

Congregationalists on Social Concerns

Articles from the *Congregationalist*, 1958-1996

Readings in the History and Polity of the National
Association of Congregational Christian Churches

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Rev. Dr. Arlin T. Larson, editor

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INTRODUCTION

How have the churches of the National Association of Congregational Christian churches responded to the social problems of our day? The first thing to be said is, with one exception, not collectively. Congregationalists have traditionally worked through ad hoc voluntary societies, such as the American Missionary Association and Women's Christian Temperance Union, for addressing social concerns. There was no national mechanism for social action to which the churches were bound. Second, the founders of the NACCC in 1957 were united in their opposition to their predecessor General Council of Congregational Christian Churches' Council for Social Action. This was in part because of its tilt toward the left and in part because of its presumption to act on behalf of the churches collectively. The NACCC was, therefore, created with no provision for addressing social concerns on either an advocacy or educational basis.

Lack of collective involvement, however, does not indicate that Congregationalists do not have a social conscience or are not affected by the issues of the day. From the very circumstances of its origins, Congregationalism has been deeply involved in reforming society. It was born in civil disobedience against the established order of 17th century England. It then set about to establish a new form of society in North America, one which rejected monarchy and instituted democracy. In the early years, when colonial Congregationalists held a religious monopoly, they worked hand in hand with "the magistrates," civil government, to reform "manners" (behavior) as well as piety. The move toward ad hoc voluntary societies began, however, as early as the eighteenth century when circumstances required toleration of other denominations, especially of the Church of England. Congregational social action on the societal level reasserted itself in the American Revolution as a "black regiment" of Congregational clergy served as propagandists as well as chaplains. In the new United States Congregationalists continued as leading reformers on a number of fronts -- abolition, temperance, education, the social gospel.

In the twentieth century, however, Christian social activism was taking directions disturbing to many in the churches -- more collectivist and critical of the Protestant/capitalist order which they had helped bring into being. The Congregationalists who merged into the United Church of Christ embraced the new forms and enthusiasms. Those who joined the NACCC, for both institutional and ideological reasons, did not. Social involvement was left to individual churches; the churches were not particularly inclined to get involved in causes of either the political right or political left.

The following articles are indicative of Congregationalism's residual social concern and its generally middle of the road approach. Most of the great public policy issues of our time have made their way into the *Congregationalist*. With the exception noted above, none of the issues have moved the NACCC to collective action, but it has been thought important for congregations and church members to care and be informed. It is, however, striking that the most pressing, controversial, and disruptive issues are touched on only infrequently and lightly. These include the civil rights movement, opposition to the war in Vietnam, the social experiments of the Great Society, the anti-abortion movement, and the rise of the Religious Right.

Congregationalists on Social Concerns

The 1990's

*Homelessness, AIDS,
Death and Dying,
Abortion, Second
Amendment, Prisons,
Affordable Housing,
Literacy, Suicide, Sexual
Orientation, Families,
Student Activism, TV
Violence, Prisons, the
Holocaust*



An Effective and Inspirational Approach to a Growing Problem

We each do very little," said one volunteer, "but all together we make a difference." Said another, "It integrates religious experience into everyday life. This is a profound way of realizing one's religious beliefs." Another saw the program as a way to make the parish grow. "It's been a community builder for the parish itself in terms of getting volunteers to work together and to get to know one another. It's certainly been a catalyst also in terms of providing spiritual enrichment."

These comments, of immediate interest to anyone involved in the religious community, came from volunteer hosts in Interfaith Hospitality Network programs, programs that make a difference for the server and the served.

The crisis of homelessness is seldom one of moral fiber or spiritual weakness. Most people are homeless because there is not enough affordable housing. Moreover, public money for housing construction and rent subsidy has declined. What remains has been diminished by cynical developers, consultants and public servants who have diverted to their own use funds meant to help the neediest in our society, those with no place to call home.

The average percentage of income being spent on rent in this country has increased from 25 percent to 30 percent, with more than half the nation's poor people now paying up to 75 percent of their income for shelter alone. What does this mean? It means that many low-income families are only one car repair, one illness, one paycheck away from homelessness. It means that condominium conversion or property condemnation or eviction can leave them without enough money to pay for a security deposit or the first month's rent for a new place. Homeless families, many with members employed full time, are an increasing part of the nation's homeless population.

It is easy to be overwhelmed by these statistics, to file them away under things you'd rather not think about. But now it is just as easy to help, and helping is ultimately more rewarding—materially and spiritually.

In 1986 Karen Olson, a suburban New Jersey mother with a corporate job in New York City, found she could no longer ignore the problem and walk by the homeless people she saw on the streets of the city. Her personal involvement uncovered for her the numbers of hidden homeless, most of them families, and made clear to her the pervasiveness of the problem. She began by founding the Interfaith Council for the Homeless of Union County and has gone on to help other communities replicate the success of that initial program through Interfaith Hospitality Networks, Inc. (IHN). There are networks now operating in New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Ohio, with new ones developing there and in other areas of the country. They involve almost 16,000 volunteers and 300 congregations, providing assistance for more than 3,500 individuals annually.



The Interfaith Network program has 16,000 volunteers who serve in New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Ohio.

IHN is more than a shelter program. It combines the resources of the religious community—facilities for meals and overnight stays with volunteers to act as program hosts—with the daytime capacity of local social service agencies—which provide a base as well as day care, counseling and training.

A network characteristically involves between eight and thirteen congregations, some providing living space, all providing the nearly 1,000 volunteers necessary to make the program work. Each host congregation provides shelter and meals for three to five families—12 to 16 people—for one week every two to three months.



Host church volunteers help with meals. Some volunteers, usually at least one family, stay with the homeless at the church.

Guests are limited to family members. There are no single men and no one with drug, alcohol or psychological problems. They are screened by social service agencies and transported by van to the host congregation in time for dinner. Hosts and guests eat together and visit after dinner, talking, playing, working on homework assignments. Two hosts spend the night with the guests, in quarters that are partitioned for family privacy. In the morning after breakfast is made, lunches are packed, and the quarters are cleaned up, the guest families return to the day facility, so that children can go to school or day care and adults can discuss with agency staff members the help available to them and look for work and housing. Guests may stay in the program for 30 days.

More than 70 percent of the guests of the Union County Network, the first one established, have found permanent housing, often with the personal help of those who got involved as volunteers. As Karen Olson says, "Once people experience first-hand the humanness and distress of homeless families, they become support resources and advocates for them and for more permanent community solutions."



Catching up on homework before a homeless family retires for the night at an Interfaith Network church in Summit, New Jersey.

Beyond basic shelter and services, networks provide dignity and compassion, the personal contact that can help relieve the frustrations and perplexity of homelessness. "The people were so nice to us," said one guest. "They didn't treat us like one of the homeless. They treated us like friends." Another said that what she found was "caring and concerned people who made the darkest time in my life so much brighter."

The networks, because they use existing facilities and services, are easily and quickly set up and are cost effective. But they mean more than logistics and statistics. Involvement humanizes the headlines and makes participation a true act of compassion and giving. "I realized," said one volunteer, "that these folks are just like you and me, [only they] can't afford a place to live." Another said, "This has to do with me as a human being helping another human being."

For more information on how the networks function and to explore the possibilities of starting one in your community, get in touch with Interfaith Hospitality Networks for the Homeless, Inc., 110 West End Avenue, Summit, New Jersey 07901; phone (201) 273-1158. ■

How Does the Church Respond to the Challenge of AIDS?

by Anita Moreland Smith

Traditionally, the church has been a place of refuge and healing, offering help and hope to the hungry, the homeless, the brokenhearted, the sick, the bereaved. During the decade of the '80s in America, the church faced a new challenge—AIDS.

A new disease, AIDS, confronted the church with uncertain scientific data; long-term, devastating illness; and a myriad of unanswered questions. Many in the church responded with fear, prejudice, anger and judgment.

Today, we are into a new decade and a new focus related to AIDS. Today, most of the questions about this new disease have been answered. We know that AIDS is the end-stage of a disease called Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). We know that HIV can only be transmitted through intimate sexual or intravenous contact in which body fluids are exchanged, through blood and blood products, or from an infected mother to an infant. We understand that AIDS is a disease that affects males and females; young and old; people from all races, of all economic levels, from all professions.

We understand, too, that no matter whose statistics we believe regarding the epidemic's future spread, AIDS/HIV is not going to go away. Already in this new decade we have seen media reports of churches that were unprepared being confronted by the epidemic. The reality is that every church in America will

sooner or later have to face the disease in the person of an infected parishioner, the relative of a congregation member, or a member of the community.

Today's AIDS/HIV focus in the American church is on how to serve and embrace those who are both infected and affected by this disease, and how to protect its young members from infection.

The way that local congregations begin to address AIDS/HIV often depends on their specific needs. Sometimes a congregation feels insulated until they realize one of their members is infected, then they scramble to educate their members, develop programs and policy, and perform ministry. Increasingly, though, congregations are recognizing that to be prepared to deal with our society today as Christ would, they must expect to deal with AIDS/HIV and be prepared to do so.

Response of local congregations to this issue fall into the four basic categories outlined below. These are important areas for any congregation to consider when thinking through this timely and critical issue.

Education/Awareness

Education about AIDS/HIV lays a strong foundation for all other church activities related to the epidemic. This education can take many forms and be worked into regular church programs.

One pastor in New York state learned that a family in the congregation has one infected member living away from home. Looking ahead, he surmised that at some point that infected individual would come home for care. He embarked on a general awareness program for the congregation to prepare them for ministry to that individual—and others that they might not be aware of. Several evening services were devoted to AIDS, using panels comprised of congregation members whose professions gave them expertise to discuss legal, social, medical, education, economic and ministry ramifications of the epidemic nationally and locally.

Other congregation education and awareness programs have included:

- Sponsoring AIDS/HIV education sessions for church leaders and Sunday school teachers.
- Inviting representatives from AIDS/HIV-related ministries to present their work to the congregation during a mission emphasis or service;
- Planning specific worship services focused on people with AIDS and their needs;
- Implementing an adult and teen Sunday school or Bible study emphasis on AIDS/HIV;
- Including AIDS/HIV as a routine matter of prayer, sermon illustration, and general concern to make it a regular part of the congregation's scope of concern and ministry.

Policy

AIDS/HIV is a relatively new disease and because of the initial fears related to its transmission, some congregations have adopted policy statements related to how their congregations will respond to the epidemic.

One church in Georgia had to deal with the issue when they learned one young mother in the congregation was HIV positive. Knowing that a key issue for their members would be HIV-positive children and church nursery policy, the pastor and elders invited experts to a congregation meeting at which members could raise any questions or concerns. That session lasted more than four hours, but all questions were resolved and the family welcomed into the congregation.

Some congregations decide that no policy statement is necessary, but for those who develop written policy, the following points are important to consider:

1. Any written policy should begin with a statement indicating that the intent of the congregation is to include the HIV-positive person or individual with symptomatic AIDS in church programs, not to exclude them;
2. Policy should be based on scientific and medical facts, rather than in response to fears or lack of information;
3. Policy should be age-specific, providing guidelines for dealing with infants and toddlers as opposed to older children, teens and adults;
4. Policy should be the culmination of an education program focusing on church leadership and entire membership, ensuring that all involved understand the issues and are prepared to deal with them as a congregation;
5. Written policy should include a component of prevention education that the church sees as its responsibility.

As long as policy statements are in keeping with Christ's example of unconditional love, local congregational

will effectively combat the attitudes which once plagued America's response to this epidemic and replace them with understanding, compassion and servanthood.

Ministries

AIDS/HIV offers the church a wide array of ministry challenges and opportunities, ranging from counseling and spiritual support to practical assistance such as providing child care and hot meals.

One congregation in Dallas began an AIDS ministry because they felt they should respond to the community's needs. After surveying local service organizations to learn about existing needs and programs, they joined the group of volunteers supporting a local AIDS hospice by providing linens and meals.

In San Francisco a church surveyed the existing organizations and programs and discovered inadequate services for HIV-positive women and children. The result: the formation of The Bridge, a ministry to HIV-positive women that provides case management, family support services, a child care.

Any local congregation wishing to become involved in AIDS/HIV-related ministry can consider these starting points:

- Sending a congregational representative to AIDS/HIV conferences and to observe ministries already underway;
- Researching the variety of AIDS/HIV-related ministry opportunities, such as:
 - support groups for HIV-positive individuals and their families
 - practical needs for HIV-positive individuals, such as food, transportation, assistance with household chores, etc.
 - temporary housing for families of HIV-positive individuals hospitalized in your community
 - companionship for those infected

– foster care or adoption for children orphaned because of the epidemic

– prayer ministry for individuals involved in the issue

– volunteer service in existing community programs

- Determine how these ministries can fit into existing church programs and begin efforts to include AIDS/HIV as part of your church ministry outreach
- Adopt a church-wide or special group project to raise funds for AIDS/HIV-related work.

Prevention

One final area of critical involvement for the local church is prevention education geared to teens and single congregation members. Some experts have predicted that the next wave of the epidemic will occur among sexually active teens. This is a segment of the population at an age of experimentation and newly acquired autonomy, that feels immune to the virus and anything else that could harm them. AIDS awareness and sexuality education programs in the local church can save the lives of some teens who would unwittingly contract the virus through sexual activity.

To be effective, these messages must be honest and strong. Teens need to understand the effects of early sexual activity related to sexually transmitted diseases, AIDS, and inter-personal relationships. They need to understand that condoms do not guarantee protection against AIDS/HIV; they only reduce risk. In addition, the church can teach teens the positive results of chastity and secondary virginity, as well as refusal skills to give them tools to avoid intimate sexual contact where HIV contact could occur.

These programs can involve parents, youth leaders, grandparents, and all congregation members con-

Continued ►

cerned about our youth. Phase Four of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control's national AIDS awareness campaign focuses on parents and teens and provides some excellent free resources (available from the National AIDS Information Clearinghouse at 1/800-458-5231).

As we consider our response to those affected by AIDS/HIV, our Savior's words serve as a constant reminder of what He expects from anyone who loves Him, "For I was hungry and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me . . . I tell

you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." (Matt. 25:35-40)

We can do no less than offer open arms, compassionate hearts, and un-failing love. ■

Anita Moreland Smith is vice president of Americans for a Sound AIDS/HIV Policy (ASAP). ASAP is a grantee of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control to educate and involve the religious community in the AIDS/HIV issue. Mrs. Smith has worked with churches across the nation in developing education programs and policy statements.

Going Home to God

Hospice Chaplain Shows the Way through Prayer

by Ralph B. Folsom

Hope Hospice of Fort Myers and Lee County, Florida, serves a fluctuating number of terminally ill patients in their homes. They are cared for by a loving spouse or other family member. Nurses and counselors from Hope Hospice make regular calls to give skilled care to the patient and family. Then trained volunteers give respite to the family. Some do not have a church affiliation so the service of the Hospice Chaplain is offered. Some accept and I can call on them.

Some people move to Florida and do not seek a local church. Now, in time of serious illness, they want and need spiritual guidance and company.

It is a sobering responsibility to speak with a person who is soon to complete his/her life. It is also a sobering responsibility to represent God at any time, but especially in a crisis situation. Man, medicine and surgery have done all they could and imminent death looms certain. I quote a friend who said at his retirement, "That time that seemed so far away is now here."

That time that seemed so far away is now here.

I call on one man in a nursing home who has no immediate family in town. He is fed by a tube directly into his stomach. Except for his brother-in-law who is also a wid-

der, he is very much alone. At my first visit when I introduced myself as a lay chaplain he broke down in tears and said with difficulty, "I want to be saved." After only a few visits I knew this man had a deep native faith in God. I told him that God's Grace envelops the one who seeks Him and forgiveness is at hand. To know God in Christ is to know life within the context of His intentions. Christ spoke of no value for man greater than life and He called it eternal life. Reading the favorite twenty-third Psalm and others followed by prayer soon developed a new man without anxiety. He is without fear, but better still, he is at peace with an inner joy that is reflected in the last words of the Psalm: "I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Christ spoke of no value for man greater than life.

I visited a little lady suffering from cancer. She had not adjusted to her impending death and was thinking of traveling to her former home. Her daughter was caring for her. Outwardly she appeared to be in control and was respectfully attentive to my Bible reading and prayers. As time went on and her condition changed to the point where she was no longer confident of her power, another change took place. The Bible reading became more significant and prayer more pointed. She responded by expressing her pleasure in hearing



Hospice Chaplain Ralph Folsom sees first hand how the power of prayer relieves the anxiety and brings peace to Hospice patients in Ft. Myers, Fl.

things of God that now had become vital. We made it a custom to hold hands as we prayed and the morning of the day she died she was quick to extend her hand in such a way that it later seemed to me to be her most positive desire and conviction to share in this petition to God.

I call on a man who is fundamentally a good man, but throughout his lifetime did not go to church. I saw no fear of death but there was an overwhelming sense of regret that God had been neglected. He had not read the Bible, nor did he know how to pray. His pain was under control and his prognosis gives him time to read the Bible by concentrating on Christ's words. His witness: he is thrilled with what he is reading. He regrets not having done it earlier in life but his regret is mitigated to with a joy that has penetrated his inner being. His fear was dispelled by God responding to his reaching out. God has given him a peace along with confidence that He is at last with him

and will be with him into all that he is yet to be.

God has given him a peace along with confidence.

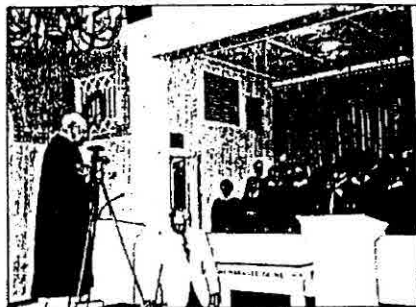
Another man I call on has been ill with cancer for about six years. He has had surgery, but no cure. I have been told that he was never a religious man. He expresses some anger with God for his prolonged life in which he "can't do anything." He once mentioned suicide but I believe it made sense to him when it was explained that God is the God of the living and not of the dead. He permits me to read the Bible to him and readily agrees to having prayer. Though he doesn't share his inner feelings, I have seen a tear in his eye at the end of the prayer. I feel there is more knowing faith in him than even he is willing to admit.

I feel there is more knowing faith in him than even he is willing to admit.

I call on a genuinely religious family whose wife and mother is dying of cancer. I mentioned my deep feelings concerning eternal life just before praying one day and the husband and father said, "Why this is what Christ was all about." He could not have pleased me more as he revealed his knowledge of what I have come to believe to be the focus of Christ's message to man.

God validates our prayer by His response.

Regretfully, once in a while there is one who is somewhat negative to statements of Christian faith. One comment was, "I don't relate to that." It follows that the chaplain is very limited from there on. It is difficult to be constructive when God is perceived in nebulous terms. Here a



Ralph B. Folsom perches precariously on a table to frame a photograph of the Thomas A. Edison Church choir of which he is a member. Besides being Hope Hospice Chaplain, Ralph serves on the Spiritual Resources Commission, CCCNA. He and his wife Evelyn travel extensively in their van and Holiday trailer. His carving of the Mayflower hangs on the wall in the foyer of the CCCNA office in Oak Creek, Wisc.

sermon would be appropriate as to how all of us can give effective Christian witness in the world.

We can speak of the power of prayer but it is more to the point to speak of God's presence and His intentions for us. As we pray, we confirm to God either our knowledge or willingness to know how we may more perfectly be fashioned by Him. God validates our prayer by His response and thus God gives us the gift of two-way communication. The end of life actually becomes the moment of beginning of God's intention for us. ■

Plymouth Church Deals with the Abortion Issue

*by the Rev. John C. Hembruch
Associate Minister, Plymouth Congregational Church*

Editor's Note: I am sure the views of Congregationalists vary widely on the complex moral issue of abortion. As a male, I feel embarrassed, like Governor Mario Cuomo, to say anything about abortion. Women bear most of the anguish. However, in this election year you can be sure the conflict between pro-life and pro-choice forces will continue. As in Plymouth Congregational Church of Wichita, the conflict may affect your church. In this light, the Plymouth Church story should be helpful.

Rev. Hembruch's comments are admittedly slanted toward pro-choice but acknowledge it is not the only solution to a complex problem.

Other viewpoints are welcome. It is not the role of *The Congregationalist* to endorse either the pro-life or pro-choice position.

—JBP

Members of Plymouth Congregational Church have experienced many tense situations due to the presence last summer of Operation Rescue in Wichita. OR is the militant anti-abortion group whose national leaders came to town in mid-July to launch 46 days of anti-abortion activities. During this time of protest and blockades at three local clinics where abortions are performed, 2,657 arrests were made of more than 1,700 people (some were arrested more than once). The chief target has been the clinic of Dr. George Tiller. Tiller is one of a handful of physicians in our nation who performs third-trimester abortions. He has received referrals from all 50 states, and performs as many as 40 to 50 late-term abortions annually. Among the more memorable scenes were occasional violent confrontations between protesters and police officers, a brigade of protesters scaling seven-foot protective walls around one clinic, and some protesters using their young children as part of driveway blockades.

In terms of faith and theology, Wichita can be characterized as a conservative community. Most of the churchgoing public belong to congregations which are aligned, or in sympathy, with what we commonly call Conservative-evangelicalism or Fundamentalism. Perhaps 25 percent of

attenders belong to the Roman Catholic Church. Plymouth is one of a minority of faith communities, including Unitarians, some Presbyterians, some Disciples of Christ, and several United Methodist, that can be described as "liberal" in theological orientation. The portion of our membership that is "pro-choice" is probably 90 percent or more.

***We hope that in a
very real sense we
are both.***

OR permeated every level of the Wichita community as evidence by our now historic "disruption." At the 11 a.m. worship on August 18, a church member participating in OR rose from her position in the third row near the lectern, climbed the steps into the chancel, and chastised the congregation for being "new age" Congregationalists out of touch with our biblical and historical heritage. Two others began to distribute a "research" paper. I rose to the pulpit, told the woman we appreciated her perspective, and her right to proclaim it, but not at this time. I asked her and her helpers to be seated, and for the ushers to collect the materials to be made available after worship. The rest of our appalled and embarrassed congregation was quite relieved that the disrupters seated

themselves, and worship continued without further incident.

Reading the statement later, I found the woman's "research" to be regurgitated anti-abortion propaganda with biblical citations dripping from the ends of sentences. Six of seven footnotes came from Arthur Rouner's *The Congregational Way of Life* which she used as support for her argument, portraying Rouner as one who would support the views and tactics of OR. Among other things, she argued that abortion is not morally acceptable in *any* circumstance: "I have . . . heard words that condone pro-choice and pro-death of innocent children, if their mothers so desire. . . . That argument is out of line with the will of God. I also contend that if we do not take a stand against this sort of proclamation, we too are guilty of encouraging sexual immorality, sexual irresponsibility, and the murder of innocent children—and the demise of our society and Christianity. . . . God has a plan for all the children and their parents. That includes the mother and children of rape and incest . . . We cannot encourage or condone others in any way, shape or form to take over and intervene in God's work of life without serious consequences."

After a series of phone calls to church leaders, the woman had come to my office on August 8, where we attempted to find some common ground on matters of the Christian Faith as it relates to abortion. The two-hour discussion bore little fruit as the next day she appeared on national newscasts as one of twelve protesters arrested on federal charges of contempt of court (multiple arrests for illegal blockades). In a request probably orchestrated by OR leaders, word came to me that she would remain in prison until our church posted the \$15,000 bond set by authorities. Her resolve went untested when charges were dropped a few days later for lack of evidence. A few more conversations ensued, and the disturbance of August 18 was the result.

Should I Be Pro-Life or Pro-Choice?

(Excerpt from Rev. Hembruch sermon, August 25, 1991)

Certainly I am concerned about the availability of abortion to almost anyone for almost any reason. Too many people have abortions without admitting that a human life is being destroyed. And too many people have abortions out of convenience rather than out of need. As I sit with the "Religious Leaders for Choice" group of which I am a part, I note that every single clergyperson from the diverse traditions represented shares those feelings. When we discuss our sincere and serious desire to curtail abortions of convenience, leaders affirm their commitment in counseling to aggressively pursue options like adoption. But we also affirm our own answer to the question of the day. Should I be Pro-life or Pro-choice? We hope that in a very real sense we are both—not in the way that Operation Rescue would like us to be, but in the way of pursuing a careful balance between reverence for life *and* reverence for freedom of choice. I hope that we are sensitive to the complexities of the issue, and allow the answer to that question to vary according to each situation. ■

In early August various forces advocating a pro-choice position considered ways to oppose OR. A group of ministers met and issued a press release on August 9. It expressed displeasure with OR claims that their view on abortion (no abortion under any circumstances) is the only position acceptable to God. The statement also affirmed a position that is both Christian *and* pro-choice, and supported the fact that many people of faith and conscience are pro-choice.

At its second meeting, the group was officially dubbed "Religious Leaders for Choice," and is composed of at least 17 different faith groups, now including Jewish and Baha'i. Coming under the umbrella of "Voices for Choice," which includes 20 pro-choice local organizations, we participated in a pro-choice rally downtown on August 24 that attracted over 5000 people.

I tackled the subject anew in a sermon for August 25. Our vocal protester was present again, and knocked on my door twice prior to 11

a.m. worship to ask permission to distribute literature and to supply an announcement to read. We allowed the distribution, and shortened the announcement. Reaction to the sermon was extremely positive. I still receive cards or phone calls of thanks for expressing a religious foundation for "the other side."

In the weeks following the disturbance the woman was active in approaching many church members to do something about our church and its clergy, which she characterized in such terms as "godless." Finding little support for her position she has renounced her membership, and seeking a congregation where she will be happier.

In my work with Religious Leaders for Choice, I note that every clergyperson from the diverse traditions represented shares feelings of concern about the availability of abortion to almost anyone for almost any reason. But we affirm our own

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► **Abortion**

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answer to the question: Should I be Pro-life or Pro-choice? We hope that in a very real sense we are both—not in the way that OR would like us to be, but in the way of pursuing a careful balance between reverence for life and reverence for freedom of choice. I hope that we are sensitive to the complexities of the issue, and allow the answer to that question to vary according to each situation.

We continue to meet and work on different strategies including theological education, dialogue with anti-abortion clergy, voter registration to combat a possible referendum to outlaw all abortions within the city limits, and development of a bibliography and circulating library on the issue. Though widely reported events like the "Rural America Speaks out for Life" tractorcade of farm vehicles have given Wichita the

image of a hopelessly backward community, we have been encouraged by a poll conducted by the *Wichita Eagle* newspaper. Of the minority of respondents who have changed their minds on the abortion debate because of OR's presence, two-thirds have moved *away* from an anti-abortion stance. We have found our voice to be very important to Wichita. Originally some asked, "Where is the religious voice for choice? Why are you silent?" We did not feel silent. We were working in a variety of ways, just not organized and attracting media attention. Requests for sermons, articles, and tapes have been enormous. We have recognized again the value of telling stories—the kind of stories that were told 20 years ago, but presently attract no media attention—like the one we heard from a woman who came to "Religious Leaders for Choice," and spontaneously addressed the meeting.

She spoke about her grandmother who with her husband and two young daughters tried to survive the depths of the depression, eating suppers like dandelion soup. Finally she got a job. But soon found she was pregnant which meant losing the job. In desperation she tried to perform an abortion which resulted in her death.

Hundreds of women still die from illegal abortions. Others obtain abortions for convenience, ignoring the sanctity of life. Somehow we must achieve a careful balance between reverence for life *and* reverence for freedom of choice. ■

John C. Hembruch was educated at the University of Michigan and Princeton Theological Seminary. He and his wife Therese have one son, Benjamin. John serves as Associate Minister of Plymouth Congregational Church, and is a founding member of Religious Leaders for Choice in Wichita.

On the Right to Bear Arms

I Almost Shot Charles Manson

by the Rev. Dr. Harry R. Bulman

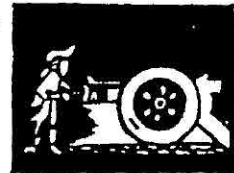
Editor's Note: The recent mass killings in New Jersey, Texas, Michigan, and Iowa have raised new questions about the right to bear arms as stated in the Second Amendment to the Constitution. I believe Harry Bulman would agree that the writers of the Second Amendment did not envision mass killings but endorsed the right for defense as Harry indicates, or to resist tyranny. The big question remains as to what type of gun control would really prevent these major tragedies. The Congregationalist would welcome your views.

The Bill of Rights

SECOND AMENDMENT

"A well-regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed."

Although it remains a political powder keg, the amendment never has been interpreted definitively by the courts. The political debate centers on how far the government may go in regulating the manufacture, sale and individual ownership of guns.



One of the most controversial themes of our times is the right to bear arms—a right expressed in the second amendment of the Bill of Rights: The National Rifle Association fights for this right with a powerful lobby while other organizations, alarmed by the assassinations of the Kennedy brothers and Martin Luther King, the attempt on Ronald Reagan, and the constant lethal gun-killings in ghetto and supposedly sedate suburbs, press fiercely for the abolition of the right to carry arms. For the Christian the business of bearing deadly weapons is a serious moral problem. I happen to be one of the minority of ministers who maintains the right to bear a weapon as a means of self-defense. I would not go as far as my illustrious pastor-ancestor the Rev. Dr. Daniel Tappan, who, hearing that a British frigate was cruising the waters of Massachusetts Bay during the war of 1812, carried his musket into the pulpit as he preached on the

Sabbath in the seaport town of Manchester, Massachusetts. But I find nothing in Scripture that declares the weapon of self-defense to be unlawful.

This article will not be a careful, logical treatise on the ethics and legalities of bearing arms. It will merely be a bit of exegesis and a couple of yarns. The Old Testament is crammed with references to lethal weapons—swords, spears, daggers, axes, slings, and the nail Jael drove into sleeping Sisera's forehead. The Old Covenant favors the use of lethal weapons against the foes of the Chosen People, and Gideon (he of the 70 sons and many wives) gives the doctrine resonant blessing—"The sword of the Lord and of Gideon."

Let's take a quick look at the most pertinent passage in the New Testament—the episode in which Peter slices off the ear of the servant of the high priest in an armed effort to prevent Christ's arrest. All the gospels tell the same story, but we examine

only Luke's account, which is the longest and most perplexing:

And he said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye anything? And they said, Nothing.

Then said he unto them, but now he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one.

For I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in me, And he was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning me have no end. (Luke 22:35, 36, 37 KJV)

This preliminary account is the most troublesome to those who are against bearing arms. Jesus here tells the disciples that conditions have suddenly changed. The time has come when weapons must be procured even at the cost of selling essential garments. There's a bit of puzzlement or protest in the disciples'

answer, "Look, Lord, we already have two swords." From this it is evident that some of them were already bearing arms. Christ's enigmatic reply, "It is enough," is capable of two interpretations. The first is one that upholds the pacifist position. Jesus is sadly resigned to the disciples' dullness. "Enough talk: you simply don't grasp my meaning." The second, and to my mind far more credible reading, is that in Christ's opinion two swords were sufficient for the occasion—enough to deter a lynch mob, but not enough to fight a quaternion of trained Roman soldiers.

Luke's second passage deals with the episode of conflict:

And one of them smote the servant of the high priest, and cut off his right ear. And Jesus answered and said, Suffer ye thus far. And he touched his ear and healed him (Luke 22:50, 51).

The blow is struck, the ear severed, and once again no word of rebuke is spoken against the use of arms. Characteristically, Luke the physician is the only evangelist to report the healing of the wound.

These two passages contain the substance of Christ's direct teaching on the matter of bearing arms: it is not possible to draw a doctrine of flat prohibition from them. Exegesis over, I now spin my yarns. Some years ago I read to the Los Angeles Clerics' Club a long, carefully prepared paper on the ethics of bearing arms in the perspective of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Not surprisingly it was received with disapprobation. But at the next meeting the Rev. Dr. Joseph M. Appelgate, of good memory, gave me a brown paper bag. In it was a 6.5 Mauser officer's dress pistol and a manuscript telling a highly interesting tale.

Dr. Appelgate, a Navy chaplain, was one of the first ashore after the surrender of Tokyo, with orders to search out any missionary prisoners. One of those he found was a Lutheran pastor who had been interned since Pearl Harbor. In appreciation of Dr. Appelgate's help the pastor gave

him the pistol, together with a fascinating bit of personal history.

The pastor was of an aristocratic Prussian family and had served in World War I with such distinction that he was awarded the Iron Cross for bravery. There were two ways in which this coveted award could be received. It could be pinned to your tunic or, if you were of the heroic Junker tradition, you could elect to have it branded in your flesh above your heart. Our young officer (not yet ordained) chose to have his honor given the hard way.

After the war he had a successful pastoral career, and married a Jewish girl of good family. All went well until Hitler came to power. Our pastor presented the Führer with a problem. Clearly he had flagrantly violated Nazi law by marrying a Jewess. But you simply couldn't execute a minister of the state religion, a member of a distinguished Prussian family, an authentic example of the master race—a man of such personal courage that he had chosen to have his Iron Cross given by means of the white hot branding iron. The problem was solved by exile: he and his Jewish wife were to leave Germany instantly, never to return. So he went to America, and from there to Japan as a missionary. His pistol, he told Dr. Appelgate, saved his life several times during the perilous years of his internment. I have given it to my son, to be cherished in memory of a brave Christian who believed in the right to bear arms.

The eyes of the driver sent me to the trunk of my car.

My second story tells of an intense personal experience. I have told it elsewhere in print but it is pertinent here. On a blisteringly hot day in the desert (it was 114 degrees at noon in the nearby town of Mojave), I sought for shade in the ghost town of Garlock. All I could find was a scanty foot-wide strip cast by the deserted jail which stood on the very

edge of the paved road. As I sat there eating my lunch of a sandwich and a soft drink, a black car came drifting up from the South. The driver was a small, heavily bearded man; three others were with him; they stared at me.

The car went up the road a few hundred yards, turned, and came slowly back. It passed me a few yards away, and there was that in the eyes of the driver that sent me to the trunk of my car where I kept a Ruger .22 single six with a magnum cylinder. As I expected, the car turned North again, and as it rolled by I ostentatiously pumped shells into the piece.

I could see no emotion in the driver's black eyes.

I then sat down in my strip of shade, fully cocked gun at my right hand, sandwich and soft drink beside it. To the North, the car came to a stop. I had no doubt that if they came to me a fourth time they meant ill. Although I was alone in a desert town, strangely I felt no fear. I had made a simple battle plan: the first man out of the car would be instantly shot. A curious alien idiom went through my mind, "If you get your jollies beating up old men, don't try me. I won't be easy."

The car did stop, not more than ten feet away. We stared in silence. I could see no emotion in the driver's black eyes. To this day my conscience gives me trouble about my total lack of emotion. I can understand killing in hot blood—the crime of passion. I cannot understand my cold intellectual decision to kill this enemy if he opened his car door to come at me. There's something to be said for Jeremiah's and John Calvin's doctrine of the total depravity of man.

The confrontation ended abruptly when the driver broke the lock of staring, gunned his motor, and roared off to the South. I finished my

