.

Our oppression, by and large, is nowhere near as extreme as blacks’, and we insult them when we make facile comparisons between our plights. Gay people have more resources than blacks had in the 1960s. We are embedded in the power structures of every institution of this society. While it is illegal in this country to fire an African-American without cause and in most places it’s still legal to fire a gay person for being gay, we are more likely to have informal means of recourse than black people have. Almost all gay people have the choice of passing. Very few black people have that option. Of course, we shouldn’t have to make that choice, and our civil rights struggle is about making sure that we don’t have to.

On a deeper level, though, the gay civil rights struggle is about preventing discrimination based on our proclivity to love, as distinct

from the messier foundation of racial discrimination, which primarily has to do with protecting white privilege and wealth. No one would deny that fear of mixed marriages significantly inhibited the progress of the black civil rights movement. (Blacks won employment and voting rights a full three years before the Supreme Court finally struck down miscegenation laws in 1967.) But love and sex were not, as is the case with gay civil rights, unambiguously the heart of the matter.

This is the reason our progress has been slow: Love cannot be understood in the abstract. You cannot understand it until it touches you or you find your way

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into its orbit.

We have to stop rage from getting the best of us right now, and keep love at the fore of everything we do and say in this battle. We are close to winning everything we want. We are so close that we do not have time to rehash the Malcolm/Martin struggle between anger and peace, force and nonviolence. Let’s call the Mormons out on the campaign of lies they funded, but let’s find a way of doing it that steers clear of hatred. Enough with the “Fuck Mormons” signs. Some Mormons are gay, not all Mormons voted against us, and a few of them publicly put themselves on the line for us.

We are taking to the streets now — while writing this, I received an e-mail from a friend pointing me to an online organizing of protests on November 15 in all 50 states — and we are angry, probably not least at ourselves for our own complacency and cowardice, for not working as hard as we could, for not giving as much as we could, and for letting so much slip from our grasp. Let’s find a way of channeling the passion of this flash point and harnessing this energy for the long haul so we can do the hard work of claiming the full rights and realizing the full lives that we know we can have.

When you use faggots to start a fire, you don’t just dump a bunch of twigs on a few logs and hope something catches. You choose your tinder carefully, you bundle it vigilantly, you place it carefully — then, and only then, you set the fire.

On Election Day the **No on 8** campaign prepared statements for its website to post in

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MFSA Welcomes Young Adult Missionary

We are delighted to welcome United Methodist Mission Intern, Jennifer Mihok, who will be working with MFSA for the next 15 months.

For the past 15 months, Jennifer has been working with Genthin United Methodist Church in Genthin, Germany. Her service there involved working in the church's ministry with Russian immigrants and in helping the North German Annual Conference reach out to immigrants from Russia.

Jennifer will bring her concern and experience in working with immigration issues to her work with MFSA. Additionally she will work with us in outreach to young adults. She reports that she has a particular interest in making young adults within the United Methodist Church aware of the many ways in which the UMC is involved nationally and internally in various forms of ministry.

From North Wales, Pennsylvania, Jennifer attended Dickinson College in Carlisle, PA and earned a Bachelor of Arts in Russian and German. She is a member of Lehman Memorial United Methodist Church in Hatboro, PA in the Eastern Pennsylvania Annual Conference.

The United Methodist Mission Intern Program, for those who are unfamiliar with it, is a three-year leadership development and mission service opportunity for young adults between the ages of 20 and 30 to be actively involved in mission service and social justice in both an international and a domestic context. The program encourages young adults to live with and learn from communities that struggle with injustice.

The program is designed such that the Mission Intern serves half of her or his time abroad, and the remaining time in a placement site in their home country.

MFSA has had several mission interns working with us over the years including Kathy and David Munson, Cherie Emery, Cheryl Blankenship, Jim Winkler and Jane Easley. Current MFSA Director, Kathryn Johnson, was a Mission Intern in the mid-eighties, doing her overseas placement with church-related human rights groups in the Philippines and her US placement with the University Christian Movement in New England. ❖

Look Out, Walls

By Jennifer Mihok

United Methodist Mission Intern

Note: This article was written by Jennifer from Germany to her home church in PA

It seems like forever since I last wrote, but I'm pretty sure it was only one month ago. Fall is in full swing and I'm squeezing in some "work-related" travel in my final months in Germany. In mid September we had a district meeting in Cottbus (near the Polish border). Most recently, I attended the "Theological Week" at Germany's one United Methodist Seminary in Reutlingen (near Stuttgart). This included the 150th anniversary celebration of Methodist theological education in the German-speaking world. I also met many of the current students here in Reutlingen and went with them and the professors on



Jennifer Mihok at the East Side Gallery in Berlin, a strip of the wall with graffiti art depicting the East German struggle and culture

their traditional, beginning-of-the-academic-year hike in the "Swabian Alps."

And although the Southern German change of pace has been a treat, even abroad I'm more of a Northern girl. A good friend of mine visited in late September and we spent half a week in Berlin. For all the times I've been there, it never gets old. The fall of the wall, 19 years ago on Nov. 9th, came as a complete surprise. A slip of the tongue at a press conference turned the front line of the Cold War into an all-night party. Instead of contending with concrete and barbed wire, the East German Trabi-drivers were met by jubilant fellow citizens at the border. Now chips of the Wall are sold as souvenirs attached to postcards. Communist and East German military insignia are also big sellers, as in many a former East-Bloc country. And

the fad of all fads are the Ampelmaenner, East German walk/don't walk traffic light symbols which are MUCH cuter than their West German counterparts. Now you can buy everything from washcloths to doormats to bottle openers with these symbols. Germans even have a name for this phenomenon: Ostalgie, or Ostalgia. (Nostalgia minus the "n". Ost in German means East.) Capitalists profit from the novelty of the good ol' days of socialism. Leaves one with a little Schadenfreude.

But the Wall is down. As I walked though the million souvenir shops, sorting through colored cement shards, I thought of my colleague, David, in Israel/Palestine. Walls, checkpoints, separation. The details of the two situations—Berlin and the Middle East—are incomparable, I know. It is practically impossible to believe that such a change—overnight or over years—could ever occur in that area. But giving up the last bit of hope would make it impossible.

As we mission interns enter the final months of our placements, the question, "what have we actually accomplished?" is heavy on our hearts. In Genthin a congregation has been divided and reconciliation has not occurred. Unemployment is a steady 20% and disillusionment and frustration are on the rise, especially as the last major factory prepares to close its doors in 2010. Our congregation is aging and shrinking, as financial opportunity in the West continues to draw Easterners, now 18 years after reunification. And what have I done? What has David done for Middle East peace? Lindsey and Liz for human rights in the Philippines and Hong Kong? Brittany and Beth for the youth in South Africa and Chile? Abby and Christy for their communities in Grenada and Nicaragua? We've all traveled, attended conferences, run programs and experienced a different life firsthand, but has that made a difference?

It's easy to lose heart, but doing so would be more fatal than if these situations were to remain unchanged. We don't know what our efforts have brought about in the hearts and minds of those we've worked with. We also don't know when the next surprise peace-making press conference will be held. But we know that there is an ever-loving God who meets us in places of reconciliation, a Christ whose mercy finds the lost of the lost, and a Spirit that binds us together and guides us on our journey. We're gonna keep walking. Look out, walls. ❖

CELEBRATING THE LIFE OF RON FASSETT

Reverend Ronald M. Fassett, 75, of the UMC's West Michigan Conference who passed away of cancer on All Saint's Day: November 1, 2008. He was a member of MFSA and the Secretary of the West Michigan Chapter. His life was celebrated by family and friends at St. Paul's UMC in Grand Rapids. A graduate of Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, acknowledgment was given of his involvement in concerns and issues also of MFSA. Having served as a pastor in churches, both in small towns and in the inner-cities of Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids, he was appointed Executive Director of Metropolitan Ministry of Greater Grand Rapids until his retirement in 1994.

As Director he was instrumental in developing and overseeing many ministries. Among them are three new ethnic congregations – Hispanic, Vietnamese and Native American two inner city outreach ministries for the poor and destitute, and the Grand Rapids Area Service Project, which does home improvement for low income families.

A strong advocate for justice, Ron participated in many more ministries, including "night ministries" to street people, demonstrations and actions against racism and war, and was a member of the Institute for Global Education and the Peace with Justice Community. Among his many memberships on church boards and agencies, he served as Chair of the Conference Board of Global Ministries. These and other involvements, as a pastor and leader over the years led him to many parts of the globe. Garrett presented him with the distinguished Alumni award in 1989. The West Michigan Conference honored him with the "Peace Maker of the Year" award for 2008. During his retirement he and his wife, Mary Lou, gave untiring service to a multicultural inner city church, Oakdale, in



Rev. Ron Fassett

Grand Rapids, and in volunteer service at the United Methodist Clark Retirement Community.

Let us remember him for his faithful service.
❖

ANDREW WEAVER 1947 – 2008

A WITNESS OF LIFE AND FAITH

For we are not peddlers of God's word like so many; but as persons of sincerity, as persons sent from God and standing in God's presence, we speak in Christ.

2 Corinthians 2:17

Paul's pervasive theme throughout 2nd Corinthians is the meaning of Christian ministry. He affirms it as service to Jesus Christ's gospel of God's unconditional, reconciling love and justice. For Paul, special religious knowledge, orthodox doctrines, ecstatic spirituality, or miraculous powers were not the central issues of Christian ministry. Rather, Paul held that the crucial question for anyone seeking to serve Christ's gospel was whether Jesus' life and love are evident, are made real, in and through one's life, relationships, and service by the power of God in and through one's life. Such persons, says Paul, are not peddlers of God's word - - those who travel from congregation to congregation offering cheap grace, backing away from confronting others with Jesus' parabolic teaching of the unconditionally loving nature of God, or Jesus' call for justice through the Beatitudes, or his radical confrontation of the violent and death dealing powers of domination.

To celebrate the life and faith of Andrew Weaver in all his many life roles (ordained minister, licensed psychologist and researcher, author, husband, and friend to name a few) is to remember a man, who was never a peddler of God's word. Rather, Andrew, my best new friend over the past four years, was a man of sincerity, sent from God and standing in God's presence, who spoke in Christ. From our first conversation to our last, I always knew Andrew from the depth of his heart, mind and spirit. His profound Christian experience made real for me not only his story but also Jesus' story that helped me to live always at a greater depth and with greater courage than ever before in my life.



Rev. Dr. Andrew Weaver

Sharing with Andrew tasks of love and justice was always a challenge. Whether we were resisting the attacks on the United Methodist Church by those who would destroy its commitment to social justice; or affirming that war and torture are incompatible with Christian teaching; or opposing the location of the George W. Bush presidential think tank at the only university with "Methodist" in its name, he always sought to call forth from me a centeredness in God's presence and a fearless living by the Spirit of Christ. I discovered again and again that Andrew's tireless research into the hard facts about people and issues, his intense energy to speak the truth in love to power, his relationship building via email with thousands of other progressive sisters and brothers, his incredible ability to seize upon and profoundly laugh at life's incongruities were gifts of new life and faith that truly transformed my life. On a personal note, his friendship introduced me to MFSA and encouraged me to become an Executive Committee and Board Member-at-large for the past three years. As I shared with the MFSA Board on November 1, 2008, the All Saints Day on which Andrew's memorial service was held, his death leaves an enormous void, but his spirit will continue to sustain and strengthen.

Andrew Weaver was, is and always will be a person who sincerely spoke in Christ from his heart and his life experiences. He was no peddler of God's word. Such a life is a joy in the life of God, where Andrew Weaver is cherished now and forever by God. ❖

Fred Kandeler, Retired United Methodist Clergy
Affiliated with Travis Park UMC, San Antonio, Texas



Palestinian Children

GAZA CRISIS

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The U.S. is also directly complicit in the violations of the Geneva Convention inherent in Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip. Israel's actions — keeping Gazans locked in the Strip; closing the border crossings to almost all fuel, food, equipment and other basic humanitarian goods; preventing UN and other international human rights monitors and journalists from entering, and more — have all been backed and supported by the U.S. and others in the international community. The resulting humanitarian crisis — reaching catastrophic proportions even before the current air attacks — is partly the responsibility of the United States.

Still another violation involves the disproportionate nature of the military attack. The airstrikes have killed at least 270 people so far, injured more than 1,000, many of them seriously, and many remain buried under the rubble so the death toll will likely rise. This catastrophic impact was known and inevitable, and far outweighs any claim of self-defense or protection of Israeli civilians. (It should be noted that this escalation has not made Israelis safer; to the contrary, the one Israeli killed by a Palestinian rocket attack on Saturday after the Israeli assault began, was the first such casualty in more than a year.)

Key human rights officials, particular the UN's Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, Professor Richard Falk, as well as Father Miguel d'Escoto, President of the General Assembly, have issued powerful statements identifying Israeli violations of international law as well as the UN's obligations to protect the Palestinian population. But so far there has been no operative re-

sponse from the UN Security Council. The Council statement, issued 28 December, was completely insufficient, essentially equating the culpability of the Occupying Power and of the occupied population for the violence that has so devastated Gaza. And the statement makes no reference to violations of international law inherent in the Israeli assaults, or in the siege of Gaza that has so drastically

punished the entire population. There is a clear need for the General Assembly to step in to reclaim the UN's role of protecting the world's people, certainly including the Palestinians, and not just responding to the demands of the world's powerful.

U.S. COMPLICITY

The United States remains directly complicit in Israeli violations of both U.S. domestic and international law through its continual provision of military aid. The current round of airstrikes have been carried out largely with F-16 bombers and Apache attack helicopters, both provided to Israel through U.S. military aid grants of about \$3 billion in U.S. taxpayer money sent to Israel every year. Between 2001 and 2006, Washington transferred to Israel more than \$200 million worth of spare parts for its fleet of F-16's. Just last year, the U.S. signed a \$1.3 billion contract with the Raytheon corporation to provide Israel with thousands of TOW, Hellfire, and "bunker buster" missiles. In short, Israel's lethal attack today on the Gaza Strip could not have happened without the active military support of the United States.

Israel's attack violated U.S. law — specifically the Arms Export Control Act, which prohibits U.S. arms from being used for any purpose beyond a very narrowly-defined set of circumstances: use inside a country's borders for self-defense purposes. The Gaza assault did not meet those criteria. Certainly targeting police stations (even Israel did not claim Gazan police forces were responsible for the rockets) and television broadcast centers do not qualify as self-defense. And because the U.S. government has confirmed it was fully aware of Israeli plans for the attack before it occurred, the U.S. remains complicit in the violations. Further, the well-known history of Israeli violations of international law (detailed above) means U.S. government officials were

aware of those violations, provided the arms to Israel anyway, and therefore remain complicit in the Israeli crimes.

The U.S. is also indirectly complicit through its protection of Israel in the United Nations. Its actions, including the use and threat of use of the U.S. veto in the Security Council and the reliance on raw power to pressure diplomats and governments to soften their criticism of Israel, serve to protect Israel and keep it from being held accountable by the international community.

TIMING OF ISRAEL'S ATTACK ON GAZA

The Israeli decision to launch the attacks on Gaza was a political, not security, decision. Just a day or two before the airstrikes, it was Israel that rejected Hamas's diplomatic initiative aimed at extending the six-month-long ceasefire that had frayed but largely stayed together since June, and that expired 26 December. Hamas officials, working through Egyptian mediators, had urged Israel to lift the siege of Gaza as the basis for continuing an extended ceasefire. Israel, including Foreign Minister Tsipi Livni, of the "centrist" (in the Israeli context) Kadima Party, rejected the proposal. Livni, who went to Egypt but refused to seriously consider the Hamas offer, is running in a tight race for prime minister; her top opponent is the further-right Benjamin Netanyahu of the officially hawkish Likud party, who has campaigned against Livni and the Kadima government for their alleged "soft" approach to the Palestinians. With elections looming in February, no candidate can afford to appear anything but super-militaristic.

Further, it is certain that the Israeli government was eager to move militarily while Bush was still in office. The Washington Post quoted a Bush administration official saying that Israel struck in Gaza "because they want it to be over before the next administration comes in. They can't predict how the next administration will handle it. And this is not the way they want to start with the new administration." The Israeli officials may or may not be right about President Obama's likelihood of responding differently than Bush on this issue — but it does point to a clear obligation on those of us in this country who voted for Obama with hope, to do all that's necessary to press him to make good on the "change" he promised that gave rise to that hope.

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OBAMA AND FUTURE OPTIONS

The escalation in Gaza will make it virtually impossible for any serious Israeli-Palestinian negotiations aimed at ending the occupation. It remains uncertain whether sponsorship of an immediate new round of bilateral negotiations was in fact on Barack Obama's initial post-inauguration agenda anyway. But the current crisis means that any negotiations, whether ostensibly Israeli-Palestinian alone or officially involving the U.S.-controlled so-called "Quartet," will be able to go beyond a return to the pre-airstrike crisis period. That earlier political crisis, still far from solved, was characterized by expanding settlements, the apartheid Wall and checkpoints crippling movement, commerce, and ordinary life across the West Bank, and a virtually impenetrable siege of Gaza that even before the current military assault, had created a humanitarian catastrophe.

SO WHAT DO WE DO?

The immediate answer is everything: write letters to members of Congress and the State Department, demonstrate at the White House and the Israeli Embassy, write letters to the editor and op-eds for every news outlet we can find, call radio talk shows, protest the U.S. representatives at the UN and their protection of Israeli crimes. We need to engage with the Obama transition process and plan now for how we will keep the pressure on to really change U.S. policy in the Middle East. We should all join the global movement of outrage and solidarity with Gaza. There are a host of on-line petitions already — we should sign them all. The U.S. Campaign to End Israeli Occupation is compiling action calls at — www.endtheoccupation.org. We have to do all of that.

But then. We can't stop with emergency mobilizations. We still have to build our movement for BDS — boycott, divestment and sanctions, to build a global campaign of non-violent economic pressure to force Israel to comply with international law. We have to challenge U.S. military aid that scaffolds Israel's military aggression, and U.S. political and diplomatic support that prevents the UN and the international community from holding Israel accountable for its violations. We have to do serious education and advocacy work, learning from other movements that have come before about being brave enough to call something what it is: Israeli policies are apartheid policies, and must be challenged on that basis.

We have a lot of work to do.

Phyllis Bennis is a Fellow of the Institute for Policy Studies and of the Transnational Institute in Amsterdam. Her books include Understanding the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: A Primer in FAQ format which many will find useful for education work in this urgent period. (www.interlinkbooks.com)

Thanks to Josh Ruebner of the U.S. Campaign for some of the background on U.S. military aid. ❖

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the event of a victory or of a loss. One of the people in charge of this task left the office that night with her eyes full of tears. "I am so angry," she explained, "that they dragged us into this shit. And they shouldn't have. We already won, and still, they are making us fight for what we already won." She pulled herself together. "But we're going to win. We have to win. I am 23 years old," she said, "and this is my civil rights battle."

For a moment I was overcome with admiration for this woman's passion, and at the same time, with a shiver of thought that, if it were made of words, would consist of something like the phrase You are going to die. It was a keen intimation of mortality, of the sense in which our lives, even in the moments of our most focused and profound presence, are merely fragments of the endless story of the human struggle for dignity. A friend in Los Angeles said he saw a sign at one of the protests saying, "Rosa sat so Martin could march so Barack could run." For us, as for the African-Americans who lived through the '60s, many apparent failures will, in retrospect, clearly be progress. We lost a lot on this Election Day, but we gained a lot too. Not least was a president who has shown almost every sign of goodwill we could wish for and a Congress eager to follow his leadership where we are concerned.

A lot of us have been fighting for as long as we can remember, trying to keep the world from seeing us as faggots. Maybe it's time to give up that fight and choose another one instead. Go ahead and be a faggot, in a way that shows the world that a faggot is a person. Start a fire, but let your fire be a beacon. Let your fire burn away your hate, and it will burn away the hate of your enemies. Let your fire be the light that shows your love. If you

do that — if we do that — we will win the world, and soon. ❖

THE KINGDOM OF GOD continued from page one

on the horror that is unfolding in Palestine/Israel and includes ways to channel humanitarian aid to the region quickly.

Finally we remember the lives of two amazing persons that have died recently (page seven) and we welcome Mission Intern, Jennifer Mihok, who will be coming to work with MFSA for the next fifteen months. ❖

A Word of Gratitude

Many thanks to all who gave so generously in year-end contributions to MFSA. Your support is deeply appreciated and enables MFSA to continue as a source of challenge and change as well as proving a channel for justice ministries in the church and in the world.

Remember that MFSA now has the capacity to receive contributions on the web at www.mfsaweb.org. You may now also join MFSA on MFSA's web site.

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OPEN LETTER TO MY WHITE LGBT SISTERS AND BROTHERS

Editors Note: The following excerpts are taken from a letter entitled, An Open Letter to My White Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Sisters and Brothers, written by **Dianne Finnerty** back in 2004. So much of the wisdom in her letter applies to our situation today that I wrote asking her if I could use excerpts of her letter in this issue of the SQB. She graciously agreed.

... I am writing this open letter to my white LGBT community to implore us not to salve our pain with the privilege of whiteness. It is truly suicidal for us to forge ahead believing we can wage our civil rights struggles without being part of a more comprehensive social justice agenda. Beloved community, I ask us instead to use our pain and anger at injustice in this historic moment to strengthen our readiness and worthiness as white anti-racist allies who understand that united we stand and divided we truly fall.

I want to chronicle some of the tactics I have observed from white LGBT people on the regional and national level that I believe may be intended to create short-term political gains, but will increase unnecessary division among people of color and LGBT communities.....

DIVISIVE TACTICS

1. Piggy-backing on the civil rights struggles of people of color, most notably the Black Civil Rights Movement, without first studying those struggles to honor the true legacy which they have offered this country, as well as the work yet to be done. I see this happening by lifting quotes and metaphors from the Black Civil Rights movement: incessantly quoting Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; evoking Rosa Parks' civil disobedience by proclaiming that "gays should no longer have to sit at the back of the bus"; equating the *Nabozny v. Podlesny* (7th Circuit, December 18, 1995) case confronting homophobic harassment in schools as the "*Brown v. Board of Education* decision for gay people"; using the rhetoric of "separate, but not equal" to confront the difference between civil unions and marriage rights for same sex couples without understanding the historic case law behind it; showing our disingenuous use of these race-based civil rights references by only using comparisons to African American civil rights achievements and ignoring the presence of other communities of color and their struggles for liberation.

2. Making statements that diminish the impact of racism or imply racial discrimination no longer exists: "Gays are the last oppressed minority." "Gay rights are the last bastion of civil rights for this country." "Gay rights are the civil rights issue of

the day." "If these were racial slurs, teachers would be stopping them." (Reis et al) "At least if you're a person of color, you have your family as a place of harbor against the world. Gay and lesbian youth don't even have that!"

3. Engaging in contextual shaming tactics with a person of color who expresses views about marriage rights for same-sex couples that are different than your own: "Of all people who should understand discrimination, I'm surprised that you, as a person of color, wouldn't understand this is a civil rights issue."

4. Playing the "tit for tat" activist game: "They want me to support racial diversity efforts? Well, as soon as their definition of 'diversity' includes sexual identity, I'll work with them. Not until.".....

5. Saying under our breath to each other or merely holding on to the unchecked belief that communities of color are essentially more homophobic than white communities, with no exploration of the sources of homophobia in different communities nor interest in engaging in meaningful dialogue to have our beliefs challenged.

6. Dismissing the contributions of leaders of color who are not quite "there yet" on "our issues." This is different than being committed to challenging leaders' of all colors views and rhetoric if it is based in hate and misinformation. I mean when we choose not to attend a speech by someone highly regarded within a community of color solely because the speaker has expressed what we consider to be homophobic views – which then, of course, eliminates the possibility that we might learn something about the reasons this person is so well-respected or be challenged about issues of racism. It also implies that "our issues" don't include issues of importance to communities of color.....

STRATEGIES TO MOVE FORWARD A SOCIAL JUSTICE AGENDA

The following suggestions are a compilation of ideas developed through numerous conversations with allies of color (straight and

lgbt), and LGBT white anti-racist activists. They are beginning suggestions for what we can do to develop greater alliances for short-term political battles, as well as for participating openly as LGBT people in long-haul strategies for a broader social justice agenda.

1. Do our white homework. Educate ourselves about the history of whiteness in the U.S. and contemporary white privilege that continues to operate in our society. Being queer does not make us immune to experiencing skin color privilege. It may be easier for us to see how societal systems preference heterosexuals with informal and formal privileges, but I encourage us to understand how our whiteness confers everyday preferences to us, as well.

2. Understand how a people's history undergirds their views on issues of sexuality, sexual identity, gender relations, family, and religion/spirituality – all of which impact traditionally defined "homophobia." How, for example, does the experience of historic and contemporary genocide among Latino, Indigenous, Asian, and African peoples impact views within their communities on the roles of men and women, sexuality, families? How might heterosexuality be protected in a community in which children are stolen from families, men routinely castrated, and women raped and forced to bear the fruit of their colonizer? How might religious views feel impermeable, if spiritual traditions were the only source of sanity, strength and social interaction 'allowed' within a community; how does the sacred become a matter of survival in the here and now and not just the hereafter? What strength does the Church take on if the congregation is an oasis where community leadership is developed and honored? How has state-sanctioned and community-sanctioned scrutiny of Black sexuality impacted the ways in which sexuality, in general, and same-sex intimacy, in particular, are discussed within Black communities? What if cultural values deem overt conversations about sexuality, in general, as disrespectful? What would it mean to be "out" in this context? As a white lesbian, I need to do my homework on the histories of communities

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of color and understand how others' experiences differ from my fourth generation Northern European immigrant views of the world before I can enter any dialogue about the complex views of sexuality and same sex relationships within communities of color.

It is important for me to state that I am not suggesting that we excuse hateful and hurtful statements that may come our way from people of color as "cultural" and, therefore, unobjectionable. Neither am I suggesting that we submerge ourselves in "white guilt" nor some version of "martyrdom for the cause." But if we are committed to offering something more than a white-washed (white-privileged) response of "That's homophobic!" then we need to understand and honor the historical and cultural context of our differences as we engage in dialogue about our mutual humanity.

3. Develop critical media skills and question the media's positioning of communities against each other.

..... A recent article that appeared in a local "alternative" newspaper, the Des Moines CityView magazine, was titled, "Is Gay Marriage a Civil Rights Issue?". The article followed the same tired format: several leaders in the local African American community responded "no" to the title question and white gay and lesbian activists responded "yes." Two other community leaders were included to offer a bit of balance: a straight African American legislator responded that he is against "any type of discrimination" and a white straight leader within the Iowa Civil Liberties Union weighed in that "it's hard to defend" the assertion that there aren't comparisons between gay/lesbian civil rights and Black civil rights. The article follows a prototype that we will see more and more in the days ahead and, if we play into the wedge tactics, one that will serve to enlist us in strengthening the White Right's agenda. We need to be critical of such divisive strategies by posing questions such as: What racial/ethnic identity do the people writing those articles claim? What sexual identity? In the past, how has the media source covered the powerful work being done by LGBT people of color within communities of color? Why did this type of article make it to the fore and voices of LGBT people of color and allies ignored? When selling copy is the primary intention of a newspaper, and not promoting social justice, who literally is profiting by our taking the bait of divisiveness and reacting with white entitlement and furor?

4. Engage in a much more thoughtful response to the request to compare civil rights struggles with one another. It is true that contemporary liberation movements owe a great deal to the legal and social template created by struggles for civil rights by communities of color, in particular, the struggles of African American communities against the U.S. apartheid system. We will be stronger by being students of those movements – honoring their legacy rather than just using soundbites to prop up our contemporary struggles for civil rights. To do this, we need to be clear about several things: the ways in which the term "civil rights" looks different around matters of race and matters of sexual identity (D'Emilio, et al, 2000), and ways it is similar (Bond, 2004). I can do this by acknowledging historical and contemporary "civil rights" struggles waged by communities of color (i.e., right to vote, right to equal education, right to fair housing, right to freedom from police maltreatment, right to language access) and I can enumerate historical and contemporary struggles of LGBT communities (i.e., right to nondiscrimination in the workplace, housing, public services and healthcare; right to form families, right to decriminalization of intimate behavior; right to education free of discrimination).

Further, when articulating the similarities/differences between civil rights struggles, I need to educate myself on the issues that are most challenging for communities of color...and I need to educate myself on the issues upon which our communities share common ground.

5. Similarly, as individuals and as a movement, we need to better understand the civil rights cases upon which our legal strategies today are built so that when I, as a community activist, parrot the language used by attorneys arguing same-sex equality in the courtroom, I will know more than just the soundbite "separate, but not equal." Without an understanding of the original case, I am treading on sacred ground with only my ignorance and personal interpretation to fall back on. By showing we know and honor the struggles and hard-won victories, it will demonstrate our commitment to broad social justice, rather than just a willingness to appropriate the pain and power of those who have come before for our gain.

6. Do not say that racism and hetero-

sexism are the same thing or that white LGBT people experience the same type of discrimination as people of color. The different forms of oppression share commonalities, but they are not the same. Both bring great harm to their targets, but the oppression comes in different forms and with different intent. No community has a corner on the pain market, and you can find a white LGBT person who believes his/her personal "suffering" registers as high on the pain Richter Scale as that of a person of color. However, we too often get caught up comparing individual pain and allow ourselves to get distracted from our work to understand and dismantle systems of oppression. Whom does this personal warfare serve?

7. Show your trustworthiness as an ally by being articulate and clear about your understanding of racism and white privilege. To develop allies, let's first show our commitment to dismantling white supremacy and be allies. Begin by showing up at events of importance in communities of color. Educate ourselves on English-only legislation, disproportionate minority confinement and the prison industrial complex. Listen to parents of color talk about the experiences of their kids in schools and show up at Board meetings when there is a call to action. We need to demonstrate our willingness to show up and step up to make our voice heard as anti-racist whites on these issues. Think about how powerful it is when I, as a white parent, approach the school district and challenge that I want my daughter to be taught about racism and multiculturalism to make her stronger and more prepared to create authentic community in the future; when I challenge our public officials about why there are more Brown and Black men in prison in our state than there are in institutions of higher education; when I as a white monolingual English speaker oppose "English only" laws. ...

What have we given back to our allies of color on issues of importance in their contemporary struggles?

8. Don't allow our white straight allies to triangulate us against people of color. Ever had a conversation with a white straight 'ally' after a meeting with people of color and heard, "Wow, I didn't realize how homophobic she is! Of all people, you'd think she'd get it!" Know that given the way white privilege works, white straight allies will have a much easier time bonding

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OPEN LETTER

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with us across their heterosexual privilege, than with communities of color across their white privilege. White straight folks are more likely to have an lgbt person within their near/distant family than they are to intimately know a person of color. Rather than encouraging white/straight allies in a 'taking care of their own' type of alliance, expect and ask them to use the understanding of how 'privilege' works to expand on issues of race, class, and gender privilege, as well.

9. Learn about the powerful work going on within communities of color by lgbt and allied people of color and ask how we can support those efforts.

For example, when having the "Are gay rights civil rights?" question posed to us, in addition to showing ourselves to be worthy allies in how we respond, it is also important to share the analyses offered by people of color regarding the comparison.....

In particular, we need to listen to, support, and learn from our lgbt brothers and sisters of color who have a powerful border-crossing vision and immense insight for joining struggles. I honor the inspiring and challenging voices of Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, Lamont (Montee) Evans, Will Roscoe, Keith Boykin, Mandy Carter, Daisy Hernández, Barbara Smith, Merle Woo among many, many others for their contributions to our understanding of lives lived as lgbt people of color.

10. Learn about and embrace the important contributions white lgbt people have made as allies for social

and racial justice. As a white lesbian, I honor the inspiring and challenging voices of Mab Segrest, Suzanne Pharr, Jennifer Holladay, Irene Klepfisz, Minnie Bruce Pratt, Ricky Sherover-Marcuse. I am proud to join in that legacy and, rather than wish away my sexual identity, I want to proclaim to my allies that my commitment to social justice is stronger because of my experiences as a lesbian – that my sexual identity is my strength and power, not a form of victimization I wish to discard in order to enjoy my white entitlements.

11. Forge genuine relationships with people of color – lgbt and straight people.

The powers-that-be do not want those lines of division crossed. Know that. Be ready for the pull to abandon one another. The relationships I share with allies who are straight men and women of color and lgbt people of color hold amazing strength, growth, and power. As queers, we know deep within our hearts the power that comes with stepping across societal lines and forming intimate relationships against all odds. This is a strength – this resilience, this ability to forge community – that we can undeniably bring to the table of social justice. It can and will change the world – if we do it with intentionality, strength, and vision across social lines that divide communities from one another.

12. As we are on this journey, we need to join with each other and create intentional communities of white queer anti-racist organizations. We need to strengthen each other on this journey – sup-

port our continued growth, struggle together to develop accountability to communities of color in our efforts, and be visible as a white anti-racist presence.

Lastly, we must know – deeply within our hearts – that our pain will not be salved, much less healed, by creating greater divisions between communities or within our own community. We must engage in battles for lgbt equality not as "walking wounded," but as healers in the tradition of so many lgbt people who have walked this earth before us. We need to continue to embolden each other with the knowledge that our struggle for justice for lgbt communities is right and rich, and will only grow stronger through alliances with others. We can't and shouldn't ignore the pain we feel with each denial of our humanity, but we must care for our wounds outside of our coalition work (Reagon, 1983) – with each other as if our lives depended upon it and with our allies as the time is right.

My dear white lgbt communities, let us seize this historic moment by working side by side to move this society toward greater justice, love, and healing. Many have walked this way before and it is upon us to re-create the journey today.

Yours in love and struggle,

Diane Finnerty, Director of Training National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice, University of Iowa. Copyright © 2004

Comments and conversation about this essay are welcome and invited: diane-finnerty@uiowa.edu.



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