

Social Questions Bulletin

Seeking Global Justice through the United Methodist Church

JUNE - AUGUST 2009

ISSN: 0731-0234

Vol. 99, No. 3

The Log In My Own Eye

Kathryn Johnson, Editor

I had already decided that I disliked the man, that he had nothing to say that I needed to hear. I hadn't met him, mind you, but as the pastor of the largest United Methodist Church in the country, I had concluded he was a smarmy televangelist type and the church must be a feel-good-don't-face-the-tough-issues kind of church.

I was wrong on all counts; it was one of those experiences that serves to humble and remind one that prejudging others is a dangerous, and in this case stupid, thing to do.

The Rev. Adam Hamilton, pastor of the 12,000-member Church of the Resurrection (COR), in Leawood, Kansas, spoke at the New England Annual Conference this year.

With an average weekly worship attendance of 8,200 people, COR has grown from four people in 1990 to more than 12,000 adult members today.

Rev. Hamilton attributes this phenomenal growth to many things, among them having a clear mission (purpose) and vision. He recounts that everything at COR, from worship to programming to building construction, is guided by this mission. Everything.

The purpose of the COR is "to build a Christian community where non-religious and nominally religious people are becoming deeply committed Christians." The vision: "changing lives, transforming the community and renewing the mainline church."

Once I had begun to swallow my pride and set aside my judgment, I found many things in the six hours of lectures that provided substantial food for thought. He was speaking about local church ministry, but I was able to relate much of what he said to MFSA and our ministries.

continued on page 4

MFSA at Annual Conferences 2009

Annual Conference sessions provide a great venue for MFSA chapter activities and 2009 was no exception. Our chapters held events with inspiring speakers; submitted, spoke to and helped pass legislation; staffed display tables with helpful and challenging information; presented awards to faithful justice workers; and, in one case, even cleansed a meeting space that had housed a gun show the previous week!

Chapter leaders report here on some of the highlights.

IOWA

A highlight of the Iowa Annual Conference was MFSA's Awards Event on Saturday, June 6th attended by over 400 people. Awards were presented to Sol Varisco and Jeff Abbas for their outstanding work with immigrants following the raid at Postville a year ago. In addition two churches, St. Bridget's Catholic Church in Postville and First United Methodist Church in Decorah, were recognized for



Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Wright

their tireless work in the community of Postville. A third award was given to Sharon Malheiro, who was instrumental in the case that ultimately led to the Supreme Court's decision on marriage equality.

The keynote speaker, the Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Wright, was received enthusiastically and delivered a simple but powerful message. To the award recipients and to MFSA he said, in essence, that our work fulfills scripture; it's

continued on page 2

Progressive Fundamentals: The Dignity of Work

Labor Day will have come and gone by the time you receive the September issue of the Social Questions Bulletin. Thus, I include here an article on the dignity of work. It is printed here by permission of the Center for American Progress, Faith and Progressive Policy Initiative.

By Rev. Dr. Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite
February 24, 2009

Americans are becoming more and more anxious about the declining economy, according to a new Associated Press poll. Many reported that they had already lost their jobs, or were underemployed. Even among those surveyed who are currently employed, nearly half responded that they fear losing their jobs—almost double the percentage at this

time last year. High- and low-wage workers both share this worry.

The cascading loss of jobs and the increasing anxiety among those who still have a job is a fundamental threat to basic human dignity. Work itself is fundamental to how human beings realize their destiny in this world. To be deprived of work, to be unable to provide

continued on page 3

ANNUAL CONFERENCES

continued from page one

not in vain and does make a difference, and it's not over. He called the recipients "prophets," and admonished all of us to keep on working.

Other highlights of Conference were the Rainbow Communion Service, attended by over 80 persons, and the celebration of the 10th Anniversary of Justice for Our Neighbors.

Eloise Cranke

WISCONSIN

The Wisconsin Annual Conference MFSA Chapter honored the Perry Saito Award winners, Craig Mybro and Rev. Barbara Certa-Werner for their work with labor and faith and also the starting of a new homeless ministry in Superior, WI.

The chapter held a program about community organizing and we were blessed with the presence of Stephanie Gyldenvand, organizer for ESTHER, the interfaith social-justice organization in the Fox Valley (Appleton, Wisconsin).



Wesley White

Craig Myrbo and Rev. Barbara Certa-Werner, Perry Saito Award Winners for 2009

We were energized by the specifics Stephanie and others from ESTHER brought to us. We saw where we could apply some of their techniques and skills to our own situations. A very encouraging time.

The Wisconsin Chapter of MFSA is sponsoring a retreat and workshop at Pine Lake Camp on the theme, "Worshipping God...Just for Us or for Justice," January 22-23, 2010. Our own Phil Carver will be the workshop leader. For more information, contact Steve Zekoff at: szekoff@charter.net.

Wesley White

Carolyn Kinney



"God's Foolish One" Rev. Dr. Mary Kraus

BALTIMORE-WASHINGTON

Over 100 people gathered at a Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference for a lunch co-sponsored by BWARM (Baltimore Washington Reconciling Movement) and MFSA. Our guest speaker was Bishop Melvin G. Talbert and we presented our annual "God's Foolish One Award" award to Rev. Mary Kraus.

Kenneth Hawes

NEW YORK

On the legislative front, the New York MFSA chapter submitted resolutions on the following issues: human trafficking, energy use, torture and use of Fair Trade products within the conference, all of which were passed. Two other resolutions concerning advocacy for the New York State Marriage Equality Law and support for those who dissent from the *Book of Discipline* were also adopted by the body.

MFSA-NY has joined the effort begun by NYAC Board of Church and Society to address immigration issues and helped to shepherd a resolution through Annual Conference that turned the currently ad hoc group on immigration into an official conference taskforce.

The 2009 recipients of the Gwen and C. Dale White award are Rev. Gilbert H. and Grace Caldwell. Gil is one of the founders of the Black Methodists for Church Renewal and was its second national president. He served the general church as the Associate General Secretary of the Commission on Religion and Race. He was one of the organizers of the United Methodist of Color, committed to the

full inclusion of all people in the United Methodist Church. Grace Caldwell's ministry has included teaching school for many years as well as raising two sons. Both Gil and Grace have been blessings to the communities where they have served and to the national UMC.

The NYAC also allotted 90 minutes for the body to dialogue on homosexuality and inclusiveness in a session entitled, "The Beloved Community Speaks." Presentations from both the "evangelical" and "progressive" perspectives were given, interspersed with singing, prayer, and a time to speak both in small groups and on the floor of the conference. MFSA-NY convener Kevin Nelson led the team presenting the progressive witness, which included 8 testimonies demonstrating the struggles of many persons—LGBT and straight, clergy and laity, parents and friends—with the exclusivity of the church on this issue. Feedback from the experience was positive, with some suggesting that this model be used in other conferences and local churches for honest and open dialog amidst division.

One of the new initiatives undertaken by the New York chapter has been to participate in a dialogue with members of racial and ethnic communities of the NYAC around racism and gender equality. This work is still in its beginning stages and has expanded to include gender issues. The dialogue is born out of the concerns for racial justice and gender equality, inspired in part by Rev. Taka Ishii's challenge last year at the MFSA dinner during Annual Conference.

Kevin Nelson and Jennifer Mihok

WEST MICHIGAN

The West Michigan MFSA had a luncheon featuring Fred Keller, a United Methodist area businessman and philanthropist who has done amazing work with raising consciousness and taking action on sustainability issues in the workplace. His talk was entitled "Why Christians Should Care About Sustainability."

The chapter also passed out many of the national MFSA suggestion forms for voting on the Constitutional Amendments. We are proud that West Michigan was one of the minority of conferences that passed amendment one by more than 2/3. Our younger delegates rose on several occasions to voice their support for the amendment! We can

see the gradual change in attitudes towards our LGBT persons but there is still much work for all of us to do.

Susan Hagans

ILLINOIS GREAT RIVER

The Illinois Great River MFSA Chapter co-sponsored a Social Justice Dinner with the Board of Church and Society, and the Commissions on the Status and Role of Women and Religion and Race, with speakers from the Central Illinois Organizing Project (a faith-based community organizing group that started up in 1996) and Farmers Supporting Independent Agriculture. The Cramer-Heurman Social Justice award was presented to Rev. Howard Daughenbaugh, a retired minister in our conference who has taken a bold stand on many social justice issues, beginning with the civil rights movement while he was still living in the south.

Janet Eggleston

CALIFORNIA-NEVADA

The Cal-Nevada Chapter co-sponsored a dinner with the conference Board of Church and Society on Thursday evening June 18, 2009, in the Sacramento Convention Center. The speaker was Paul Larudee, PhD, co-founder of the Free Gaza Movement and a neighbor from El Cerrito, California.

Doug Sibley

DETROIT

Bishop Jesse and Annamary DeWitt participated in the Detroit Conference MFSA Banquet. The DeWitt Peace with Justice Awards were presented to Jacquie Washington in recognition of her witness for the American Civil Liberties Union & Planned Parenthood, and to Rev. Herb Glenn in memoriam for his ad-



Jeanette Bartz

Jacquelin Washington receives the Jesse and Annamary DeWitt Award. With her are her pastor, the Rev. Edwin Rowe (r) and the Rev. David Kidd (l).

vocacy for affordable housing and preaching on peace. Rev. Faith Fowler delivered an inspirational message on "Charity and Advocacy."

We held a hopeful celebration for "All Means All" outside the chapel following the opening worship service and two MFSA folk spoke eloquently on amendment one on the Conference floor.

A resolution entitled, "Create a Peace Economy" was passed: "We call upon the President and our U.S. Congressional Representatives to order a thorough review of major weapons systems and other defense spending programs with the objective of bringing about at least a 25% reduction in spending without cuts in salaries and benefits to military personnel & dependents and care for veterans."

Richard Peacock

Roland Curry



MFSA display tables at the Southwest Texas Annual Conference

SOUTHWEST TEXAS

The Southwest Texas Chapter hosted a very busy table at Annual Conference, including a book fair for used religious books. SWT had a catchy display of lighting options for energy efficiency, with LED and CFL options shown for attendees to see and compare. Continuing in the study theme of environmental stewardship, we presented a slide show on the scriptural basis for environmental issues. We distributed MFSA's position papers on the constitutional amendments, and talked to a large number of delegates that came by.

On June 6, the chapter sponsored a "float" at Austin's Pride Parade on June 6. Besides balloons and other decorations on the float trailer, we had an "open door" representing our fondest wishes for the denomination. Several Austin-area churches marched the route with us, and crowds were enthusiastic about our participation. ❖

Rowland Curry

DIGNITY OF WORK continued from page one

for one's family and oneself, is to become not only economically vulnerable, but also humanly stunted. Even the threat of job loss is enough to erode a sense of personal dignity and self-worth. Work, whether a paid job or unpaid work in the home, as a caregiver, or in a volunteer capacity is fundamental to human nature and its expression.

This connection between work and human dignity lies at the core of progressive values. Progressivism is deeply rooted in the struggles of ordinary people to realize a decent life for themselves and their children. While progressivism is informed by the Enlightenment ideals of freedom and equality, it is most characterized by its focus on economic struggle. (1) Progressive values dictate that people need both a means to practical economic advancement and respect for their human dignity and equal worth.

This central moral value of progressivism holds that people are of infinite worth, and economic well-being is a way that their core value is recognized in society. Few have stated this deep conviction of the centrality of work to human dignity more profoundly than John Paul II. In his famous encyclical "On Human Work," he writes that work is fundamental to the truth of the human condition. Through work, people become who they are intended to be. Through work, human beings share "in the activity of the Creator" (*Laborem Exercens*, V.25).

Human dignity, therefore, should not be regarded as passive, but as active. Human potential is more fulfilled when people have the means to express their creativity, and an important way they do that is through work. When people are denied the ability to work, they are denied the dignity that comes with that work. Society thus has both a practical and a moral obligation to promote economic systems that allow for the widest possible expression of human potential through work. (2)

Progressives recognize the fundamental link between sound economic practices and respect for human dignity. Progressives, therefore, have a deep-seated commitment to helping create and sustain economic systems that draw upon and stimulate human creativity.

In the last decade, however, our economic

continued on page 4

LOG IN MY OWN EYE continued from page one

One of the things he said was that everything at COR is designed so that visitors (often non-religious and nominally religious people) encountering the church will find community and a place to be in service. They *expect* visitors and they prepare for them.

To this end, members of COR park on the periphery of the parking lot so that visitors will find spaces close to the door. The narthex of the church contains a "connection point" where newcomers can learn about the church, its study groups, community life groups, and service projects - in other words, the places where new folks can connect with the ongoing life of the community. Likewise the COR website www.cor.org is replete with opportunities for study, community and service.

In MFSA circles we frequently lament the fact that our membership numbers do not increase as we wish they would. As I look over our national newsletter and web site and reflect on the design of our national gatherings, I immediately see ways in which MFSA could improve on "connecting" with newcomers. The same holds true for our publications and events at the chapter level.

I fear we sometimes operate with the mentality that small is good, that it means we are on the cutting edge. We are prophets and thus rejected by many in the mainstream. That fact of the matter is that most people in the mainstream of our church have never heard of us. It isn't a matter of being rejected so much as it is a matter of never being heard in the first place.

Likewise, I have paused to reflect on our clarity of purpose and vision, at both the chapter and national level.

I truly believe in the significant and powerful ministries carried out by MFSA. We continually "play above our weight" and our influence in the church is a testament to the commitment of our members and our passion for justice and peace.

But the mission and vision of a living, vital organization must be reviewed often, either to be reaffirmed or revised to fit the present age. It is time for MFSA to be about this work. Indeed at the national level we have already begun revisiting our mission statement through a strategic planning process which will culminate with our fall 2009 board and program council meetings. The MFSA

staff looks forward to sharing our insights and resources with our chapters so that they might engage in this type of reflection as well.

Curious about Rev. Hamilton's position on LGBT inclusion, I listened to his February 1, 2009 sermon which focuses on homosexuality and can be found on the COR website. Again my prejudgment (prejudice) was that I would find the sermon offensive. Rev. Hamilton and I are not exactly on the same page here, but his careful exegesis of the Scriptures, his openness and his suggestion to his parishioners that they act as Jesus would act is a very long distance from the pigeon hole in which I had placed him.

Finally, trying desperately to find some evidence to support my prejudice, I searched the COR website, certain that I would find no ministries that address systemic racial injustice and economic inequities. As you might have guessed by now, I was foiled again when I discovered explicit ministries aimed at addressing the root causes of racial division, poverty, and social injustices in the Kansas City area.

There are some things about Church of the Resurrection that give me pause. It is not a Reconciling Congregation and inclusive language is not consistently used in the worship services, both of which are core values for MFSA and for me personally. Indeed these are things which are fundamental to my understanding of what it means to be the church. As welcoming as Church of the Resurrection is, unless and until an explicit welcome is articulated for LGBT persons, many who enter its doors (or choose not to enter its doors for this reason) are excluded in a very fundamental way.

I believe that COR has some major growing to do in this area. As I set aside my prejudice, however, I see that COR is on this journey toward full inclusion in the same way that many of our churches are. The fact that they have not yet arrived does not invalidate the other amazing ministries they carry out.

This whole experience has taught me some important lessons. I learned, for example, that I'm pretty determined to find information to support my prejudices, of which I have many. I learned that Adam Hamilton *did* have some things to teach me, among them some lessons about how to be a welcoming place for newcomers and the importance of having mission and vision-driven ministries. I learned that Rev. Hamilton's challenge to us to envision our churches as powerful and

engaging centers of ministry and outreach to our communities was authentic and powerful. I learned that the lessons he applied to the church may well apply to MFSA also.

As your (humbled) director, I plan to continue reflecting upon these lessons and to apply them to our journey together as we continue our vital ministries into the future. ❖

DIGNITY OF WORK continued from page three

system has produced fewer and fewer jobs, and the jobs it has produced are more in the lower-paying, service sector. Tax cuts for the wealthy, wage suppression tactics, undercutting unions, and other deliberate practices created almost a decade of declining or stagnant wages and slow or no real job growth. These tactics increase profits at the expense of workers. Many Americans have had to work two or even three jobs to make ends meet, sacrificing family time and even adequate rest to make even a modest living. These kinds of jobs do not honor human dignity; they erode a sense of self-worth and contribute to a sense of helplessness and despair. They are a direct attack on the fundamental dignity and worth of human beings as expressed through their work.

These economic policies have been both a moral and a practical failure. As Michael Ettlinger of the Center on American Progress argues, "economic policies with tax cuts for corporations and the wealthy as their centerpiece have simply failed to produce strong economic growth by a variety of measures."

Economic policies of tax cuts for corporations and the wealthy are the result of political processes that favor those economic interests over the majority of Americans. In 1932, Reinhold Niebuhr, the mid-twentieth century ethicist and theologian, wrote from the depths of another economic downturn that "economic power has become irresponsible in society." Niebuhr believed that economic interests had simply overwhelmed the political process through an excess of power. (3)

The first decade of the 21st century is beginning to bear a strong resemblance to the third decade of the 20th century. In the last years, those with economic power have dictated to the political realm, resulting in not only an economic meltdown, but a moral meltdown, too.

continued on next page

The irresponsibility of which Niebuhr speaks is especially visible in the failure to provide a 21st century regulatory structure to oversee the financial markets, and to exercise proper oversight within existing regulatory structures, as happened with the Securities and Exchange Commission's failure to stop Bernard Madoff's multi-billion dollar Ponzi scheme swindle.

The policies of the Bush administration did not meet the moral standard of what it means to respect human dignity through job generation, and through appropriate oversight of financial markets.

In these next years, we need not only an economic stimulus, but a moral stimulus as well. The moral stimulus is rooted in a return to the core progressive value that human dignity is respected when the majority of citizens are able to participate in a meaningful way in both their economic and their political life as a society. ❖

Rev. Dr. Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite is a Senior Fellow with the Faith and Progressive Policy Initiative at the Center for American Progress (www.americanprogress.org) and Professor of Theology at Chicago Theological Seminary.

Endnotes

1. John Podesta, *The Power of Progress* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2008), pp.16-17.
2. The dignity of human beings transcends work, of course. Work is a means by which dignity is exercised. People who cannot work because of handicapping conditions or other problems do not cease having dignity, though a failure to provide adequate care for them also insults their dignity and worth. The key insight of progressivism on human nature, however, is that it is fundamentally dynamic rather than static. Economic systems are most robust when human beings are the active subjects, not the passive objects of these systems.
3. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics*, Intro. Langdon B. Gilkey (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), originally published by Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932.

Honoring Dr. George Tiller

Written by the Reverend Carlton W. Veazey
Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
June 1, 2009

Today, we mourn the death of a humble, courageous man who dedicated his life to justice, liberty and freedom - Dr. George Tiller. George Tiller was murdered yesterday in his church, a place of peace and worship. This good doctor put his life on the line every day to make sure that safe, legal abortion was available to women in the greatest need, women with late-term complications and emergencies, who often had nowhere else to turn. He did so in respect for each woman he served and in the service of a great and noble cause - preserving the promise of reproductive freedom for all women.

Dr. Tiller had a powerful vision that sustained his daily actions of courage. In a letter thanking RCRC for our support during the hate-filled assault on his Wichita clinic in the summer of 2001, he wrote: "Together, we will create a society and a paradigm shift so that every pregnancy is an invited guest in the woman's body and a welcome addition to her family."

Dr. Tiller was a military man. He was proud of his service to his country and to the cause of freedom - and he felt that providing abortion services was part of this country's commitment to upholding women's rights and democracy. He hung an American flag at the clinic every day. After that summer assault on his clinic, he suggested to an RCRC staff member that those who harassed and threatened abortion providers and women needing services were tyrants - and he felt that in providing services, no matter the danger and difficulty, he was standing up to tyranny.

George Tiller was continually harassed - his home, church and clinic were picketed, his clinic was burned down, he was shot in both arms by a demonstrator who is now jailed, and he was recently targeted for investigation only to be acquitted by a jury just a few months ago. But he never backed down.

George Tiller began providing abortion ser-

vices in the 1970s. We cannot say with certainty what motivated and inspired this man to persevere, despite almost daily threats. Perhaps it was the model of his father, also a doctor, who provided abortion services before it was legal to do so. After his father's untimely death in a plane crash, George Tiller took over the practice. Some women patients began to ask discreetly, "Are you going to help us out like your father did?" And so he did. This strong family connection is in the great tradition of American values.

Women in the greatest medical need came to Dr. Tiller's clinic in Wichita; women in the final weeks of pregnancy with crushing medical conditions were among his patients. His clinic was a warm, welcoming place. Once past the gauntlet of angry demonstrators, women found a compassionate

staff, a well-run medical practice, and the sense they were respected and safe.

Reformation Lutheran Church, Dr. Tiller's church, also sought to be a safe place for all people. In a statement yesterday, church members wrote: "...we reject any notion that violence against another human being is an acceptable way to resolve differences over any issue. We must always strive to engage in peaceful discussion. Our faith calls us to this. Our humanity demands it."

With members of Dr. Tiller's church, we pray for healing and peace to be restored. We pray for Dr. Tiller's family, for the clinic staff, for patients and their families, for friends, and for our country.

We pray for George Tiller - a true American hero who lived his life according to his values and his faith, who was selfless and fearless in the line of danger to the very end.

Peace and blessings,

Reverend Carlton W. Veazey
President and CEO

Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice



Dr. George Tiller

End the Violence in Iran

LEADERS OF MORE THAN 35 NATIONAL GROUPS, INCLUDING MFSA, CALL FOR END TO IRAN VIOLENCE

To: **Ayatollah Ali Khamenei**
Pres. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad
U.N. Ambassador & Permanent Representative Mohammad Khazaei

Date: **June 24, 2009**

We are leaders of organizations representing tens of thousands of U.S. citizens who love Iran: its people, culture, poetry, and stories of wonderful new friends and your land's admirable humanitarian and religious cultures. We passionately urge peace between our countries, and deeply regret the unfortunate history of U.S. intervention in Iran and its sovereignty. We believe all nations and peoples have the right to live free of the threat of unjust foreign interference in their internal affairs.

Our organizations represent national and regional U.S. peace, anti-war, and religious communities, and some of our members have held meetings with President Ahmadinejad, former President Khatami, and Iranian religious leaders to discuss common concerns about peace and humanitarian issues. We have pressed the U.S. Congress and White House on numerous issues related to Iran, including: ending sanctions levied on Iran; engaging in constructive dialogue with Iranian leaders; and formally apologizing for past actions against Iran – such as the July 3, 1988 attack by the USS Vincennes on Iran Air #655, which killed 290 innocent civilians. And while the results of the recent Iranian election are contested, we commend the election as an exercise in the building of stronger democracy in Iran, and we hope that the open expression of different ideas and visions for the future of the nation will continue.

The Holy Qur'an teaches us, "If anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people." And today we are compelled to communicate our pain and outrage about the violence being inflicted on peaceful Iranians. The killings of innocent civilians, beatings of elderly women and young students alike, and imprisonment without charge of

hundreds of civilians – done in the name of Islam – serve to slander this holy religion whose name itself means the "making of peace."

We are inspired by the ways that the nonviolent legacy of Mahatma Gandhi has been lifted up by many ordinary Iranians in this critical moment. For indeed, Gandhi reminded us, "Victory attained by violence is tantamount to a defeat, for it is momentary." Our faiths and commitments to peace compel us to demand an end to this senseless brutality against the people of Iran who are walking in silence, offering nonviolent witness, and engaging in other peaceful acts of conscience.

For more than a week, violence has wracked the nation of Iran. This past weekend, official reports have stated that between 10 and 19 Iranians died, while other reports give higher figures. These deaths are in addition to many others who have died in previous days. Moreover, we have received reports that in Tehran on Saturday, June 20, liquid chemicals were sprayed on civilians, causing burns. Many were unable to obtain adequate medical care, as they were followed by militia forces and trapped in hospitals; the consequences of their seeking aid and refuge were either additional beatings or arrest.

We have seen no sign that this oppression of ordinary Iranians will cease. In the name of the Islamic Republic and of the constitutional rights of its people, Iran's political and religious leaders must bring an end to the ruthlessness that is being perpetrated, immediately.

We bring no moral weight to this request as Americans. In fact we stand in the same relationship of resistance and opposition to the use of violence by the government of the United States, in its continued violent occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, its use of violence to quell nonviolent dissent around political conventions and elections, its use of

torture in violation of the Geneva Conventions, and its use of imprisonment of people without charges or fabricated and unsubstantiated charges against U.S. citizens and non-nationals alike.

The Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon

**"Victory attained by violence is tantamount to a defeat, for it is momentary."
Gandhi**

Him) said, "Break your bows, sever your strings, beat stones on your swords." Therefore we appeal to the Islamic Republic of Iran, under the guidance of the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, to work to immediately stop the violence.

With deepest concern,

Signed by over 35 leaders of national peace groups and communities of faith including MFSA.

This letter was drafted by the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR). Visit www.forusa.org/programs/iran/ for more information about FOR's Iran Initiative.

The **SOCIAL QUESTIONS BULLETIN** is published bi-monthly by the **METHODIST FEDERATION FOR SOCIAL ACTION**, an independent fellowship founded in 1907. The Rev. Kathryn J. Johnson is Executive Director and Editor. The national office is at 212 East Capitol Street, NE, Washington, DC 20003 (202/546-8806). E-mail: mfsa@mfsaweb.org. Individual subscription rate: \$12 per year. Additional copies @ \$2. Inquire for quantity rates. Periodical postage paid at Washington, DC. ISSN: 0731-0234. Postmaster: Send address changes to Social Questions Bulletin, 212 East Capitol Street, NE, Washington, DC 20003.



Reflection on the Life of Jean Brown

by Ruth L. Boling
Iiterim Pastor
Olivet Presbyterian Church
May 27, 2009

When Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled" (Matthew 5:6), he could have been describing Jean Brown.

"Righteousness" in this passage means "justice" – "social justice" to be precise. Jean's lifelong hungering and thirsting for social justice has been well-documented in newspaper articles and op ed pieces spanning the decades.

Jean was no armchair critic. She took to the streets and the churches, to the banks and the board rooms asking those who held the power to take into consideration the powerless, and do their business differently. She advocated for specific causes: democracy in Nicaragua, divestment from South Africa during Apartheid, and fair housing here in Staten Island, just to name a few.

She was fortunate to work for 13 years and volunteer for an additional 7 years for an organization dedicated to this vision: the Methodist Federation for Social Action. Its director, the Rev. George McClain relied on Jean as Administrative Assistant to make things happen.

In her hunger and thirst for righteousness, Jean was indeed filled. She was indeed blessed – blessed with a meaningful life of purpose and conviction.

Jean Phillips Brown 1923 - 2009

Jean Brown, a vital presence in the Staten Island MFSA office for many years, died last month at the age of 86. A faithful church member and social activist, Jean served as MFSA office manager from 1979-1991 and then as an MFSA volunteer. A tireless supporter of civil rights, Jean worked behind the scenes, in the office and on the "front lines" as described in the eulogy below.

Jean is survived by her husband of 60 years, Oran Brown, her son Larry Brown and her daughter, Elizabeth Sullivan.

When Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Matthew 5:9), he could have been describing Jean.

Jean Phillips Brown, child of God, was a peacemaker. She demonstrated. She picketed. She got arrested. She wrote letters. She signed petitions. She spoke to groups and gave slide shows about what she had experienced in trips to Central America and Cuba in order to say: there is another side of the story that needs to be heard, which can hasten peace. Her causes were never the most popular in Staten Island. That didn't stop her. Bless you, Jean, child of God, peacemaker.

When Jesus said, "Let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Matthews 5:16), he could have been describing Jean.

Jean was "out there" on the front lines, so to speak. Larry and Liz remember going with their mother from church to church to get signatures for petitions. Oran remembers Jean picketing, all by herself, in front of a Citibank. I studied those pictures and newspaper articles at the Funeral Home last night. Why was Jean's photo in so many of them? Because she let her light shine before others. Seeing, thus, her good works, let us stop and consider and give all glory to our Father in heaven.

1 John 3:18 says, "Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action."

The epistle writer could have been describing Jean. It wasn't all words and slogans. As Larry and Liz said a few weeks back in the hospital, "she lived it." Jean didn't just feel compassionate, she acted with compassion. "Always busy," Larry said, "always working, always active, no sitting around."

Jean did all the driving in the family. But in every important respect, Oran and Jean shared the drive to do the right thing. Oran says that he and Jean thought alike when it came to politics and religion. In their 60-year marriage, Oran and Jean didn't just love each other. They chose and loved Larry and Liz. And they loved God's other children, not with sentimental platitudes, but with concrete actions.

Little children, let us love that way, too, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. If Jean could love that way, so can we.

Deuteronomy 10:18 gives us an early picture in the Bible of God who is not just mighty but who is also full of compassion. The Lord "executes justice for the orphan and the widow, loves strangers, and provides them food and clothing."

The lesson for us? "You shall also love the stranger."

Jean did that. Jean and Oran opened their own home to the "stranger" in the form of a family of refugees from El Salvador. Ana, Noe, and Margarita lived in the Brown family home for six months. And the relationship continues to this day.

Micah 6:8 says, "What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God?"

The prophet Micah could have been describing Jean. And although I haven't and can't give every detail, you who have known Jean longer and better than I, can no doubt fill in the gaps. I hope you will "fill in the gaps" as you reflect together on the life and legacy of a remarkable woman.

To do justice,

To love kindness,

To walk humbly with our God—

This is what the Lord requires of us all. ❖

One Thousand Paper Cranes



Ten years after the Atomic Bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, Sadako Sasaki died as a result of the Atomic Bomb Disease. Sadako's determination to fold one thousand paper cranes, symbolizing her hope for peace, and her courageous struggle with her illness, inspired her classmates.

After her death, they launched a national campaign to build the **Children's Peace Statue** in memory of Sadako and the many other children who were victims of the bombing of Hiroshima. On top of the statue is a girl holding a large crane in her outstretched arms. She is Sadako Sasaki.

To this day, in Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park, the statue of Sadako is beautifully decorated with thousands of paper cranes brought and sent by people around the world.

Taka Ishii, a member of the New York MFSA chapter, has written a book about this remarkable story entitled, [One Thousand Paper Cranes, The Story of Sadako and the Children's Peace Statue](#). Inspired by the excitement his son Scott expressed upon learning about Sadako, Taka proceeded to read all he could about Sadako as well as Hiroshima and Nagasaki. A family visit to Japan coincided with this venture and Taka and his son were able to travel to Hiroshima and speak with people, including family members, who knew Sadako's story first-hand.

"Every war invariably results in terrible tragedies, immense waste and sinful destruction," recounts Taka. He goes on to say that "all wars,

no matter how big or small, how nearby or far away, diminish our humanity to a barbaric level."

Taka's decision to write this particular book was due to his interest in children and his belief that young and old must work together for a better society.

Learn more about this book at www.onethousandpapercranes.org contact: author@onethousandpapercranes.org ❖

New to MFSA?

MFSA is a movement at the heart of the United Methodist Church that mobilizes clergy and laity to take action on issues of peace and justice. We are an unofficial organization composed of United Methodists across the country, organized into 35 chapters.

We'd love to welcome you to the MFSA network. Please visit our web site at www.mfsaweb.org to find out more about the MFSA movement and ways we can connect with one another.

Get involved in MFSA

Check out the MFSA website to find out who to contact in your area of the country to **get involved** in MFSA at the conference level.

Subscribe to our bi-weekly e-newsletter containing information and action opportunities. Email our national office and indicate your interest in receiving the e-newsletter at mfsa@mfsaweb.org.

Ways to Give

The new MFSA website www.mfsaweb.org makes it convenient and easy to **give to MFSA online**.



SOCIAL QUESTIONS BULLETIN

Methodist Federation for Social Action

212 E. Capitol St. NE, Washington, DC 20003

Nonprofit U.S. Postage PAID Permit No. 1748 Washington, DC 20003
--

In this issue:

Annual Conference Reports

Dignity of Work

End the Violence in Iran

Remembering Jean Phillips Brown

Book about Sadako, by Rev. Taka Ishii