

# 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*

**W**e 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

**T**raditionally, 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. ■**

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*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.*

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# Going Home to God

*Hospice Chaplain Shows the Way through Prayer*

by Ralph B. Folsom

**H**ope 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-

er, 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.***

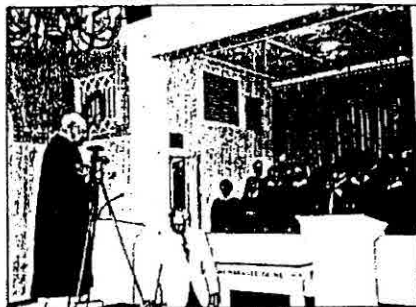
Another man I call on has been ill with cancer for about six years. He has had surgery, but no cure. I have been told that he was never a religious man. He expresses some anger with God for his prolonged life in which he "can't do anything." He once mentioned suicide but I believe it made sense to him 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.

—/BP

**M**embers 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

► See **Abortion** on page 24

## ► **Abortion**

*Continued from page 9*

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. ■

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*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.*

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## On the Right to Bear Arms

# I Almost Shot Charles Manson

by the Rev. Dr. Harry R. Bulman

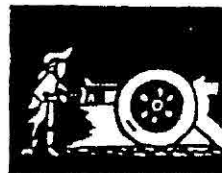
*Editor's Note: The recent mass killings in New Jersey, Texas, Michigan, and Iowa have raised new questions about the right to bear arms as stated in the Second Amendment to the Constitution. I believe Harry Bulman would agree that the writers of the Second Amendment did not envision mass killings but 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

## ► **Arms**

*Continued from page 13*

lunch and drove home to Los Angeles. It was too hot for safe hiking in the canyons of the El Paso Mountains that afternoon.

I wondered why my hackles had risen at the sight of the little bearded driver. Shortly after our confrontation the old custodian of Holland Mine in nearby Iron Canyon told me that he was uneasy about a band of hippies camping on Goler Heights. The leader's name was Manson. Ten days later the nude and ravaged body of a girl was found near Garlock.

I often go by the Garlock Jail as I take safaris to Death Valley, and in passing I wonder about other possible outcomes of the brief tense en-



counter. If I had shot Charlie Manson (and I am 99 and 44 one hundredths percent certain that my silent adversary was he) pregnant murdered Sharon Tate's baby could now be a young adult. If I hadn't had a gun, I might well have been dead these 23 years, with a lot of fun missed, a fair amount of work for our Way undone, and this article unwritten. ■

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*The Rev. Dr. Harry R. Butman, one-time editor and now contributing editor to The Congregationalist, has served the CCCNA in many ways, including moderator and chairman of the executive committee for three years. He helped frame the Articles of Association which describe our corporate identity.*

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## *Another Point of View on Amendment II*

# Gun Control Is Constitutional

by Robert A. Goldwin

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Congress has been dismayingly inconsistent in its voting on gun-control legislation this year, first passing the Brady Bill, then moving in the opposite direction by defeating a provision to ban certain assault weapons and ammunition. But in one respect members of Congress are consistent: they demand respect for our "constitutional right to own a gun." They cite the Constitution's Second Amendment and argue it prohibits effective national regulation of the private ownership of guns.

But there are strong grounds for arguing that the Second Amendment is no barrier to gun-control legislation. In my opinion, it even provides a solid constitutional basis for effective national legislation to regulate guns and gun owners.

The best clues to the meaning of the key words and phrases are in debates in the First Congress of the United States. The Members of that Congress were the authors of the Second Amendment. A constitutional amendment calling for the prohibition of standing armies in time of peace was proposed by six state ratifying conventions. Virginia's version, later copied by New York and North Carolina, brought together three elements in one article—affirmation of a right to bear arms, reliance on state militia, and opposition to a standing army:

"That the people have a right to keep and bear arms; that a well-regulated militia, composed of the body of the people trained to arms, is the proper, natural, and safe defense of a free state; that standing armies, in

times of peace, are dangerous to liberty, and therefore ought to be avoided. . . ."

The purpose was to limit the power of the new Congress to establish a standing army, and instead to rely on state militias under command of governors. The Constitution was ratified without adopting any of the scores of proposed amendments. But in several states ratification came only with solemn pledges that amendments would follow.

Soon after the First Congress met, James Madison, elected as a congressman from Virginia on the basis of such a pledge, proposed a number of amendments resembling yet different from articles proposed by states. These eventually became the Bill of Rights. In the version of the arms amendment he presented, Madison dropped mention of a standing army and added a conscientious objector clause.

"The right of the people to keep and bear arms will not be infringed, a well armed and well regulated militia being the best security of a free country, but no person religiously scrupulous of bearing arms shall be compelled to render military service in person."

In this version, "bearing arms" must mean "to render military service," or why else would there have to be an exemption for religious reasons? What right must not be infringed? The right of people to serve in the militia.

This militia amendment was referred to a congressional committee, and came out of committee in this form:

"A well regulated militia, composed of the body of the people, being the best security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed; but no person religiously scrupulous shall be compelled to bear arms."

Two significant changes had been made: first, the phrase "to render military service in person" was replaced by the phrase "to bear arms," again indicating that they are two ways to say the same thing; second, an explanation was added, that the "militia" is "composed of the body of the people."

The House then debated this new version in committee of the whole and, surprisingly, considering the subsequent history of the provision, never once did any member mention the private uses of arms, for self-protection, or hunting, or any other personal purpose. The debate focused exclusively on the conscientious objector provision. Eventually the committee's version was narrowly approved. The Senate in turn gave it its final form, briefer, unfortunately more elliptical, and with the exemption for conscientious objectors deleted:

"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."

Certain explanations were lost or buried in this legislative process: that the right to bear arms meant the right to serve in the militia; that just about everybody was included in the militia; and that the amendment as a whole sought to minimize if not elim-



inate reliance on a standing army by emphasizing the role of the state militia, which would require that everyone be ready to be called to serve.

But what about the private right "to keep and bear arms," to own a gun for self-defense and hunting? Isn't that clearly protected by the amendment? Didn't just about everybody own a gun in 1791? Wouldn't that right go without saying? Yes, of course, it would go without saying, especially when there were no organized police forces and when hunting was essential to the food supply.

But such facts tell us almost nothing relevant to our question. Almost everyone also owned a dog for the same purposes. The Constitution nevertheless says nothing about the undeniable right to own a dog. There are uncountable numbers of rights not enumerated in the Constitution. These rights are neither denied nor disparaged by not being raised to the explicit constitutional level. All of them are constitutionally subject to regulation.

The right to bear arms protected in the Second Amendment has to do directly with "a well-regulated militia." More evidence of the connection can be found in the Militia Act of 1792.

"Every free able-bodied white male citizen" (it was 1792, after all) was required by the act to "enroll" in the militia for training and active service in case of need. When reporting for service, every militiaman was required to provide a prescribed rifle or musket, and ammunition.

Here we see the link of the private and public aspects of bearing arms. The expectation was that every man would have his own firearms. But the aspect that was raised to the level of constitutional concern was the public interest in those arms.

What does this mean for the question of gun control today? Well, for example, it means that Congress has the constitutional power to enact a Militia Act of 1992, to require every person who owns a gun or aspires to own one to "enroll" in the militia. In plain 1990s English, if you want to own a gun, sign up with the National Guard.

Requiring every gun owner to register with the National Guard (as we require 18-year-olds to register with the Selective Service) would provide the information about gun owners sought by the Brady and Staggers bills, and much more. Standards could be set for purchase or ownership of guns, and penalties could be established.

Restoring a 200-year-old understanding of the Constitution may be difficult, but there isn't time to dawdle. Americans now own more than 200 million guns, and opinion polls show Americans want gun control. Why not avail ourselves of the Second Amendment remedy? Call in the militia, which is, after all, "composed of the body of the people." ■

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*Robert A. Goldwin is a resident scholar in constitutional studies at the American Enterprise Institute. This article is reprinted with permission from The Wall Street Journal, Thursday, December 12, 1991.*

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## Even the Most Inhumane Inmates Can Learn Christian Values

by Cynthia Thorpe  
First Congregational Church, Oshkosh, Wis.

**M**y career as a health services unit manager and the career of my husband, Dennis Kavanaugh, in a variety of therapeutic, security and managerial roles, represent a combined total of 21 years in the corrections field. We often say there is no human behavior act which will surprise or shock us. But that hasn't dulled our senses to the human sufferings we experience through our work or daily lives.

Dennis began his correctional career as a crisis intervention worker at Ethan Allen School for Boys in 1980, upon completion of his master in social work at the University of Iowa. Ethan Allen is a maximum security juvenile detention facility in Southeastern Wisconsin. Clearly, corrections was not a conscious career choice as much as an opportunity to draw upon his previous seven years of juvenile and protection services experience as a community-based social worker, and the desire to return to our home state.

I chose to pursue a nursing degree after completing a B.S. Degree, majoring in Political Science and English. In 1980, I was head nurse on a surgical urology unit at the Veterans Hospital in Des Moines, Iowa. I conveniently transferred to the Milwaukee VA as head nurse of an acute psychiatric unit. A year later, I accepted a position with Corrections as

a health services unit manager at Ethan Allen. The unit consisted of four registered nurses, one secretary, one dentist, one dental hygienist, and one part-time physician. The position offered the challenge and autonomy to plan and direct the delivery of care to youthful offenders drawing on my administrative, educational, and direct nursing skills. Here we were part of the same administrative team, often involved in treatment plans for troubled boys. At that time, staff were encouraged to be involved and frequently we took the boys off-grounds for "earned" privileges.

Our first daughter, Meghan, was born in 1981. My working until the day she was born caused quite a stir on grounds. Dennis gained the reputation for being really hard-nosed for making his wife work in her condition. These same young men who

would think nothing of physically assaulting or robbing innocent victims could be trusted to play with Meghan (now 10 years old), as she became a frequent visitor to our work site.

In 1986, I transferred my position into adult corrections, eager to apply my knowledge and managerial skills in a completely new state-of-the-art prison. Oshkosh Correctional Institution, located on 43 acres on the outskirts of Oshkosh in Northeastern Wisconsin, opened its doors in August. Originally designed to house and treat 300 young (30 years of age or younger) offenders, Oshkosh Correctional Institution quickly expanded to meet the needs of a growing prison population. Currently involving 530 medium security male inmates, our program remains dynamic as we address the needs of a much older and diverse clientele. One inmate recently reached his 90th birthday. We had 12 inmates in wheelchairs during the same time period. We also opened a 100-bed sex-offender unit.



*Husband and wife Dennis Kavanaugh and Cynthia Thorpe both have managerial roles in correctional institutions. Cynthia works at the Oshkosh Correctional Institution (shown) and Dennis at the Wisconsin Resource Center.*

Dennis continued in the field of corrections in several other facilities, including a female institution. He is now a unit manager at the Wisconsin Resource Center, a medium security prison developed to handle inmates with special needs such as mental illness, behavioral problems, or those not able to make it in the regular correctional facilities.

## **Religion a Constitutional right.**

The religious beliefs and practices for inmates have been deemed a constitutional right as defined in the Wisconsin Administrative Code for Corrections. This code clearly delineates issues relating to access, practice, and worship accommodations within the facility. If requested, inmates' schedules may be altered to allow religious participation. The chaplain's position, a full-time state employee, is to plan and direct all religious programming. This position requires no formal ecclesiastical training. Our chaplain at Oshkosh Correctional Institution had previously served 20 years in a Lutheran parish. The chaplain coordinates worship services, instructional classes, special activities, and individual marital and family counseling. These tasks could not be accomplished without the assistance of 30 community lay volunteers, plus the services of a Catholic priest whose time (23 hours weekly) is supported by the local diocese. The current religious programs encompass services for Muslims, Jews, Catholics, Native Americans, WICCA's, and an ecumenical Protestant group. All groups are permitted to worship regularly and observe major festivals. Inmates' beliefs prevail. However, security issues may dictate or curtail practices that directly violate rules or promote destruction or non-orderly behavior. Alcoholic beverages are not allowed in the facility, so non-alcoholic wine or juice is used for communion services.

The 22 practicing Native Americans meet weekly for their services



*Oshkosh inmates work in chapel where services are held for various religious groups with the assistance of 30 lay volunteers plus a Catholic priest and a Lutheran chaplain. A sweat lodge was constructed on the grounds for 22 Native Americans to practice their religious purification ceremony.*

and monthly for their purification ceremony in the sweat lodge, which was constructed on-grounds for this rite.

Jumah, the Muslim prayer service, is observed on Fridays. The current group of three (size varies) also meets for a weekly Koran study. One of the major celebrations in the Muslim faith occurs each spring when the Fast of Ramadan is observed. This traditional fast, from dawn to dusk, is achieved by providing meals earlier and later than usual to participating inmates. This is quite a concession for a facility run on security rules and regulations. At the end of the fast, the Feast of Ramadan is observed, followed 30 days later by a second Feast of UL-ADHA, a celebration of Thanksgiving.

## **God's forgiveness is a critical element here.**

The WICCA group has a following of approximately 12 inmates who meet twice monthly. WICCA is an earth religion along the pagan lines, observing festivals closely lined with the seasons.

Finally, the Catholic and Protestant groups meet regularly for worship services and Bible classes. All major

church holidays and celebrations are observed. Special services are scheduled to allow family members to worship with the inmates at Easter and Christmas when security staff is available to supervise large groups.

In reality, prison, or loss of freedom, is an inmate's punishment; rehabilitation is a personal decision while incarcerated. Avenues offered include educational, vocational, medical, and clinical modalities. Formalized religious programming is another treatment offering for inmates. Beyond fulfillment of a spiritual nature, religion teaches acceptance of a greater authority, respect of others, and discipline in our lives. For the inmate who has failed miserably in society and is lacking in self-esteem, God's word and unconditional love may be the first step toward healing and acceptance. God's forgiveness is a critical element here. I believe the Christian concepts of forgiveness is vital to those who work in prisons. Objectivity and professionalism may be asked of the caretakers, however, it is the non-judgmental, caring, fair individuals who are most effective in their roles.

Inmates have committed tremendously inhumane acts against others.

► **Prison**

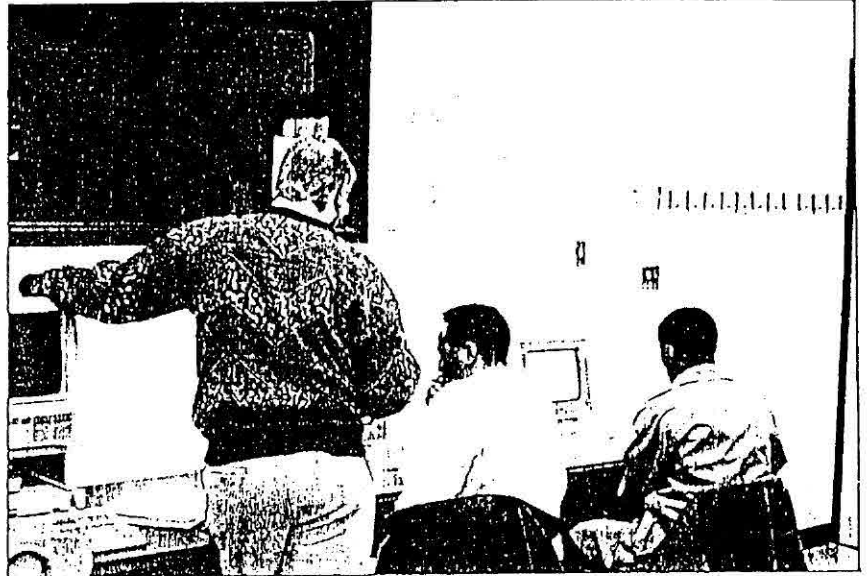
*Continued from page 7*

One needs to look beyond these acts when providing treatment. Dennis draws his reserve from deeply rooted Christian values begun at home, continued in parochial school, focused in the seminary, and tempered by Christian life experiences. I, too, feel that Christian values support me daily, preventing the burnout attitude towards inmates. I feel I am an advocate for some of society's least desirable products who need forgiveness, compassion, and fairness. We could not work in corrections without a strong belief in the worth and dignity of human life. ■

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*Cynthia Thorpe and Dennis Kavanaugh are active in the First Congregational Church of Oshkosh, Wis.*

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*Prison walls do not eliminate the need to face the challenge of modern technology. Rehabilitation is a personal decision for inmates. They can achieve rehabilitation in various forms, including educational, vocational, medical and clinical, and religious programs.*



**Habitat for Humanity  
International**

## CHRISTIAN LOVE IN ACTION

*Giving God's People a Decent Place to Live*

*by Ronda Wooten, Executive Director  
Habitat for Humanity International, Sandusky County (Ohio)*



*Ronda Wooten practices hands-on direction of a Habitat project.*

**H**ABITAT FOR HUMANITY, MILLARD AND LINDA FULLER\*, JIMMY AND ROSALYNN CARTER. You know or have heard of one or more of these names and maybe you know what they stand for. Like many people, I only knew that former President Jimmy Carter as being involved in building houses "for the poor." I gave an irregular, small amount of money to the local affiliate in Oklahoma, my home state, but never became involved with the actual work. I had to go to Oregon and be taken underwing by Laura Morris to learn about HFH. She helped me get the paperwork underway to become a part of the great grassroots movement to eliminate poverty housing from the face of our earth. Because I

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\*Lawyer-businessman Millard Fuller and his wife Linda founded Habitat for Humanity International 16 years ago. He believes fervently that Habitat makes religion relevant: "Jesus said, 'If you see a stranger invite him in' ... The most creative way to invite a person in is to help that person build his or her own home."

always have had an interest in property and housing, buying a few and remodeling a few in years past, it seemed a natural lead to follow when looking for a good reason to get up each day. I needed a reason beyond comfortable cocooning and entrenching for old age, which seemed to be to be fast approaching! Now that I have worked with, been out-worked by so many, many 60-, 70-, 80-plus year-olds, my feelings of old age seem pretty ridiculous!

My ambition is small: I want to meet and work with people as they live the day-to-day balance of hope and anxiety for meaning in their lives; I want to experience the local cultures across our great land. In this past year of meeting the numerous people involved with HFH in some way, working with the many and only glimpsing the live of many more, I am close to fanatical on emphasizing the importance of living daily in the **now ... not past ... not future. Today, as it comes to us.** It has been the mixture called HFH that has shown me this scriptural wisdom. It is the **partner families**; their struggles of existing hand to mouth ...





*The ecumenical movement in action at 10 degrees below zero in Roscommon, Michigan. The workers include three American Baptists, one Roman Catholic, one Presbyterian and one Congregationalist.*

coming from a hard past. It is the volunteers, THE NOW, from extreme diverse backgrounds, giving of themselves to help the families and receiving so much more in return. It is a marriage; a "we" that develops ... a future ... a hope. More than anything else, the partnership of HFH with the families is a miracle, the promise of the Risen Savior, the gift of the Paraclete (Holy Spirit), the circle of unbroken, unending presence of God in His world.

### **MIRACLE HOMES BUILT WITH LOVE**

My pleasure has been to work at the headquarters of HFH in Americus, Ga. There I lived and worked with people who have one common denominator, all are seeking alternative lifestyles to serve their fellow beings and be effective witness and positive action to our broken world. There in Americus, I worked and worshiped with people whose lives have been transformed by the care and the vision that began with Millard and Linda Fuller and Clarence Jordan of Koininia Farms. The vision of "no more shacks" on our planet Earth.

In June of 1991, I began the 15 weeks of workcamps in 15 cities for the 15th anniversary of HFH. Four-

teen other teams did the same across the U.S. The numbers of people who were a part of this great undertaking is a staggering, uncountable number! I tried on many occasions to count



*Georgia Wildfang, Independence Oregon, says volunteering for Habitat is our way of "fulfilling our Christian faith. We feel far more privileged than the families we benefit." She and husband Howard belong to Christ Church, a combined Methodist and Presbyterian congregation.*

how many people gave something of themselves and their resources toward making the workcamps a success and to make those of us that were traveling feel welcome and comfortable. The figures are just too mind-boggling, but what a marvelous point of reflection and contemplation when I feel discouraged.

The people who traveled with me, some for a week, some for many weeks, are forever etched in my heart as the finest examples of what friendship and community brings to our hurting world. The retired, from both sides of the U.S.: Wildfangs, from Oregon, Martha, from New Hampshire, Percy, Don, from Iowa, Bruce, from New York, the Hicks, from Virginia. The young people from Canada, Illinois, Pennsylvania, New York, Maryland. The non-retired, but giving up vacation time to work hard ... from Hawaii, Indiana, Oklahoma ... In addition to all these people I was privileged to fellowship with, there were all the people who joined us from within the states we were working through: Michigan and Ohio.

Just as there were so many volunteers who became an integral part of the fabric of my life, working with the partner families always enriched and encouraged my purpose for being a part of HFH. When you see first hand a family like Jennifer and her three

young children, working to the point of exhaustion and illness, plus trying to finish a nursing degree; then hearing later about her son Matt's response to his mother's apology that Christmas would be very sparse this year ... "I don't need presents, Mother, I have my house." ...

When you work with a family of ten, Mary and Willie, who for 13 years have lived in a three bedroom apartment in a housing project; yet have loving, disciplined, mannered children; who are putting in every spare minute into helping build another partner family's house before their own can be completed, all the while praising God for their good fortune, always joyful, ready with kindness for everyone else ...

*Continued on Next Page*



*Kristi Schutjer, recent Harvard Divinity School Graduate and member of First Congregational Church, Mansfield, Ohio, holds the ladder for hammering Mildred Ginn who now occupies the home with husband Sylvester and their three children.*

## HABITAT Shows God's Love

*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*

—Matthew 5:15

*Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.*

—Matthew 25:40

*If a rich person sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against his brother, how can he claim that he loves God? My children, our love should not be just words and talk; it must be true love, which shows itself in action.*

—1 John 3:17-18

**T**hese verses of scripture serve as the basis for the vision of Habitat for Humanity International: to put Christ's words of love into action and do what is now more needed than ever: to love our neighbors, to build and rebuild families and neighborhoods one house at a time.

Many, especially women, think that Habitat has no place for them. "I can't hammer nails or saw wood." "I'm not strong enough to carry lumber." Little do they realize that Habitat for Humanity is fraught with opportunities to utilize God-given talents in ministry, from placing telephone calls to preparing and serving lunches to volunteer workers.

Most Habitat affiliates are ecumenical in scope. So additional opportunity is afforded to fellowship with volunteers from other denominations while actively demonstrating love for one's neighbor. One cannot adequately describe the feelings of gratification that accrue.

I encourage you to explore these possibilities in your local Habitat for Humanity affiliate. You might be surprised at how much fun it can be to show forth God's love.

—Marjorie T. Walbridge, First Congregational Church,  
Roscommon, Michigan  
Women's Commission, CCCNA,  
Chairman, Volunteer Coordination Committee, Roscommon  
County Habitat for Humanity.



When one has these memories, plus hundreds more similar sweet fragrances of love in action to recall, all the sore muscles, hard gym floors, hot weather, paperwork, all the inconveniences melt into nothingness.

David and Sara Tucker's son Nathan, Mansfield, Ohio, and the youth choir he is part of, sang the song that rings often in my ears ... work for the night is coming ...

Work until there are "No More Shacks" ... Work until all God's people have a simple, decent place to live! ■

*Trained as a nurse and legal secretary, Ronda Wooten typifies the ecumenical spirit of Habitat. She was baptized a Methodist, converted to Catholicism, and now attends the Church of the Latter Day Saints. "I find something I like in every denomination," she says. As executive director of Sandusky County (Ohio) Habitat since November, 1991, she receives housing, transportation and a stipend for food, but no salary. In 1991 she was involved in more than 50 home-building projects in Michigan and Ohio. In October, she expects to be "on the road again" working with Habitat projects in another location.*

*Former President Jimmy Carter and wife Rosalynn have been strong participants in the Habitat program since he left the White House in 1980. He commented as follows in the January, 1992 issue of Good Housekeeping:*

*"Being out of the political arena and doing the kinds of things we choose to do now has given the news media a different perspective of what we are and what we tried to do when we were in the White House.*

*"I think building houses for poor families is much clearer demonstration of those qualities than trying to serve in the political world. I am not involved in the controversial nature of politics and all our programs are attractive, humanitarian and non-political."*

## Habitat Built Homes 'Right'

by Andrea Stone, USA Today

Hurricane Andrew blew down whole blocks, but 27 homes built by the non-profit Habitat for Humanity survived almost undamaged.

"In a nutshell, we built them right," says Kevin McPeak, a coordinator for the volunteer group that builds low-income housing.

Word about Habitat's houses—which at \$35,000 cost about half the average south Florida home—comes amid charges that shoddy construction added to the devastation.

Habitat's wood-frame houses lost a few shingles and windows; the center truss on one was damaged.

They were built in the past three years and conform to hurricane building codes.

But while codes let builders staple roofs on, Habitat uses nails, which are stronger. While builders aren't required to bolt frames to foundations, Habitat does.

Says McPeak: "When a hurricane leaves [your] building standing, it's nature saying you built a good structure. We don't cut corners."

Habitat, whose most famous volunteer is Jimmy Carter, has built or renovated more than 16,500 homes worldwide since 1976.

The group relies on land donations and private gifts. Owners help build the homes and get no-interest loans.

The group is trying to raise at least \$3 million for up to 200 homes in Florida.

—Sept. 9, 1992



*The Rev. Robert Quillen (with cap), United Church of Christ, Fremont, Ohio, assisting in Habitat construction for Yolanda Rangle (left) who shares the now completed home with six children, two of her own, three of her sister's and one grandchild.*



# ABORTION

## *The need for an informed Christian perspective*

*by the Rev. James Beinke, Senior Minister  
First Congregational Church, Roscommon, Mich.*

**Editor's Note:** *The recent Supreme Court decision on abortion straddled the pro-life-pro-choice issue. So the controversy continues, as it would have regardless of the decision.*

*The following article by the Rev. James Beinke presents an informed Christian viewpoint from a moderate pro-life position.*

*In the next issue of The Congregationalist will appear an informed Christian perspective with a moderate pro-choice position by the Rev. Roland E. Wildman, a former Methodist minister, now serving the Trinity Congregational Church, Pomeroy, Ohio (see his letter on page 29).*

*With the publishing of these two articles, The Congregationalist will let the abortion issue rest, soliciting no more articles for the time being. As Rev. Beinke points out, the issue is not new and probably will never be resolved.*

*We thank the people who have contributed their constructive, Congregational thoughts.*

**W**hy would anyone want to write another article about the subject of abortion? In my case, because I know that many Christians have yet to develop an informed perspective about the issue, and in order to do that Christians need to get beyond the emotional baggage characterizing much of the debate, beyond even the best rational arguments for or against abortion. We need to discover and differentiate between the two agendas at work in the world: the world's and God's, and we must remember that Christians are to live out God's agenda. The rest of the world is free to do as it will.

It is not my intention to "convince" you, the reader, that my viewpoint is correct. That is not the issue. Both of us, if we are Christ's persons, must seek God's viewpoint, and it will do us no good to say that it cannot be known, or that God has none, or that God is not concerned about the issues that trouble us today, for we have the written witness which testifies to God's concern even for the sparrow who falls in the field, and an even greater concern for the human condition.

I have made central the need for us to seek the wisdom

of God concerning the abortion issue because abortion on demand has been around at least 4,700 years. We know this because there is a written record dating back to the Chinese Emperor Shen Nung (2737-2696 B.C.), who wrote a prescription to someone for an oral abortifacient.<sup>1</sup>

More recently, both Greek and Roman societies advocated abortion. Plato, in his *Republic* said that an ill-conceived embryo should not be brought to birth, and if born, should be disposed of. His argument was that ill-conceived children did not advance the interests of the state.<sup>2</sup> Aristotle spelled it out. He believed that if a child were born deformed, that child had no inherent right to life, and should immediately be exposed to the elements and left to die.<sup>3</sup>

Even though Plato and Aristotle went on record as abortion advocates they probably did not speak for all society, but they came close and probably spoke for the majority, for the Greeks were the great debaters and pioneers of legalized abortion and Roman law neither considered a fetus to be a living person nor outlawed abortion. There is a preserved 1st Century B.C. letter written on papyrus in which the husband, Hilarion, writes to his wife, Alis, saying, "As soon as we receive our pay I will send it up to you. If by chance you bear a child, if it is a boy, let it be, if it is a girl, cast it out."<sup>4</sup>

Although some of the most significant peoples of history felt that not all fetuses should be allowed to term, others just as significant argued against legalized abortion. Both the Code of Hammurabi (18th Century B.C.) and the writings of Tiglath-Pileser I (12th Century B.C.) contain specific prohibitions against abortion. Hippocrates (4th Century B.C.) included in his famous oath for physicians the following words, "I will not give a woman a pessary to cause abortion." Philo, the 1st Century A.D. Jewish philosopher from whom we get corroboration about Roman life at the time of Jesus, roundly condemned abortion.<sup>5</sup>

From these few examples it can be seen that up until the time of Jesus, legalized abortion on demand seldom had an easy time of it because of the ethical, moral, social, and political issues connected with it. The informed Christian

issues connected with it. The informed Christian needs to know that the issue which so inflames us today is not new to humans and no society before us has been able to bring the problem to satisfactory resolution.

The Church early on got involved in the abortion issue. The wording of early Christian documents which have been preserved give a clear understanding of how those first followers of Jesus understood what constitutes life. Since one of the problems we face today concerns our inability to define what constitutes life, an informed Christian perspective needs to give serious attention to the Church's historic position. Even though the rationale behind the Church's position is not clearly spelled out, every Christian ought to spend considerable time asking *why* the early Christians were so consistent in their witness.

A very famous 2nd Century A.D. document called the Didache or Teaching contains both a code of Christian morals and a manual of Church Order. Concerning abortion it says, "You shall not slay a child by abortion."<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, the Epistle of Barnabas from about the same time says, "Thou shalt not murder a child by abortion. Thou shalt not procure abortion, thou shalt not commit infanticide."<sup>7</sup>

Clement of Alexandria (a "liberal" of his time) wrote, "... those who conceal sexual wantonness by taking stimulating drugs to bring on an abortion wholly lose their own humanity along with the fetus."<sup>8</sup>

It is important to remember that statements like this were being made throughout the early Church at a time when the Church was being persecuted. Those earliest leaders of the Way were not making political statements. For them to speak against state-sanctioned abortion and the ethics of that time was to risk their

very lives. Obviously, they were not speaking to score points. They spoke from conviction, from some understanding which came to them because of their close proximity to what Jesus was all about. To them it added up to the necessity of speaking against abortion.

The Christian who would develop an informed perspective concerning abortion needs to ask what was it that the Christian apologist Athanagorus understood when he wrote in the 2nd Century, "How can we kill a man when we are those who say that all who use abortifacients are homicides and will account to God for their abortions as for the killing of men. For the fetus in the womb is not an animal, and it is God's providence that he exists."<sup>9</sup> Why did the Christians think this way, and not the rest of their neighbors?

## A Spiritual Issue

At its core, abortion is a spiritual issue with two sides who are not speaking the same language. How can a woman carry a sign, "Jesus Hears Their Tiny Screams," converse with another whose sign says, "Abortion—Every Woman's Birthright?"

—Brenda Peterson, taken from her book, "Nature and Other Mothers."

Tertullian, a 2nd Century attorney for Carthage and a Christian convert wrote, "For us, indeed, as homicide is forbidden, it is not lawful to destroy what is in the womb while the blood is still being formed into a man. To prevent being born is to accelerate homicide, nor does it make a difference whether you snatch away a soul which is being born or destroy one being born. He who is man-to-be is man, as all fruit is now in the seed."<sup>10</sup>

What a remarkable statement. Tertullian knew nothing of DNA's role in determining life, so how did he know that the instruction set of the very first stage of a human life-to-be (the single celled zygote) is so specific that there is not the slightest possibility of that zygote becoming a worm, or chicken, or chimpanzee. Not only that, the instruction set is specific to

sex, race, height, weight, and every other characteristic that makes you uniquely you. When you began to be, there was not the slightest possibility that you could be anything or anyone else than you. Until recently we didn't know that the fertilized egg was programmed to produce a particular and unique individual, but now we know. To put it bluntly, science may not know the *moment* when life begins, but it is absolutely sure that a human zygote is an unyet unformed *particular* human being.

Dr. Jerome Lejeune, M.D., Ph.D., Professor of Fundamental Genetics on the faculty of Medicine of Paris and holder of the prestigious Kennedy Prize (for being the first to discover a disease caused by chromosomal abnormality—Down's Syndrome), always refers to both zygote and embryo as an "early human being," because the zygote and embryo are species specific. When asked by a lawyer whether he regarded an early human being as having the same moral rights as a later human being, he said, "... I cannot see any difference between the

early human being you were and the late human being you are, because in both cases, you were and you are a member of our species. So an early one or a late one has not changed from its species to another species. It belongs to our kin. That is a definition. And I would say very precisely that I have the same respect, no matter the amount of kilograms and no matter the amount of differentiation of tissues.

... as a geneticist you ask me whether this human being (zygote) is a human, and I would tell you that because he is a being and being human, he is a human being." When asked if he felt it was morally very wrong to intentionally kill a zygote, he said, "I think it is no good, it's killing a member of our species."<sup>11</sup>

The informed Christian perspec-

tive must take into account the *particularity* of each zygote and embryo, that each is a member of our species. Each is kin.

Somehow, the Church sensed this, and by the 4th Century, the issue of abortion was the subject of canon law. The Council of Ancyra in 314 denounced women "who slay what is generated and work to destroy it with abortifacients."<sup>12</sup>

The Reformation leader, John Calvin, to whom we trace the beginnings of our Congregational heritage, wrote, "The fetus, though enclosed in the womb of its mother, is already a human being and it is almost a monstrous crime to rob it of the life which it has not yet been able to enjoy. If it seems more horrible to kill a man in his own house than in a field, because a man's house is his place of most secure refuge, it ought surely to be deemed more atrocious to destroy a fetus in the womb before it has come to light."<sup>13</sup>

Again, the person seeking an informed Christian perspective about abortion needs to ask why—why this consistent witness of the Church—especially since the Bible neither points to a certain moment when life begins nor ever tells that there is human life before birth?

To answer that question we must ask ourselves: *What evidence has God given us to let us know that God allows abortion? Do we have any evidence that would suggest that God might disallow abortion?* I believe that the Church's great concern about abortion stems from her knowledge that God is involved in our life even before conception. Scripture *assumes* the personhood of the embryo.

In Psalm 139:13-16, the psalmist refers to self with these words: "you knit me," not "you knit it." The only time the Hebrew word for embryo appears in Scripture is in verse 16 of this psalm. The New RSV translates it thus: *Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed.*

Both Isaiah and Jeremiah treat the

unborn as having distinct identities. God says through Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart" (Jer. 1:5).

In a story whose form is clearly historical narrative and not poetry, Mary, pregnant with an embryo, visits her cousin Elizabeth, also pregnant. Luke records that even in the womb, John had cognitive powers and emotions—signs of personality—for he "leaps" in his mother's womb when he hears that Mary is carrying the Christ.

**The informed Christian perspective must take into account Scripture's witness to the personhood of the embryo.**

Any Christian contemplating abortion needs to remember that the state legalizes abortion as an option, not a requirement. One of the paramount questions facing us is whether abortion is *always* evil. The honest answer is that we simply do not know. For the Christian struggling with the abortion issue, the paramount concern must be to discern and live God's viewpoint.

If after examining the evidence God has made available, we cannot say for sure that God would disallow abortion, we can say for sure that Scripture clearly indicates that God considers the "early human" as a person and exhibits wonderful concern for that person prior to conception. Therefore, choosing *not* to have an abortion is clearly a legitimate course of action. It is consistent with the law. It is consistent with Scripture.

Finally, Christians are called to righteousness. Period. God says that we are to ask Him for wisdom. He promises to give it. Other views can and do offer crucial insight to the abortion issue, but any perspective which fails to search the whole counsel of God does not speak with authority. The bottom line is that right and wrong are to be found only in terms of God. **Any informed Christian perspective about abortion must begin and end with the mind of God.** ■

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*The Rev. James Beinke, minister of the First Congregational Church, Roscommon, Mich., describes himself as a "retread," having left a career as an educator in mid-life to become a minister. After serving as a lay minister in Plymouth Congregational Church, Racine, Wis., he went to Trinity Seminary, Deerfield, Ill., in 1983, graduating in 1986 under the CFTS program.*

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## Footnotes

1. "Complications of Abortion in Developing Countries," *Population Reports* (July 1980), p. F-107 cited by John Jefferson Davis, *Evangelical Ethics, Issues Facing the Church Today* (Phillipsbury, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1985), p. 130.

2. John A. Rasmussen, "Abortion: Historical and Biblical Perspectives," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 43 (1979): 19., cited by John Jefferson Davis, *Evangelical Ethics, Issues Facing the Church Today* (Phillipsbury, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1985), p. 131.

3. *Ibid.*

4. C.K. Barrett, *The New Testament Background: Selected Documents* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), p. 38.

5. Davis, p. 131.

6. Cyril C. Richardson, ed., *Early Christian Fathers* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1970), p. 172.

7. Cited by Davis from the translation of Kirsopp Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers*, vol. I (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1912).

8. Quoted on the book jacket of Curt Young's *The Least of These: What Everyone Should Know About Abortion* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984).

9. Davis, p. 131.

10. *ibid.*

11. R.C. Sproul, *Abortion: A Rational Look at an Emotional Issue* (Colorado Springs, CO.: Navpress, 1990), pp. 178, 179.

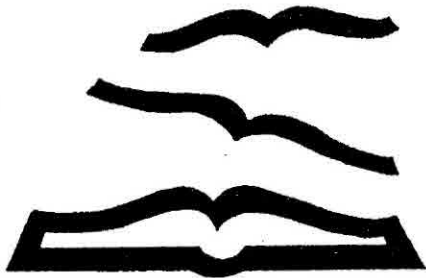
12. Davis, p. 131.

13. Young, *Ibid.*

# Share The Gift

by Juliana Otis  
Project Manager, Project Literacy

## Los Angeles Project Teaches Literacy One-on-One



## LITERACY LIGHTS THE WORLD

*"Many miracles and wonders were being done through the apostles . . ."*

—Acts 2:43

*"Philip ran over and heard him reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah. He asked him, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' The official replied, 'How can I understand unless someone explains it to me?' And he invited Philip to climb up and sit in the carriage with him."*

—Acts 8:30-31

**T**o those who cannot read, the gift of literacy can be as precious, and appear to be as unattainable, as the ability to run and jump was to the lame man outside the Beautiful Gate. Too many people in our society are not as fortunate as the Ethiopian governmental official—they do not understand the printed word, and have no one to explain it to them.

Project Literacy Los Angeles (PLLA), headquartered at the First Congregational Church of Los Angeles, was formed to address the growing problem of illiteracy in America. The statistics are appalling. It has been estimated that one in five (and perhaps as many as one in three) American adults is functionally illiterate, unable to read or write at a level required to function competently in society. Approximately 65 percent of the nation's incarcerated adults, and 80 percent of the juveniles who appear in our courts, are functionally illiterate. The annual national cost of illiteracy has been estimated at \$225 billion in lost productivity, reduced tax revenues, welfare costs, crime and poverty. This does not take into account the disenfranchisement of those who cannot vote, or the incalculable personal cost of being unable to drive a car, follow a recipe, complete a job application, understand the instructions on a bottle of medicine, or read from the Bible.

Confronted by these numbers, the attempt to eradicate illiteracy may seem to be an impossible task. PLLA and the hundreds of other volunteer

literacy centers throughout the nation and the world tackle the problem, not from a global, or even a community, perspective, but by reaching out to the individual. The core of the program is summarized in the phrase "each one, teach one." Individual lives—both new readers' and tutors'—are transformed, as students and their volunteer tutors work one-on-one or in small groups to share the gift of literacy.

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*Illiteracy costs  
\$225 billion  
annually.*

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PLLA is an independent non-profit corporation, which offers training in basic English literacy skills to adults and older teenagers. PLLA was formed under the leadership of an interfaith association of religious organizations in the Mid-Wilshire area west of downtown Los Angeles in 1987, in conjunction with various business and other educational institutions and the ABC/PBS television task force. The Los Angeles Public Library, Los Angeles County Library and Los Angeles Unified School District, as well as many other community organizations, were instrumental in the formation and organization of PLLA. California Literacy, Inc. has provided ongoing tutor training and



program and staff development support.

From its inception, PLLA's goal has been to establish learning centers in space donated by religious institutions of different faith traditions and denominations. Instruction is provided at no charge by trained volunteer tutors, working one-on-one with students from the community in which they live. For several years, classes have been held in churches in the Mid-Wilshire area of Los Angeles, and a new training center has just opened at a church in the Westchester area, near Los Angeles International Airport.

Volunteers are recruited from among the members of the Mid-Wilshire and Westchester-area religious organizations and the surrounding communities. Our goal is to develop an in-house cadre of tutor trainers and volunteer managers to assist with training, tutor and student support, recruitment, intake and coordination of students and tutors and community outreach, and to assist in fundraising activities within the religious bodies and the community.

Prospective students and tutors are referred to PLLA by other agencies, including other literacy service providers, adult basic education schools, and governmental agencies, and national and local literacy telephone information lines, and word-of-mouth. Some students are members of the supporting religious bodies (a reminder that we should never assume that everyone can "read about it in the church bulletin"). Financial support has been provided by individuals, churches, businesses and foundations.

Tutors are required to complete a 12-hour training session in the Laubach method, which emphasizes basic reading and writing skills for the teenage or adult learner. This method was developed by Dr. Frank C. Laubach, who recognized the fundamental importance of literacy while working as a missionary in the Philippines.



*Reading is important even in a physical game like football because "the game is based more on intelligence than brawn," according to Thane Gash, formerly a defensive back with the Cleveland Browns, now with the San Francisco Forty Niners. Here he reads "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" to third-graders in the Mount Auburn Elementary School, Cleveland, helping to celebrate Right to Read Week. "I read and study the plays real close to keep up with the big guys," he said. Photo courtesy Cleveland Plain Dealer.*

Dr. Laubach developed a teaching technique which emphasized the use of key words to help students identify sounds and names of letters. The system of one-on-one teaching developed out of his technique. Dr. Laubach spent more than 40 years promoting the cause of literacy as a first step toward ending the suffering and exploitation of the world's disadvantaged people.

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### *Project Literacy reaches out to the individual.*

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Students who graduate from the program are prepared to enter adult basic education classes. Many of our new adult readers have no prior experience with schools, or have had experiences which were primarily unpleasant ones. To enter a basic

reading program as an adult is an act of great courage and commitment. It is exciting to hear stories of how our students' new skills have changed their lives. One student was able to obtain a driver's license, which enabled him to obtain a full-time job in a place which was not accessible by bus or bicycle. Another student went grocery shopping, using a list which she had written herself, for the first time. One proud young man wrote a love letter to his wife, the first he had ever written. A number of our students are now able to read to their children, and to read for themselves the Bible stories which have been read to them for so many years.

Each student works with his or her own tutor. Classes are held at the mutual convenience of the tutor and student, typically two times per week, for approximately one hour per session. The training centers are selected to provide secure, supportive and easily-accessible facilities for all participants.

See *Literacy*, next page.



Books that are easy enough for kids to read themselves often aren't interesting to them, according to Lana Hostetter, Springfield, Ill., past president of the National Association for the Education of Young Children. "I encourage parents and grandparents to read to their children throughout the elementary years," she advises.

## Literacy

continued from previous page

PLLA's challenges for the future are to improve its outreach to prospective students, to increase awareness of the problem of illiteracy, to develop stronger ties with local businesses, to enhance the strength and visibility of the program by involving community leaders, and to provide financial stability through ongoing corporate, foundation and individual support.

First Congregational Church's involvement in PLLA carries forward the longstanding Congregational commitment to education and community leadership. PLLA's tutors serve as "urban missionaries," using teaching techniques developed by Dr. Laubach during his ministry in the Philippines. The lives of students and tutors are immeasurably enriched by their experiences in the program. In small and often unseen ways, they are working to effect miracles in the world.

PLLA's offices are located at 540 South Commonwealth Avenue, Los

Angeles, Calif. 90020. We would be delighted to speak with other churches which have ongoing literacy programs or are interested in becoming involved with the effort to eliminate illiteracy in America. ■

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*Juliana Otis belongs to First Congregational Church of Los Angeles where she is a member of the board of trustees. A securities lawyer by profession, she was a volunteer tutor for three years before becoming project manager at the church's literacy program.*

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The American Bible Society (P.O. Box 5656, Grand Central Station, New York, N.Y. 10164-0851) brings the Good News of God's Word in easy-to-understand everyday language. The Bible for Today's Family New Testament is ideal for anyone who is reading the Bible for the first time, for those who speak English as a second language, for children and for everyone who wants to read God's Word in clear, modern English.





# Why I Gave Up TV For Lent

by the Rev. David Henry  
Fourth Congregational Church, Chicago, Ill.

**I**n January of 1992, NACCC Executive Secretary Mike Robertson suggested that Congregationalists ought to take the lead in encouraging families to give up television for Lent. Shortly after this, I wrote a tongue-in-cheek article for our church newsletter suggesting that Mike's idea was unthinkable, unworkable, and possibly un-American.

I did end up taking his idea seriously, notwithstanding my daughter's suggestion that I had lost whatever meager mental health I possessed prior to Lent. I did not try to coerce my family into joining me in my Lenten denial, and I must admit that the temptation was overwhelming to sneak a peek once in a while. After a few bouts with PTSD (Post-Television Stress Disorder, characterized by staring glassy-eyed at anything box-shaped) and PRK (Phantom Remote-control Kinesia, or involuntary twitching of the thumb and forefinger of the right hand), keeping my Lenten vow became easier.

I did not advertise the fact that I had given up TV for Lent, believing that to be a matter between myself and God. Those who found out by way of family and friends ("You'll never guess what he's gone and done now, Frieda.") made sure that I had no short supply of dumbfounded looks directed my way. Conversations would start with the words, "Did you see ..." and then stop abruptly, as if the questioner had just realized she had asked a widower how his wife was feeling. Sometimes people would just stare, jaws agape, as they might if I had shaved a map of Louisiana on top of my head. My wife Mary finally verbalized the question that had silently dominated so many social contacts during Lent: "Whatever possessed you to do something like that?"

I began to understand the concern. TV was a far more important social institution than I had previously imagined. As William Pfaff observed in an op-ed piece in the *Chicago Trib-*

*une*, TV is the last vestige of the great American melting pot. In a multicultural era, Americans no longer speak the same language, hold the same values, or practice the same traditions. TV may be the only tie that binds us together. While we shrink from imposing our values, religion, language and culture on others, TV stands unequalled as the source for information about what it is to be an American (although a Martian watching TV would come to believe that Americans are atheistic compulsive consumers who settle all disputes in a hail of bullets).

TV speaks in every language, and in images that need no language. Giving it up was akin to walking out on Thanksgiving dinner, before dessert, without apology or explanation. Now I began to search for reasons that would make my Lenten sacrifice sound prophetic or courageous, or at the very least, reasons that would reassure people that I still had enough noodles to make soup.

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*"...because TV is harmful?"*

My first through was, "I did it because TV is harmful." Plenty of evidence of television's damaging effects exists. There is no longer any serious doubt among researchers that television violence is a cause of aggression in children and increased violence later in life. The amount of television consumed is also related negatively to children's grades in school. Video games have been found to cause seizures in some children, and some "copy-cat" crimes draw their inspiration from television programs; one of the saddest examples being the five-year-old who burned down his house after watching "Beavis and Butt-head" play with fire on TV. Adults are much less susceptible to the harmful effects of television, as they are able to view it more critically. Although I believe firmly that television can be harmful, especially to young children, I don't believe that TV placed me at greater risk for anything but insomnia, when trying to go to sleep after napping the evening away while "watching" it. Harmfulness, at least to me, was not the reason.

*"...because I needed the time?"*

"I needed the time" came to mind next. An average person spends about 20 hours per week watching television. That amounts to about 1000 hours per year. In a decade, that is enough time to build a house with one's bare hands, complete a Ph.D., read a small library, or jog around the world ... twice. I was certainly busy enough to want more time, and giving up TV allowed me to complete several projects I may not have completed otherwise. But being prone to overwork, TV also provided some needed relaxation. I had to admit that time was not the reason either.

"This will impress them," I thought. I personally experienced the dreadful inaccuracy of television

news long before a major network was caught rigging a truck so that it would blow up and appear unsafe to the public. During one of Chicago's many school crises some years ago, a minister and a group of parents took over a school classroom in our neighborhood to protest the firing of a teacher. This action immediately brought all three networks and several local television stations to our little part of Chicago. Although most of the clergy in the community did not wholeheartedly condone the action of the protesters, we could understand the frustration of parents whose children's education was being disrupted by another dispute between the teachers' union and the



Board of Education. We could also understand the frustrations of the teachers and the principal, who struggled with parents who were normally indifferent to their children's education. The clergy in our area had spent years building a good working relationship with the school, and that relationship was threatened by this action.

As the crisis dragged on, I was asked to moderate a community meeting to deal with the issues. I vowed to conduct a meeting in which all sides could be heard, and the conflict could be used to form the basis for solutions that might benefit all parties. On the night of the meeting, the hall of my church was packed with neighbors, clergy people, TV news people, and others. I opened the

meeting by stating some ground rules, and then asked representatives of the protesters and the school to make some initial comments. The protesters went first, receiving enthusiastic applause from much of the assembly. Then a member of the school board spoke, but before she could get her second sentence out, several people were on their feet screaming at her. The cameras whirred. I reminded the screamers of the rules, and asked them to hear the school board member out. They took their seats, and the school board member managed about two more sentences before the group was on their feet again. Now the cameras really homed in.

*"...because TV news is inaccurate?"*

After the meeting, I spoke to one of the news reporters, saying that I had hoped to run a calm, reasonable meeting that might find some solutions. The reporter replied that the meeting was a bit too calm for his taste. The lead story on the evening news was "ANGRY PARENTS CONFRONT SCHOOL BOARD," featuring the screamers, who, I learned later, did not live in the neighborhood, did not send their children to the school, and had been brought in by the protesting clergyman for the purpose of creating a media event. I have since seen the same screamers on television at other meetings on other matters in other communities. The whole issue of the school takeover was settled later, in a private meeting between real parents, ministers and school personnel. Several grievances on both sides were redressed and a healing process begun. The media were informed of the solution, but never reported it.

Since that time I have seldom watched television news, preferring instead to read the newspaper. Inaccuracy was not the reason either.

*Continued →*



*"...because I'm  
passive-aggressive?"*

As Lent passed into Easter, which passed into the Fourth of July, then Labor Day, I still was searching for good, profound, intellectually respectable motives. By this time, Mary had said on more than one occasion, "You don't know why you did it, do you? I think its passive-aggressive behavior. You just did it to disrupt our tranquil family life!" I had to admit that this bit of armchair psychology made a lot more sense than anything I had come up with. Then I read an article which suggested that, as a result of television, we are now living in a "post-rational age" in which people have short attention spans and no longer comprehend rational arguments. "What a rational motive!" I thought. The article went on to say that truth, in the latter 20th century, is no longer a matter of revelation, conclusions following from premises, or empirical evidence.

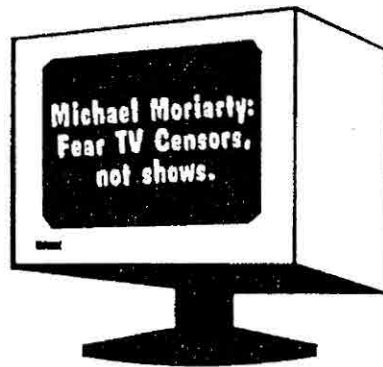
Truth, today, is the property of those who can produce powerful images. The potential for manipulating the public is truly awesome. This writer maintained that in order to be understood by the post-rational generation, preachers should jettison the traditional three-point sermon in favor of creating images and telling stories. Aside from my feeling that this writer's conclusions did not follow his premises (TV makes people abandon reason, preachers should preach to people, therefore preachers should abandon reason), Mary surely would have discerned that this was a better argument for watching television than for giving it up for Lent. I soon consigned the post-rational age to my growing pile of once-promising purposes.

As the pumpkins of October turned to the turkey hash of late November, Joe Polhemus called and said, "I saw that piece you wrote about giving up TV for Lent. How about writing another one for *The Congregationalist*? I need it in Decem-

ber." Always enthusiastic about seeing my name printed other than on the roster at traffic court, I agreed immediately.

The words "TV" and "Lent" had not been used in the same sentence for two months around our house, and I decided that if I wrote late at night, assigned a cryptic password to the file on the computer, and canceled our *Congregationalist* subscription, I would be in the clear. All I needed was something to say.

As to profound, prophetic explanations, I have come up empty. The harmfulness, time demands and inaccuracy of TV offer good reasons to reduce our dependence on TV generally, and the national debate on



whether TV sex and violence should be regulated makes it a current concern. But ultimately, these were not my motives for giving up TV during Lent. It was more related to my own spiritual growth, and the reasons for making any Lenten sacrifice, than it was to television itself. It had something to do with the words of the Rabbi, who, when asked why Jews don't eat pork replied, "It is not because pork is so bad, but because it is so good. If you can't do without pork, what will you do when real temptation comes along?" It had more to do with the First Commandment: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me."

By making a small sacrifice for a few weeks of the year, I have to struggle with minute temptation, and pray that I will have more strength and

resolve when real temptation comes. By letting go of a small pleasure, I am painfully reminded of how easily, even willingly, I hand over the freedom with which Christ has set me free in return for small pleasures. Whether I hand that freedom over to television's warped view of the world, or to covetousness, envy, or hatred matters little.

As I write at the small desk in our bedroom, Mary stirs and turns on the light.

"What are you doing?"

"Writing."

"What are you writing?"

"An article."

"What for?"

"*The Congregationalist*."

"What's it about?"

"It's a surprise. Read the February/March issue." ■

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*The Rev. David Henry, minister of the Fourth Congregational Church, Chicago, Ill., teaches psychology, part time, at the University of Illinois, Chicago. The effects of TV violence and sex are expected to be one of the concerns addressed by the new commission on Family Life in the Church.*

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# Christian Counseling for the Clinically Depressed, Suicidal Individual

by the Rev. Giovan H. Venable  
Church of the Messiah, Los Angeles, Calif.

**D**eath is difficult for all of us to deal with, but perhaps the most haunting kind of death is death by suicide. Even Christians who look forward to salvation and heaven are unnerved when someone attempts suicide or commits suicide.

Common characteristics of suicidal persons (many of which are also characteristics of the clinically depressed) are: low self-esteem, feelings of incompetence and failure, loss of appetite, early morning awakening and insomnia. Clinical depression, or affective disorder, can often affect a person's perception. A clinically depressed person is not as alert, frequently distorts conversations, and feels a loss of interest in anything, even in things in which she normally is interested.

Another profound symptom of clinical depression, so often a precursor to suicide, is a feeling that the depression will never end. The individual is in tremendous psychic, and often physical, pain and usually honestly perceives that the pain will never end. As a result, the person sees no way to escape the pain except by

suicide. The person may also be intensely embarrassed, because he or she feels as if he will never be able to do anything ever again, because he feels as if he has been feigning interest in life, and because he feels that, since the disabling clinical depression is so apparent, the depression must be apparent to everyone who sees him.

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## *Would you deny a diabetic his or her life-saving medicine?*

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It is important, when pastoring an individual with these feelings, to determine whether the person has suicidal thoughts, how strong the individual's suicidal desires are and how able, physically and mentally, he is to attempt suicide. One should evaluate the danger of a person attempting suicide by asking:

- Does he or she have a specific plan by which to commit suicide?
- Is the person thinking about taking aspirin or stronger drugs, using ropes or guns?
- How available are these to the person?
- Who spends time with the suicidal individual, and how much time is spent with the person?

It is usually *not* at all helpful for any kind of therapist, pastor included, to attempt counseling at this point. The suicidal person's thoughts are all jumbled. I find it helpful to think of the clinically depressed, suicidal individual as a malfunctioning computer. One attempts to fix the malfunction by examining the inner workings of the computer, not by looking at the incoherent symbols and letters appearing on the computer screen.

A clinically depressed, suicidal individual may be able to tell about thoughts or feelings. The problem is that those "inner workings" are malfunctioning. The thoughts and feelings the person conveys to you are, more often than not, simply

incoherent messages indicating that something is physically wrong with him. They are often not the person's true thoughts and feelings.

For the reasons stated above, it is imperative that the suicidal individual be referred, *not to a psychologist*, but to a psychiatrist, an M.D. trained at dealing with clinical depression. More often than not, the M.D. will treat the individual with antidepressants. Anyone who has ever seen a person respond to these drugs cannot help but be profoundly impressed with the change in that person.

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*Faith may just be  
temporarily  
blocked by the  
illness.*

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Antidepressants are a part of mainline, medically accepted practice and no one should be denied these drugs, if there is any chance the drugs may work. Would you deny a diabetic his or her life-saving medicine?

The most important time period in the healing process of a clinically depressed, suicidal individual, and the time in which a pastor *can* be of the most help is the most critical time period between when the antidepressant first begins to work and the time when the clinical depression is in remission. That is the time in which many suicides occur. At this point, a person has usually been in pain for a long period of time and has completely lost hope. If the person has been seriously depressed, he or she has not had the energy to carry out any suicidal plans. However, when the person first begins to feel better, but is still in some amount of pain, he may find it much easier to plan, and carry out, a suicidal plan.

While the pastor can be a comforting reminder of God for the suicidal individual, it is important also to remember that a suicidal, clinically

depressed person probably cannot sense God's presence in his or her life, no matter how strong his or her faith is when the person is well. The person should not be told that his or her faith is weak. His or her faith may *not* be weak at all. Faith may just be temporarily blocked by the illness.

Once a clinically depressed person is better, it is helpful to watch for signs of relapse. It is equally important, however, to accept him as a complete, whole, healthy person. Constant questions about his health, meant to elicit signs of relapse, are not helpful. Do not treat a person with an affective disorder as if he is likely to be sick again at any moment.

Clinical depression can strike anyone at any time. Suicide is an extreme symptom of clinical depression. Learning to accept and understand suicidal feelings, and their cause, is the first step towards suicide prevention. Never forget: there but for the grace of God go all of us. ■



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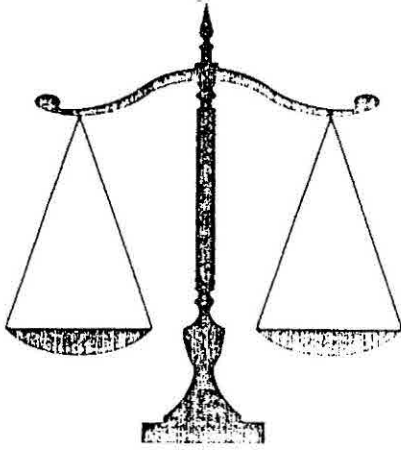
*The Rev. Giovan Venable, Congregational Church of the Messiah, Los Angeles, was formerly a chaplain at McLean Psychiatric Hospital in Boston, a member of the Association of Clinical Pastoral Education and the American Association of Pastoral Counselors.*

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### Richard Cory

Whenever Richard Cory went down town,  
We people on the pavement looked at him:  
He was a gentleman from sole to crown  
Clean favored, and imperially slim.  
And he was always quietly arrayed,  
And he was always human when he talked;  
But still he fluttered pulses when he said,  
"Good-morning," and he glittered when he walked.  
And he was rich—yes, richer than a king—  
And admirably schooled in every grace:  
In fine, we thought that he was everything  
To make us wish that we were in his place.  
So on we worked, and waited for the light,  
And went without the meat, and cursed the bread;  
And Richard Cory, one calm summer night,  
Went home and put a bullet through his head.

—Edwin Arlington Robinson,  
*Anthology of American Poetry*, © 1983, Crown Publishers.



# GOD Does NOT Play Favorites

*He Loves Us All Regardless of Sexual Preference*

*by the Rev. John W. Currier  
Minister; Lake Country Congregational Church, Hartland, Wis.*

**I**n the book of Leviticus are these words: "If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads." (Lev. 20:13) In 1837 North Carolina passed a law against homosexual activity. It spoke of "the crime against nature, not to be named by Christians." The penalty was death. It wasn't until 1962 that Illinois became the first state to decriminalize homosexual behavior between consenting adults. Many states still consider homosexuality to be criminal. And, of course, if you've been watching the news, you know that the issue of homosexuals in the military is in the headlines.

The topic of homosexuality has moved out of our cultural closet. None of us wanted to talk about it. Now it's moved onto the front pages and we can't avoid talking about it.

One thing these months of pondering has brought to me is an awareness of how little clear thinking there is in our society about homosexuality. There's a great deal of well intended

and emotional speechifying on the subject, but not much clear thinking. There's a great deal of literature. But most of it is either garbage or so biased that it does little to help us gain anything like an objective view. It's no wonder our thinking is muddy.

*All people are capable of sexual misconduct*

Let me give you one single example. When the subject of sexuality is brought up, we, (and when I say "we" I'm assuming an almost exclusively heterosexual congregation, because most homosexuals have not found reason to remain in a church that has shunned them) when we think of sexuality, we might well think of romance, courtship, marriage, and so on. But when "we" think of homosexuality, our tendency is to think about how it's done—to think about the act of sex. President Clinton is at least thinking when he makes a distinction between the status and the conduct of homosexuals. All people are capable of sexual misconduct.

*Editor's Note: Just as with abortion and the right-to-bear arms, we hear sharp differences of opinion on homosexuality. We don't expect tolerance to burst instantly out of the controversy. We do know the issue will not go away. Rev. Currier has favored us by a thoughtful, Christian-related analysis.*

There's a ton of misinformation out there, self-serving and otherwise. There's a great deal of prejudice on both sides of the issue and that's a problem. Because opposing sides are throwing salvos instead of talking. Ruth Tiffany Barnhouse writes, "It is unquestionably time for society to stop oppressing homosexuals by abrogating their civil rights and labeling their behavior criminal ... But it also time for homosexuals to stop shouting 'oppressor!' at anyone who dares say that homosexuality is less than normal." (In *Homosexuality: A Confusion of Symbols*) "Those who proclaim a sexual standard different from what is generally accepted must be prepared for serious debate." (Barnhouse in *Clergy and the Sexual Revolution*) The voice of the Christian Church, for good and for bad, is very loud in this country. And until the Church can love, accept and welcome all people as children of God, it's doubtful that any meaningful change in relation to this issue will occur in our culture.

### *Church Has Role*

The military and the politicians will do what they will do and I won't speak to that today. But I will speak about religion. Because the Church has an interesting role to play in this discussion. The role of religion is not simply to acknowledge *what is*. Science can do that quite handily. The role of religion is, and has always been, striving to see *what ought to be* so that *what is* will gain real meaning (see Barnhouse). And what religion repeatedly affirms is that *what ought to be* includes the circumstances wherein humans show forth the image of God, in whose image we were created, by loving one another.

### *Bible Not So Clear*

About homosexuality the Bible is not so clear as we might think. One thing that is very clear, however, is that the Bible understands heterosexuality to be the norm. That a het-

erosexual view predominates in the world of the Bible is not disputed. As always the majority of the population was heterosexual. So we shouldn't think it odd that heterosexuality predominates in Bible stories and perspectives and pronouncements. Agenda filled efforts to challenge the meaning and authority of scripture to accommodate homosexual causes, however well intentioned, risk throwing out all useful rules for Bible interpretation. *I'm not in favor of that.* On the other hand, shallow and self-serving interpretations of scripture that have been used throughout the life of the Church to deny personal dignity, not only to those who claim to be homosexual, but also to slaves, blacks, women and those of other faiths. Neither approach to scripture serves us. With open hearts we should look to the scriptures and let them speak to us, rather than using the scriptures to say what we'd like.

There are only a few direct references to homosexuality in our Bible. And some of those references can legitimately be challenged.

In Genesis, the story of Sodom is the first place where people look to see what our Bible says about homosexuality. There's a similar story in the book of Judges (Judges 19). And the meaning is not clear. No Biblical reference to Sodom ever specifically labels the sin of Sodom as homosexuality. For instance, in Ezekiel we read this: "Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. They were haughty and did detestable things before me. Therefore I did away with them as you have seen" (Ezekiel 16:49-50). I'd be uncomfortable saying that Sodom was punished, exclusively or even primarily for homosexual acts. It was really for a pervasive wickedness that extended to their whole society. Does that sound familiar?

There are two one-sentence condemnations in the book of Leviticus. You heard one of them at the start of the sermon. The other goes like this:

"You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination" (Lev. 11:12). On the other hand, such laws showed themselves to be useful to that culture and society. So it's not out of order to ask, as people of religion, do these laws still serve a purpose in today's society? There's no easy answer.

### *Jesus Never Mentioned Homosexuality*

In the case of the Apostle Paul, when the subject of homosexuality is mentioned, it happens three times, once in Romans, once in I Timothy and again in I Corinthians. The words we translate as "homosexual" or "homosexuality" mean more than a mere reference to a group of people who are attracted to members of the same sex. The words, coming from a culture that knew well such things as pagan ceremonies and debauchery, speak of inappropriate expressions of sexuality as older men abused younger boys, or as prostitutes were employed to provide only sensual pleasure without love or a sense of honoring a Creator.

We find those things abhorrent in any circumstance, whoever is involved. In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians he writes this: "Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor homosexual offenders, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God" (I Cor. 6:9-10). That sounds like a pretty comprehensive list to me. I wonder how important it is where we fall in that list. The point is, perhaps we should be careful not to miss the greater concerns of God's word by focusing on a few verses alone. In the Bible we're told that it's wrong to misuse any gift of God. *And for the record, Jesus never talks about homosexuality at all.*

*Continued* →



Scripture, however, does teach us this much, and clearly: **Love one another.** In I John are written these words: "Dear Friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love" (I John 4:7-8). William Sloan Coffin writes, "The problem is not how to reconcile homosexuality with scriptural passages that appear to condemn it, but rather how to reconcile the rejection and punishment of homosexuals with the love of Christ" (in *The Courage to Love*). Indeed, even a writer who does not look favorably upon the idea of homosexuality can write this, "the immaturity which homosexuality represents, even though it is morally significant, cannot possibly be as distasteful to the sight of God as the self-righteous hostility of those who persecute homosexuals" (Barnhouse).

### *All Are Worthy of Respect and Love*

The love of God that extends to all people is a love that is not lost even through Divine judgment. We humans are quick to withhold love once we've judged someone. But if we are created in the image of God, then all are worthy of respect and love. God does not show favoritism. This I believe.

The Christian Church needs to live up to the principles it preaches; principles of love and tolerance and acceptance. Does that mean that the church should move beyond that to the place where it *approves* or indeed consecrates homosexuality as a package? That can do violence to the principles of the Church. And that may or may not be healthy. But such an approval could also do violence to the homosexual individual who would prefer to be seen as a distinct person and not as a classification. Group classifications only encourage stereotypes. Heterosexuals and homosexuals alike have done it too much.

### *Group classifications only encourage stereotypes.*

The Church must do this: It must say to all people, "Come and know God's compassion and love. Come and be whole creatures. Come and be welcome." I can see no other way. If the Church cannot have doors that are open, trusting God in spite of our fears and prejudices, then there will be no church. There will be only fear and prejudice. Hope will be lost. That is intolerable.

I'm not ready to say that homosexuality can be held up as a moral ideal, but I believe that no special judgment of homosexuals is in order from Christians. Remember our scripture passage (Romans 1:16-2:11), "... at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things ... God does not show favoritism." God does not show favoritism. ▢

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*A graduate of Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, the Rev. John W. Currier has been minister at Lake Country Congregational Church, Hartland, Wis., for the past three years. A CFTS fellow, he was ordained in 1983 and has served as an associate minister at Plymouth Congregational Church of Kenosha and at First Congregational Church of Wauwatosa, Wis.*

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# Family Problems Challenge the Church



*Include Aging Population, Decline of Extended Families*

*by the Rev. David Henry, Minister, Fourth Congregational Church, Chicago, Ill.*

**I**f the topic is "the family," it doesn't seem to matter whether the discussion takes place among clergy or lay people; at a national meeting or in a fellowship of local churches. Invariably someone points out that all families are not "traditional families," and the participants nod their heads sagely. Usually, that is as far as the discussion goes. Beyond agreement that families have a variety of configurations, Christians become stymied in the attempt to agree upon the particular configurations that we can or should support.

As the debate rages over the forms families should take, issues of family trends and processes, and their meaning for churches, go largely unnoticed. Yet it is these issues that will challenge our churches most deeply in the next several years. The ad hoc Family Life Study Committee has, for the past year, done some serious thinking about many of these issues. As a result of the committee's work, the 1993 Annual Meeting delegates approved formation of a Family Life in the Church Commission to begin work at the 1994 Annual Meeting, as reported in the August/September 1993 issue of *The Congregationalist*. Although I am a member of the ad hoc

committee, the thoughts in this article are my own, and are not meant to represent the thinking of committee members or any official position of the committee as a whole. In this article I will discuss two challenges that changes in family life present to our churches and their ministries; and suggest some directions for our churches in addressing them. These two challenges are **1. a population that is aging**, and **2. the decline of extended families**.

## *An Aging Population*

Scandal rocked the Chicago area when it was revealed that the freshman Senator from Illinois had concealed her mother's assets and allowed public aid to pay for her nursing home care. While most people frowned upon the Senator's deception, many had at least some sympathy for any family trying to pay for long-term care. A number of churches in my area have hired "parish nurses," who spend a majority of their time ministering to the needs of aging persons and those who care for them. Several states have set up hotlines and supportive services to deal with "elder abuse" by family caregivers.

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*The real storm is  
yet to come.*

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These are distant thunder. The real storm is yet to come. People today are living longer and potentially more productive lives as health habits and medical care improve. As a result, the percentage of people in the 80-100-year-old age bracket is increasing faster than that of any other group in the population. But the real surge in the numbers of older people will not come until around 2010, when the first of the post-WWII "baby-boomers" turn 65. After that, the numbers of older people will rise dramatically, peaking at around 2025, and then leveling off again.

Will we be ready? All of the great public issues surrounding aging will affect people in our churches: the ethics of buying out older workers, the ethics of treatment for persons with chronic illness and severe disabilities, the cost of long-term care, the stability of the Social Security trust fund, and others. But one of the most important issues is one in which our churches can have a critical role. That is the question of *quality of life* in the later years.

The quality of life question leads Christians to focus on God's calling, or vocation, for individuals. After more than three decades of social work with aging persons, Margaret Peat, of the Presbyterian Home in Evanston, Ill. believes that churches do not take seriously enough the retirement transition. She suggests that churches mark this time in life with a commissioning service that honors the individual's past contributions, and celebrates God's future vocation for the individual.

Usually, we think of vocation as a matter concerning people in their late teens and early 20s. But the scriptures are full of examples of people whom God called to service in their later years. Tradition has it that Moses spent his first 40 years in Egypt, his second 40 years in Midian, and received God's call to deliver the people from Egypt when he was 80 years old.

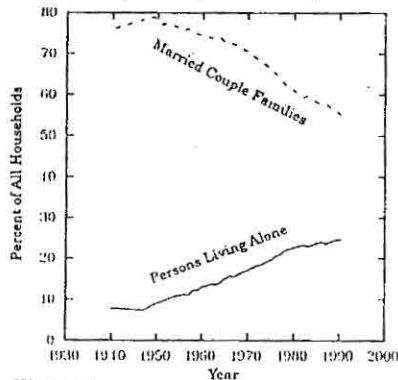
If your church suddenly had 20 persons over 65 with time, skill and life experience to share, would there be a place in your ministry for them? Our churches and pastors need to be ready to help people seek and respond to God's call at this time in life. The MAC (Missionary Assistance Corps) is one good start in this area.

### *Decline of Extended Families*

Naomi was an Israelite widow living in Midian with her Midianite daughters-in-law. All of their husbands were dead, and they were cut off from their tribes. This was the worst possible situation for them, as the tribe, or extended family, was the source of food, shelter and protection. Ruth's familiar words, "Whither thou goest I will go" (Ruth 1:16), are words of great courage, as she was entrusting her life to a tribe that was not her own.

Extended families are important

sources of support to people today as well. If there are aunts, uncles, and grandparents in close proximity to a family, there is a "check" on the behavior of both children and parents in that family. This makes problems such as child abuse, teen pregnancy, gang membership and drug use less likely. Extended families often can help absorb the stresses of life through providing emotional and practical assistance in times of need. Marybeth Shinn and her colleagues at New York University found that a major difference between poor women who were homeless and those who were housed was the integrity of their extended families. The homeless women tended to have a history of family disruptions beginning in childhood, and present-day families



close proximity to each other, but the demands of making a livelihood also have changed in ways that place new stresses on families. Work now consumes far more of a family's time than ever before. It takes nearly twice the person-hours of minimum-wage work today to support a family of four at the poverty level than it did ten years ago. An unprecedented number of women have entered the work force in the last ten years. This has been a boon for married couple families, but a hardship for single parents, whose median income has remained relatively constant (in real dollars) for the last 50 years.

Thus, life is more demanding on families who have less extended-family resources to help them cope

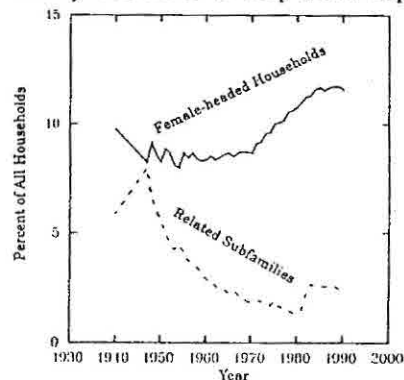


Figure 1 Evidence of the Decline of Extended Families over 50 Years Source: U.S. Census

that were unable or unwilling to help them when they lost their homes.<sup>1</sup>

Over the past half century, we have witnessed the steady decline of the "tribe" as a potential source of support.

The graphs show evidence of this decline through four U.S. census indicators. Related sub-families are related persons living together, such as a grandmother with her daughter and children. It is evident that the percentage of persons living alone and female-headed households has increased.

Not only is it less likely that extended family members will live in

with those demands. The decline of extended families combined with the aging trend noted above will, in the next century, produce many more older people in need of care and support, without the resources provided by extended families.

### *Churches as Surrogate Families*

Churches have responded to crises in family life at other times in history. We don't know all of the reasons, but the earliest Christian churches found themselves caring for a number of needy widows, who, presumably,

1 Shinn, M., Knickman, J., & Weitzman, B. (1991), "Social relationships and vulnerability to becoming homeless among poor families," *American Psychologist* 46, 1180-1187.

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did not have extended families to care for them. Like Ruth and Naomi, they had few resources for the essentials of life, and were "fair game" for any who would take advantage of them.<sup>2</sup> The earliest Christians fulfilled many of the functions of extended families for them.

The future will see churches called to similar ministries for people whose extended families are absent or not functioning. We are already seeing this in several ways. The parish nurses noted above are one example. Pastors are increasingly finding themselves asked to assume powers of attorney for persons in their later years. Church-operated day care centers, and after-school programs fill gaps opened by the demands of earning a living and the absence of extended family members to care for and monitor children.

We have come to depend on schools, institutions and government to raise our children, care for our aged, and "do our neighboring for us." These systems have never worked well, and are now overtaxed as the population ages and the demands of needy people increase. People in government and academia today are coming to see that the solutions to the problems facing our society will not be found without fundamental changes in the ways families and communities function: changes Christians have been advocating for years. Even social scientists, who for the past half century have had little positive to say about churches or Christians, are producing study after study that show the positive effects of religion and church life on families.<sup>3</sup>

### *Learning to be Families*

In addition to being surrogate families for many people, churches

teach values that can help repair our damaged neighborhoods and extended families. I believe that the early Christians were engaged in an effort to help people rebuild families and communities in a time, like our time, when these had declined. The most important teachings of scripture on family and community are not often heard in the "family values" debates of today. They address the core issues that tear marriages and families asunder: How shall conflicts be resolved? How can I answer God's call (be myself) and still be connected to my family? Why should I submit my desires to the good of my family or community? How can I live with someone who has hurt me? The answers given go against the grain of our culture, whose most frequent solutions tend to be separation and selfishness.

### *Importance of the Pastor*

As Edwin Friedman<sup>4</sup> notes, pastors work at the intersection of three important family systems: their own families, the church as family, and the families of church members. No psychologist or counselor or other helping professional has as much potential to be an agent of healing in times of need. Pastors work with people at critical times of life, such as birth, marriage, illness and death. Unlike most helpers, pastors have the opportunity to know people over a long period of time, and understand the lives of individuals and the workings of families far better than is possible for other professionals who only meet people in times of crisis.

If churches of the future will be called upon to fulfill a greater role with respect to families, pastors of the future must be prepared. Seminaries routinely offer courses in pastoral

counseling. Most of these courses are individually oriented. Very few focus on understanding the ways families function, and how to intervene with families experiencing problems. The skills necessary for helping families are not merely an extension of individually-oriented counseling skills. They require, and deserve, special treatment in the seminary curriculum.

### *Meeting the Challenges*

The family challenges facing our churches are difficult ones, but they are filled with opportunities for ministry. Meeting them will require serious examination and reorientation of our priorities as individual Christians, and careful planning by congregations and church fellowships. But we Christians and our churches already have powerful resources with which to promote a future of healing in our society. We serve a God who calls us, and thus can fill every stage of life with meaning. We are placed in church fellowships through which we can nurture and support one another in all the passages of life. And in Holy Scripture, apostles and prophets bear witness to an alternative to the excessive individualism and alienation of our times: if we listen to their words, we can learn to be families and neighbors once more. ■

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*The Rev. David Henry, who served on the Family Life Study Committee, has been minister of the Fourth Congregational Church, Chicago, Ill., since 1980. He also teaches psychology part time at the University of Illinois, Chicago.*

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2 This is the setting of Jesus's parable of the Widow and the Judge, Luke 18:1-5.

3 See Payne, L.R., Bergin, A.E., Bielema, K.A., and Jenkins, P.H. (1991), "Review of religion and mental health: Prevention and the enhancement of psychosocial functioning," *Prevention in human services*, 9, 11-40 for a review of at least 100 such studies.

4 Friedman, E. (1985) *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*. (New York: Guilford)

# What is PRAXIS?

## *Offers New Directions in Campus Ministry*

*by the Rev. Dr. Arlin T. Larson  
Minister, Congregational Church of Hope, El Paso, Texas*

**prax'is** *n., pl. prax'ēs* **1.** Practical application or exercise of a branch of learning. **2.** Habitual or established practice; custom. [Medieval Latin *prāxis*, from Greek *praxis*, from *prassein*, to do.]

—*American Heritage dictionary of the English Language.*

"Action on a material level." "Action and reflection." "Action with a goal." "Action distinguished from thinking."

—*phrases used by Praxis instructors to define the program.*

- A college student answers a suicide call on the Crisis Hotline.
- Tears in the eyes of a young man as he helps a family move from a house made of packing crates into a solid home of cement and stucco.
- Student volunteers meet to share stories and reflect on what community service means to them.
- A term paper for a Buddhism class relates the abstract idea of compassion to actual service with battered women.
- Community service agencies provide training to student servants.
- Campus ministers facilitate spiritual growth by integrating action and reflection.

- A partnership grows between the church, the university, and the community with profound implications for Christian education.

The idea is simple. College students commit to 20 hours a semester of community service. Social agencies provide training and supervision. College teachers integrate service into their requirements. Campus ministers conduct "Reflection Sessions" to help students relate their experience to their lives.

We began PRAXIS at the University of Texas at El Paso with two instructors, thirteen students, and five community agencies. Second semester we had six courses, twenty-seven students, and ten agencies. The University of New Mexico, now the center of the PRAXIS movement, aver-

ages 100 students. The Dallas Community College system, where campus minister Betsy Alden started PRAXIS 15 years ago, has 800 in community service.

PRAXIS appeals to campus ministers for several reasons: For one, we believe that helping others is a primary value. Feeding the hungry, visiting the sick, and clothing the naked should be focal points of a Christian's formative years. Jesus Christ called for a change of heart, not just a verbal commitment. Confronting human suffering and taking responsibility is key to Christian spiritual formation.

Second, PRAXIS has a wide appeal at a time when participation in traditional religious activities is low. We build on student idealism and a general revival of interest in volunteerism; to this we add the element of spiritual growth, asking students to explore the role faith plays in their lives.

Third, PRAXIS is relatively easy to put in place. Community agencies train and supervise volunteers. PRAXIS does not interfere with the classroom. Credit is not given for the volunteering but for a term paper, oral presentation, journal or other academic requirement set by the in-





University of Texas, El Paso, students clear ground for construction of a Habitat for Humanity home, as they learn to serve rather than be served.

structor. Participation is voluntary for students.

Response has been enthusiastic. Virtually every student feels he or she contributes something important to the community and grows as a person. A girl working on the Crisis Hotline said, "I concluded that not everyone's problems can be solved, but I can offer an ear, listen to what callers have to say, and hopefully listening will help them through the crisis period."

Another student working in a hospital emergency room related his volunteering to his Buddhism class. "Just as Buddha was isolated from certain types of suffering, I believe I am isolated from a lot of things. In my volunteering I found feelings I never had before about death, old age, disease and poverty. Happiness doesn't come from chasing down things the world says are good and rare. Happiness is satisfaction with one's actions and work."

Instructors are glad to receive term papers reflecting intense personal engagement. Several have shared the student term papers with me. English professor **Bruce Lawson** commented, "In his treatise on education, John Milton urges teachers to produce students who are 'inflamed with the study of learning and the admiration of virtue.' My experience last semes-

ter convinces me that Praxis helps students do just that. It joins practical experience and classroom learning in a powerful, workable way. The students in my Milton class who participated in Praxis had a remarkable opportunity to test and personalize the ethical principles of Milton's Christian humanism."

Agencies like volunteers who make definite commitments to be part of a program. As the coordinator of the Crisis Hotline said, "The Praxis program is needed in the community of El Paso. The practice of students going into the community as volunteers not only helps them to know their community better, it also helps those they provide services." The director of Catholic Charities told us that "the program was very helpful to us as we have a very small staff and depend much on volunteers."

I have enjoyed setting up the network which made this possible. But more than that, I enjoyed hearing students tell how their lives changed. It isn't uncommon to hear comments like, "Although my contribution is small, I see it as a way that I spread the word that the world can illuminate itself in a different, brighter light."

Discipleship is imitating Christ. The scriptures express Christ's compassion in many ways:

*Jesus went throughout Galilee teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. (Mt. 4:23)*

*And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you have seen and hears: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have news brought to them. (Lk. 7:22)*

*For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. (Romans 5:6)*

*Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested. (Hebrews 2:18)*

It is in seeing, confronting, wrestling with human suffering that one discovers the love by which God sent his Son. If we are to be like Him, to deserve the name of Christians, we must become people of mercy and compassion. The only way one can know whether one is called "to serve rather than be served" is to be put to the test.

But where in our normal process of Christian education does this testing take place? We confirm children who have only classroom training and no

*Continued on next page →*

*Praxis, continued* →

experience of responsibility for another person. With adults, those who continue Christian education, we emphasize intellect, curiosity, doctrine, and devotion. These remain superficial unless experienced in the context of God's healing and reconciling work.

My theological education 25 years ago in the University of Chicago's pioneering Doctor of Ministry program featured committed involvement helping others in conjunction with academic studies. Its approach has been systematized by **Don Browning**, Professor of Religion and Psychological Sciences at the Divinity School, and others in a renewed discipline of "practical theology." I have long felt this was an excellent model



*Cliff Boyd directs El Paso's Crisis Hotline where Praxis volunteers take calls that usually involve suicides or sexual assaults.*

for Christian education but didn't know how to make it feasible on a widespread basis, that is, until I learned of PRAXIS.

Churches can integrate faith, compassion, and wisdom by forming partnerships similar to those we use in PRAXIS. Opportunities to help are available in community agencies. College teachers can add understanding of ethical, psychological, social, and ecological factors. Ministers can conduct "action/reflection" seminars which integrate helping and knowledge in a person's faith.

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*The Rev. Dr. Arlin T. Larson is Director of the United Campus Christian Ministry and Wesley Foundation at the University of Texas at El Paso. He is also minister of the Congregational Church of Hope.*

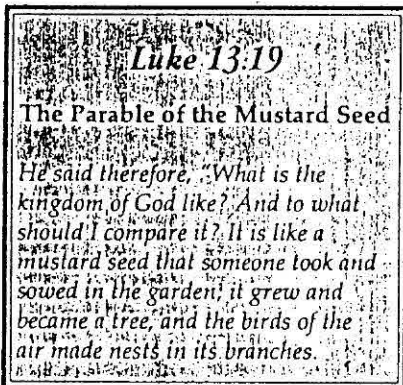
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# Mustard Seed Plants 'Seeds of Hope'

*For West Michigan's Young Male Ex-Offenders*

*by Susan K. Jones*

*Mayflower Congregational Church, Grand Rapids, Mich.*



**W**hen I entered Mustard Seed Christian Ministry," says former student Timothy D. Schaeffers, "I was angry, lonely, and tired of the way I was living. I was heavy into drugs and alcohol. I did not have a personal relationship with Christ and my life showed it.

"Sitting in the county jail in Kalamazoo, Michigan, I turned my life over to Jesus Christ. I told Him that whatever I did, or wherever I went, I would live for Him. I feel, that because of the commitment that I made that day, that God made a way for me into the Mustard Seed."

Tim Schaeffers is one of nearly 600 young men who have found their

way to Mustard Seed Christian Ministries, a residential student program for ex-offenders. Located in several inviting homes in the historic Heritage Hill area of Grand Rapids, Michigan, Mustard Seed reaches out to men ages 17-45 who can benefit by the love, support and family structure that was previously lacking in their lives.

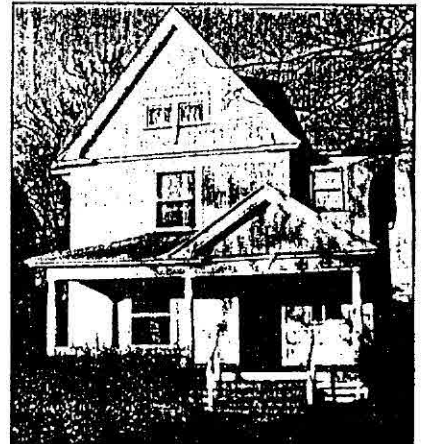
The Mustard Seed program costs approximately \$9000 per year per student, a fee that is offset by the student's own earnings as well as church and individual donations. This figure compares very favorably with the yearly \$25,000-\$30,000 cost of keeping an inmate in jail or prison. Moreover, while the general rate of recidivism is 50 percent or more, individuals who complete the Mustard Seed program of 13 months have a recidivism average of less than 5 percent.

## *Henry Salley's Commitment to Mustard Seed*

The visionary behind the Mustard Seed is **Henry Salley**, a man who has known the pain of alienation and incarceration first-hand. As a volunteer at Grand Rapids inner-city ministries during the late 1970s, Salley recog-

nized the need for a structured, yet nurturing environment for young men who wished to make a sincere effort to lead productive, Christian lives.

Time and again, Salley watched such men struggle against the temptations of the street and fail for lack of a safe haven. He envisioned a place where men could rebuild their lives and gain the discipline and spiritual



*Mustard Seed is located in several inviting homes in an historic but poor area of Grand Rapids. It reaches out to men 17-45 years of age who can benefit from the family love and support that was previously missing in their lives.*

*Continued →*



*Mustard Seed Director Henry Salley confers with Nancy Bachelder, chair of the Christian Outreach Committee at Mayflower Congregational Church. Salley won the Charles Rush award in 1993 as a minority person working with the NACCC toward worthwhile social and personal goals.*

maturity they needed to venture out on their own.

Salley began this ministry in 1979, inviting small numbers of needy men to live within such a home in a poor Grand Rapids neighborhood. In 1985, Mustard Seed Christian Ministries earned the sponsorship of Madison Square Christian Reformed Church.

Today, Henry Salley serves as full-time director of Mustard Seed. The ministry is governed by a board of trustees from various Grand Rapids area churches, helping and counseling professions, and interested individuals from surrounding communities. Mayflower Congregational Church in Grand Rapids is among the Ministry's supporters with lay and clergy volunteer time, trustee board membership and financial gifts.

### ***Mustard Seed Compares to "Christian Boot Camp"***

The atmosphere at Mustard Seed Christian Ministries is one of unconditional love and acceptance, but that doesn't mean that life is easy. Henry Salley has been known to awaken a student caught sleeping late with a bucket of cold water over the head and a booming "Wake up in the name

of the Lord!" Salley's experience as a U.S. Marine has helped him to design a program that instills discipline as well as educational and spiritual development.

Students are responsible not only for their own quarters and personal needs, but also for the maintenance and improvement of the Mustard Seed residences. The Mustard Seed day begins at 6 a.m., and includes liberal doses of good, wholesome food, classroom study, counseling for substance abuse and other problems, physical exercise, and paid work. There also is ample time for socialization, regular church attendance, community volunteer work, and the occasional restaurant meal.



*John Haney and Gordon Kudzik lead devotions at the pallet factory run by Mustard Seed. Students work five hours per day and attend classes for three to four hours. They are expected to develop personal relationships with God through prayer and study.*

### ***Mustard Seed Program of Discipling***

The unifying need of all Mustard Seed students is to develop the personal discipline, emotional and spiritual strength, and social proficiency to function productively in society on their own. This is accomplished by means of a program of Christian discipleship.

Discipling at Mustard Seed involves training on a one-to-one basis, between the teacher and the individual student. The learner is not simply told what to do and left on his own—nor is everything done for him. Rather, he gradually develops his skills and is encouraged to explore his

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Marvin Johnson (left) and Chuck Swanson break down a pallet. Work teaches basic habits, develops skills and provides income for the men and the Mustard Seed ministry. Workers are paired so that a new student works beside a partner who is more advanced in spiritual growth.

God-given potentials as he learns to exercise his responsibilities by working along with one who is more advanced in spiritual growth.

Students are expected to develop their personal relationship with God by being faithful in their own prayer life and study of scripture. The home environment includes regular Bible reading, prayer at meals, and consistent Bible study.

As soon as he is physically, spiritually and emotionally prepared, each Mustard Seed resident is helped to secure gainful employment, or to enroll in schooling which leads toward a trade or profession. Mustard Seed has its own small business, where many students find their initial employment.

Sensitive to each individual's needs, level of maturity and goals, the Mustard Seed program proceeds at the appropriate pace for each student. After a period of discipling between nine months and one year, Mustard Seed sends its graduates back into the community as practicing Christians and productive members of society. ■

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Susan K. Jones serves on the advisory board for Mustard Seed and on the council at Mayflower Church. In addition she is a free lance writer and an associate professor of marketing at Ferris State University, Big Rapids, Mich.

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**FOR MORE INFORMATION on Mustard Seed Christian Ministries, contact Henry Salley at Mustard Seed, 550 Logan S.E., P.O. Box 7551, Grand Rapids, MI 49510. Phone: (616) 774-8153.**

### No Role Models

Susan's son, William Shannon Jones, became a volunteer at Mustard Seed four years ago, at the age of 13. In the summer of 1993, before his East Grand Rapids football team's championship season, he included the following comment in his personal statement for application to the University of Michigan:

*I have worked at Mustard Seed for four years now, and I have never stopped learning about human beings. No two residents' stories are ever the same. I expected to hear that they had stolen because they needed a drug fix, but many times they committed crimes just for fun and excitement. I also found that often the impetus for breaking the law was familial. The men often deviated from society's norms because their parents or role models had done the same, or because their guardian had not adequately taught them the difference between right and wrong. Every man I spoke with echoed one point: If they had had the chance to learn what I was learning at Mustard Seed, they would not have broken the law. They would have stayed in school, learned a skill, and gotten a job.*



# More than Food

## 'Daily Bread' Offers Christian Concern

by Barbara Hunt  
NACCC World Christian Relations  
Commission

The first time I descended the stairs into the basement of St. Thomas Episcopal Church in search of **Our Daily Bread**, something happened. I expected simply to introduce myself, and to hand Manager Margaret Jones a donation from my church. As chairperson of the Board of Missions at Pilgrim Congregational Church, Taunton, Mass., it was my duty to deliver the Thanksgiving donation of food and money. I had never been there while a meal was being served, so this was an opportunity to "look for myself" and report back to our board. I'm not sure what I expected to find. I certainly did not expect to volunteer to work there, let alone to become a member of its board of directors, but that is precisely what happened, four years ago.

Something took place that I wanted to be a part of, and, indeed, I did become a part of. Since then, many of my feelings concerning the wide variety of relationships I have observed there, have grown and expanded. When I was asked to write an article for *The Congregationalist* about **Our Daily Bread**, I decided that these personal experiences and observations might be as valuable as the details pertaining to management of the kitchen. Please bear in mind that my comments reflect the impressions of my direct experience and do not represent the thoughts or beliefs of any other group or person. They are uniquely my own.

Taunton is a city of about fifty thousand people. In the last decade it has become a mixture of many cultures and races. It is in a constant race to keep up with all the changes, the needs, and requirements of its people. It is



David Fazio (left) and Art Largrey are two of the dozens of volunteers who help serve 150 meals daily five days a week in St. Thomas Episcopal Church, Taunton, Mass. All denominations participate including Taunton's Pilgrim Congregational Church.

neither a wealthy community nor a terribly poor one. Some people relish changes while others decry them. Somewhere in the middle lie opportunities for invention and creative thinking. It was in response to this spirit that nine years ago **Our Daily Bread** came into being. It had become apparent that there was a population of people in the city in need of a well-prepared meal and a safe place to consume it.

Through the hard work of a small group of dedicated people a private grant was obtained. It was the beginning. A Mustard Seed grant provided funds to initiate programs and maintain them through their delicate beginnings. St. Thomas Episcopal Church graciously offered facilities as a home, and the kitchen opened its doors. Since then, the city, churches, restaurants, private donors, farmers, civic groups—to mention only a few—have come forward with an unprecedented wave of generosity, to help keep the service alive. It is a continuous process of fund drives, grant applications, and appeals to the public, but it somehow seems to work.

**Our Daily Bread** is not a soup kitchen, for we serve a full first meal. Upon request, we also provide a second meal, smaller than the first. It is usually comprised of leftovers from the previous day. We also serve coffee, tea, and a cold drink. If we have a surplus of any perishable items, such as bread, they are placed on a table for all to help themselves. It is not an uncommon sight to see people about town carrying well-filled plastic bags from **Daily Bread**.



*"We couldn't operate without her." Margaret Jones, right, manages Daily Bread. As the only full-time paid employee she combines talents in human relations, food procurement and preparation and as a major domo. Shown with volunteer Greta Cartwright.*

## *Fellowship and Food*

Each client upon entering, must find a seat and settle, before being served. This prevents a lot of milling around, and allows each person an opportunity to have time for conversation. Many clients come for just such an opportunity. In this era of isolation, the comfort of a little caring conversation and a smile are important antecedents to the meal. At one table the same six men can be found every day. I enjoy serving them, talking with them, and yes, caring about them. Understand, loneliness is the constant companion of many of our clients. Of course, there are others that I have to grit my teeth and swallow in order to serve. I'll talk a little more about that later.

In a very short time, a lot of food has to be checked, washed, and readied for use. The kitchen has an air of frantic activity. The main meal usually consists of meat, vegetable, potato, salad and dessert. One of the churches in our community has created a welcome tradition of what we call "Meat Loaf Monday." Over the weekend, once a month, the ladies each bake a meat loaf and we serve what for many is a sumptuous treat. The odors wafting up from the kitchen on that Monday are unmistakably delectable. We have ten tables of approximately six people, which means sixty hungry people are eagerly awaiting their meal.

## *Competent Manager Essential*

We are blessed to have a very competent, thorough manager, Margaret Jones. As our only full-time paid employee, Margaret leaves me in awe. Her uncanny ability to juggle the incoming gifts of food, prepare meals, remember the names of volunteers and clients, greet donors, and make public appearances, is comple-

mented by her genuine and unending concern for the clients. When a rooming house where many of our clients lived burned to the ground, she arranged for meals to be served. She also taught me to look at our clients as individuals with individual wants and needs. Through her example, "those people" became individuals. Don't think for a minute that Margaret is syrupy sweet. She can "pin back the ears" of a misbehaving client and reduce the room to silence very quickly.

Few rules and regulations govern *Our Daily Bread*. Smoking is prohibited. School age children must be accompanied by an adult. Those are the posted rules. However, since *Daily Bread* is located on the premises of St. Thomas Episcopal Church, it is understood that a certain code of conduct will be maintained. It is a rare occasion when someone is asked to leave. I can only remember two in the four years I have worked there. Both were the result of poor behavior due to drug abuse. The only time I felt threatened was when a young man, obviously under the influence of something, acted like a person looking for a fight. When he finally left, one of the clients in the back let us know that he had stayed "in case of trouble."

## *'We Don't Do That Here'*

There is a code of unspoken cooperation that exists between volunteers and clients. Without it we could not function. Any behavior that jeopardizes the safety of the whole group, threatens the future of *Our Daily Bread* and no one can or will abide that. I can remember one day when a young man kept snapping his fingers, and calling for this and that. Just when I was about to say something to him, a very large man across the table from him turned and said, "We don't do that here. If you keep it up I'll just have to come across the table and make you stop." He stopped! Everyone in the room was grateful and relieved. We serve 125 to 150 meals a day, five days a week.

The volunteers are comprised of men and women of various ages and backgrounds. Some prefer to make meals; others would rather wait on tables. The "young" woman that waitresses with me is 82. She rides a bus in order to volunteer, sometimes more than once a week. Perhaps this was the spirit of service that attracted me to *Our Daily Bread*. I have observed this kind of dedication at work during disasters and found it here also.

Take David Fazio, an EMT and a fire fighter. He works during his off hours cooking in the kitchen, and filling in when our manager is away. His training in handling emergency situations and his ready smile are wonderful assets. Greta, a full-time nurse at a local hospital, still raising a family, is there too. Then there is Father Harry, an Episcopal minister, always willing to help with a generous hand and smiling countenance.

I could go on and on, with such examples and I only know a few of the volunteers.

Because I volunteer on Mondays I seldom get to meet the crews working on other days. These fine people from our community, a diverse and caring group, represent the finer side of human nature. Everyone enjoys the work and each other's company, all at the same time. That, combined with the belief people make a difference in one's life, that often the giver and the receiver are indistinguishable, keeps clients and volunteers going and growing. There is so much more that I could include, but I hope this is enough to give you a feel for what we do. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions or comments, for I would welcome the chance to be of assistance. I'd like to finish with a poem that was given as a Christmas present, from a client to the volunteers, last year. Perhaps it, in only a few words, expresses why **Our Daily Bread** is truly "people helping people" and a safe haven, a family, for many.

*I hope you never tire  
of my giving thanks to you.  
For seeing that we all are fed,  
and everything you do.*

*Unlike that famous poet  
I cannot "count the ways,"  
that giving of your time and  
self  
has brightened up our days.*

*Each year I just repeat myself  
But it just must be said,  
Taunton is very lucky  
to have "Our Daily Bread."*

*So to each and all of my  
"family"  
I send you Christmas cheer,  
and wish the best for all of  
you  
throughout the coming year.*

# Issues of Medical Futility

## Toward Caring Instead of Curing

□ by the Rev. Dr.  
Lloyd M. Hall, Jr.,  
Senior Minister,  
Plymouth  
Congregational  
Church, Racine, Wis.



Lloyd Hall, former NACCC Moderator and Executive Committee Chairman, has been in the Congregational ministry for 27 years, 10 of them at Plymouth Congregational Church, Racine, Wis. Recently named to the board of trustees at Piedmont College, Demorest, Georgia, Lloyd is also on-call chaplain at Racine's St. Luke's Hospital. He writes from his chaplain experience and attendance at a seminar on "medical futility."

**W**e are often confounded by more questions than answers when we are confronted with end-of-life issues about medical care. For most of us, the questions are raised by our awareness, however unscientific, that medicine can inadvertently create conditions of torture and abuse.

The scope of this reflection is confined to the issues surrounding that moment when we may need to decide to forgo any further curative treatment, and allow death to come. Our health care providers would not be as burdened by this debate if we who are, or will be, patients were assuming our responsibility. High on the list of ethical issues for physicians and hospitals is determining when—if ever—they are justified in declaring treatment futile and refusing to continue. What happens to patient autonomy? Must the caregiver continue to do whatever the patient (or surrogate) wants, for as long as he desires it, regardless of the cost and expected outcome? We need to enter into thoughtful, prayerful consideration of the issues so that we, our families, and our caregivers have some guidance and are freed from adversarial disputations at an emotional time.

We could address the question more easily if we could securely define "medical futility." Our superstitious attraction to technology allows us to reject all medical claims that curative treatment is no longer meaningful or useful. We tend to believe that if we can sustain or-

ganic function for "a while longer" there will be some "breakthrough" that will provide a cure. We Americans not only continue to pursue the Fountain of Youth but we live in denial of death as well. The resulting pressure means, too often, that we support organic function beyond any reasonable expectation, thus robbing life of its existential meaning while simultaneously denying the positive meaning of death.

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**Technology has  
become the god  
to which we  
give obeisance.**

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When attempts are made to show that "the last 100 times we tried this course of treatment it failed," we reject the argument on grounds that maybe the 101st *will* work, or the study wasn't about people like me/mine, or ... Quantitative arguments for futility fail primarily because, in truth, current data isn't that good, and, more significantly, we aren't interested in facts which contradict our belief structure.

A qualitative definition would recognize that if a treatment is not therapeutic (that is, a course of treatment which will benefit the patient in an appreciable way and en-

able his removal from intensive medical care) it may not be appropriate. "If a treatment merely preserves permanent unconsciousness or cannot end dependence on intensive medical care, the treatment should be considered futile."<sup>1</sup> We have no moral obligation to endure such treatment. To do so is both abusive to the body we have been given and is defiant toward the God-given natural order in which we will most certainly die.

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**Doesn't  
Christian  
charity play a  
role in my  
decision?**

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However much we may disagree on how much (in time and dollars) a life is worth, we will agree that there is some point at which it becomes irresponsible to apply any further resources without a reasonable expectation of cure. Can I morally demand the utilization of health resources to sustain my no longer autonomous organs, and thus prevent the application of those resources to meaningful therapy for those more likely to benefit?

In decisions for loved ones in particular, we cling to the physical, which we acknowledge, in our faith, to be intentionally transitory. We subject them in their terminal time to abuses for which we would be jailed if they were healthy. Advancing technology will not make these decisions easier. A Christian must

approach the issues with the insights of the faith. Because we "can" does not mean we "must."

As potential patients we have another role to play. Virtually every state has made provision for Advanced Directives—legal instruments in which we clearly establish all of those "extraordinary" measures which we believe to be appropriate and those which we wish to decline, and name a surrogate or agent who is authorized to instruct our care givers what is and is not to be done. As painful as leaving our survivors without a will may be, leaving them to struggle with these issues without knowing our desires is worse.

Eventually we will redefine medical care. Once we have matured beyond the cure-all/defeat-death stage, we will begin to see that medical care is the continuous delivery of physical, emotional, and spiritual support from the moment of conception to the moment of death. We will not see end-time care as a "giving up," but, rather, as the care which is appropriate for that stage of life. Physicians who have patients with this understanding will be able to continue to provide care without the need to feel failure when we die.

In some degree these are First Commandment issues. We have long-since adopted the belief that knowledge of the healing arts is God-given and is to be used for the benefit of humankind. Somewhere along the line we pushed that conviction to one which seems *de facto* to suggest that we can defeat the order which God established. In some respects, technology has become the god to which we give obeisance. Sometimes with horrors which pale the eschatology of Revelation, we idolize the physical at the expense of the spiritual. If it is not

idolatry, it is at least the forbidden fruit—the seeking of a "knowledge" through which we may defeat death.

However elusive a clinical definition of "medical futility" may be, we who are the patients bear the greater responsibility. It is for us to determine how far we wish efforts to be taken to elude death. How much of the beauty of dying to Christ are we willing to give up to seize a few more days? James Bresnahan has written, "While life and health are to be cherished as a gift of God, a Christian's dying is also the final gift of God's calling us to be conformed to Christ. Our dying is thus seen and accepted as the final gift of redemption in Christ."<sup>2</sup> We were, beloved, born to die. Our Lord came to His final hour reluctantly, but, having arrived, chose to go home peacefully. ■

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1 Lawrence J. Schneiderman, et al., "Beyond Futility to an Ethic of Care," *The American Journal of Medicine*, February 1994.

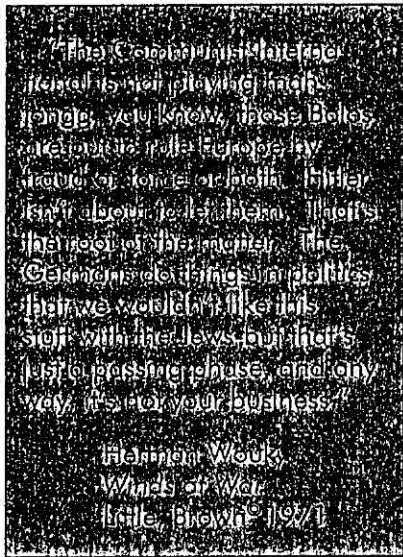
2 James F. Bresnahan, "Catholic Spirituality and Medical Interventions in Dying," *America*, June 29, 1992.



# Christian Compassion

## Still Missing as Holocausts Continue

by Dr. Gustave D. Goldshine  
Pilgrim Congregational Church, Pomona, Calif.



**T**wenty centuries ago the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ profoundly affected the future of man just as did the discovery of fire, invention of steel, and the splitting of the atom. Those inventions changed man's way of life. Jesus changed man's concept of life. If we accept the Brotherhood of Man, Golden Rule, and Universal Love, then how do we explain the actions of man against his fellow man? At this Lenten season when we consecrate again the death and resurrection of Christ for the sins of man, we need to come to grips with the modern acts of "crucifixion": the



The wall behind the eternal flame in the Dearborn, Mich., Holocaust Memorial Center lists the concentration camps where mass murder (Babi Yar) was committed. "These I do remember and for them my soul weeps ..."

murder of six million Jews in the Nazi death camps of WW II, and similar events since the end of the War, some of them going on today.

Imagine that you have lived all your life in a city the size of Chicago: population three million. Now imagine that in the suburbs about 12 miles from the downtown is a prison settlement that houses about 200,000 people. The settlement adjoins the main highway that leads

west of the city and the front gate is only 20 yards off the highway. The fence stretches for at least a mile along the highway. The city is Munich and the settlement is Dachau. Hundreds of guards control thousands of inmates who live, work, feed and die here, because the Nazis believe in the Master Race and all others need to be eliminated. How can it be that nobody knew anything until May, 1945?

## Both Good and Evil are in the Scheme of Life

In this context we come to grips with the issue of good and evil, and the presence of each in the scheme of life. For such a contemplation, a visit to the Holocaust Memorial Center in Dearborn, Mich., is an experience everyone should have and never forget.

The Center houses documents and exhibits that describe the rise of Nazism in Germany in the 1930s and the campaign of anti-Semitism from the beginning of the Nazi reign until the end of the War. It all starts with the denial of basic civil rights, and, therefore, a separation of some people into a special category as "underpersons." With the full cooperation of the legislative and judicial bodies of government, a series of laws and prosecutions resulted in the total denial of property and civil rights to these people. Then came the decree that set up the "Camps" starting in 1933, less than 60 days after Hitler entered the Hindenburg government.

A flurry of publications portrayed the Jews as the enemy of the German people: as greedy money lenders, as Christ killers, as predators on German womanhood, as Communists, as tools of the Versailles Treaty Powers (U.S., Britain, France), as the source of all the "bad" that happened to Germany since 1918. All of this justified the start of the Concentration Camps.

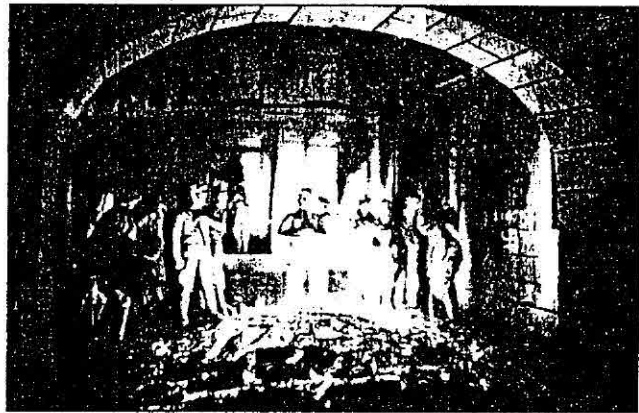
As the exhibits illustrate the campaign to justify Nazi policy, so the descriptions and the photographs tell the true tale of the horror of the "Death Camps." Over 12 million people died in these camps, about 50 percent of

### Never Again

From the Washington Post, then the New York Times and now this article, the reader is reminded what was inflicted and still is inflicted on those just like us. In the Jewish ghetto of Lodz, 3,000 people were shot in the streets. In the ghettos of Warsaw and Vilna, 300,000 people were shot in the streets. In the ghettos of Budapest and Prague, 300,000 people were shot in the streets. In the ghettos of Theresienstadt and Terezin, 300,000 people were shot in the streets. Never again, as we have vowed.

Richard Cohen, Washington Post, Nov. 6, 1995

them Jews. Millions of Russians were killed, as well as representation from all European nations. The deliberate campaign to eliminate the European Gypsy population left fewer than 10 percent alive at the end of the War. The Nazis believed that the Catholic ministry would be a source of resistance, and so they killed virtually the entire Catholic ministry of Eastern Europe. People labored 16 hours a day, and had a diet of less than 600 calories. The work week was 6.5 days, with some time one day a week for hygiene. The huts where they slept had bunk beds in columns of five, with about 18 inches between bunks. In an ordinary hut designed for 45-50 enlisted men, they kept 450-500 prisoners. There were no blankets or warm clothing issued, so the work, the diet, and the European weather killed many of the inmates. People were taken from all over Europe without notice or cause. Cattle car train



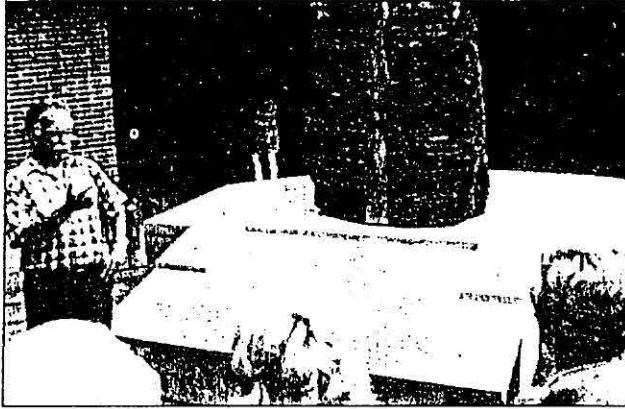
Nazis burned books of "degenerate authors," including traditional Jewish literature and books by both Jewish and non-Jewish authors, many of them American.

convoys transported them east, where most of the killing camps were located. In the winter the cold killed 30-40 percent of those in the cars. The summer heat and lack of water did the same.

The deliberate killing of prisoners started with bullets and hangings. It wasn't until 1943 that the mass killing with gas started in earnest. People who lived in those times tell of the smoke pall that almost blocked out the sun and the odor that permeated the entire area.

In these camps the Nazis carried out "medical experiments." The most famous involved camp population to test survival of airmen at high altitudes and under severe cold. An exhibit of these gruesome examples of "man's inhumanity to man" makes us wonder about Bosnia and China, where this kind of deliberate killing is still practiced with no penalty from the world or U.S. government.

Having visited actual camp sites during my many



*The Rev. Dr. James R. Lyon, executive director, the Ecumenical Institute for Jewish-Christian Studies, speaks to Congregationalists at the memorial to those who helped Jews escape the Holocaust.*

trips to Europe, I can testify to the accuracy of the exhibits. Although there is no actual replica of a facility that housed the gas ovens, as in the Los Angeles Holocaust Museum, the exhibits that are there can still chill a person on a balmy summer day in a free America.

There are background examples of specific people and the actualities of their lives as they were sent to the camps and eventually perished. At the end of the guided tour in Dearborn, an arrangement was made to have an ex-inmate who emigrated to the U.S. after the War and settled in Detroit, speak to us regarding his personal experiences from the time he and his brother were incarcerated in 1940 until May 1945 when they were finally freed by the Allied forces. They are the only remaining members of a family of six people.

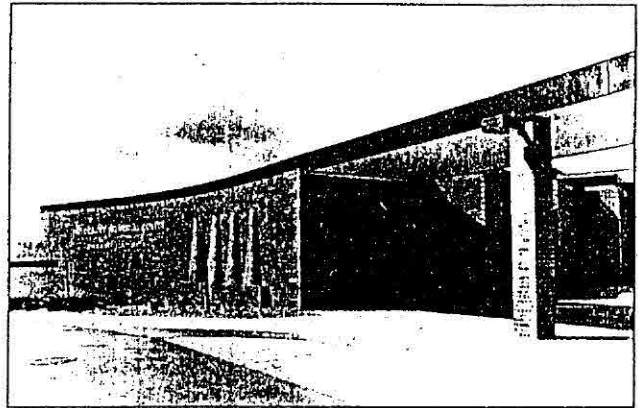
## **Do We Really Believe in Our Religion?**

A visit to an actual campsite like Dachau via videotape, located outside Munich where I actually went, should be on every civics agenda and in every high school history course. When I was there on a summer day in July, I had the most terrifying experience of my life. Wandering through the site and seeing the barbed wire, the camp huts, the firing squad pits, the ovens,

and all the documentation exhibits can give a person a cold feeling on the warmest day.

Now where do our religion and our religious beliefs fit into all of this crazed world? Do we truly believe the assertion of the sanctity of human life and the brotherhood of our fellow man? Are we to practice our Sunday assertions of Christianity and the love of the human race, or is this just a phenomenon of Sunday morning? If we truly believe and practice our religious beliefs, then how do we simply accept these actions as actions of the "real" world, and simply go about our day-to-day work and play as if this history exists separately from our own lives?

And if our religious beliefs do not allow for this kind of organized maniacal behavior, then what is the role of the Church and the Church leadership? After all, the Church is the integrated sum of all our beliefs and desires and our leadership is our representation to the world. So, what role do we and our ministerial "front" play in this devastating tragedy? How are we to cope with what is happening now in Bosnia, China, Mid-



*The Holocaust Memorial Center in Dearborn, Mich., was funded by Shaarit Haplaytah, a group of survivors primarily living in the Detroit area.*

East, Cuba, and places like Somalia and Sudan? The same acts of terrorism and genocide are practiced there and yet our Church is silent on these events and the world governments stand aside. Even the United Nations does not take a proactive role in these areas and on the subjects of mass brutality and sex slavery. The truth of the matter is that the Church is the only entity in the world that can make an impact on these events. The membership of the Church is guilty of passive ignorance by not forcing the Church leadership to take an outspoken position on these matters.

And yet the Nazis did not invent anti-Semitism. Did not Martin Luther say, "... these Jews should be treated with a sharp mercy, their synagogues set on fire with sulfur and pitch thrown in, their houses destroyed"? In parts of the Scriptures and in the positions taken by the



## Only 14 Million Survive

Over the past eight centuries, nearly one out of every two Jews was murdered in Europe. In the last 65 years alone, one out of three Jews were killed. Their crime was having Jewish parents. The issue must be confronted as a current event.

There are now fewer than 14 million Jewish survivors left in the entire world. The vigor of Judaism in the first century which permitted the flowering of new thought, new directions, new concepts, has been denigrated and denied over and over by bigots who use and misuse, who bend and redesign the language of the New Testament to meet their ends in order to arouse followers to participate in what is ultimately anti-Christian madness.

The Jewishness of Jesus must not be denied. Christians affirm, often without reflection, that God chose a young Jewish woman among all women on earth to be Jesus' mother. Accordingly, Christian leaders the world over are emphasizing their distaste and hatred for Jews as anti-Christian.

Explorations, vol. 9, no. 3, 1995  
Publication of American Faith Institute

Vatican down through the centuries, we find signs of encouragement for anti-Semitism.

The Nazis kept meticulous records and from them we learn all that happened in those days. Those same records provided proof of crimes against humanity at the Nuremberg trials. If we are not to repeat the mistakes of the past we must learn from our experiences. In September 1938 Neville Chamberlain said about the situation in Czechoslovakia: "How horrible, fantastic, incredible it is that we should be digging trenches here [London], because of a quarrel in a faraway country between people of whom we know nothing ... we cannot in all circumstances undertake to involve the whole British Empire in a war simply on her account. If we have to fight it must be on larger issues than that ..." As a result of that philosophy, 52 million people died in World War II, a war that should have been stopped in 1939, a war that birthed the Death Camp.

Somehow we must learn from our experiences in order to provide a better world for the generations to come. The assassination of Yitzhak Rabin is another example of a radical ideology run wild in an effort to redress imagined wrongs. Rabin sought a secular peace and

justice for all the parties in the Mid-East, and he died for his efforts, at the hands of his own people, like Jesus. Is this a parallel to the crucifixion of 2000 years ago?

The Church and all its ministry stands convicted of the same passive neglect if we do not march forward in a firm and public manner to turn back the course of modern events in areas where such should be our position. In Bosnia today we witness the death of 250,000 people initiated by quarrels over ten centuries old, with

## Guilty of Passive Ignorance

their origins lost in the mists of time. Again the world stood by; even the Europeans next door adopted a "it's only the Balkans" attitude. Now American soldiers are being asked again to go to Europe and do what the Europeans wouldn't do, and American mothers, wives, and kids are getting ready to risk their sons and daughters, mates and parents to a European quagmire. It is a terrible and profound decision to ask for the lives of your countrymen and young people and then send them 5000 miles away where even the body may never return. It must be for a great and just cause, and not for a political requirement. And it must be for a great and just end, and not a wasteful expenditure like Somalia, and Haiti.

Could the Christian movement have exerted an influence four or five years ago before the genocide started and the mass graves were filled? Future generations of Christians and Jews should not be divided by a collective memory of hate and fear but instead be united in a shared vision of heritage, freedom, and love. The Hebrew Cabala, that mystical treatment of the Old Testament and the relationship of man and God, says that "out of every evil action there can be found some measure of goodness." This was true 2000 years ago and is still a truth today. We have an opportunity in the Mid-East, Balkans, and our everyday lives to find that measure of goodness. Christianity can be a beacon to guide our way toward that deserving goal.

### Lest We Forget ... ■

*Dr. Gustave D. Goldshine retired in July 1994, after 42 years in the aerospace industry with Hughes Corporation and General Dynamics. He and wife Marilyn have attended Pilgrim Congregational Church, Pomona, Calif., since 1957.*

# The Second Parent

## Church Offers Positive Influence for 'Broken Families'

by Dr. Betty Vos, Commission on Family Life in the Church

"The religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress ..."  
(James 1:27, NIV)

**Y**ou've heard all the statistics: nearly half of all new marriages will end in divorce; two-parent first-married families—our beloved "traditional" family form—are now less than half of all family groups; single-parent families have swelled to 30 percent of all families with children under eighteen ... and the list goes on.

You've also heard reported repeatedly in news broadcasts, documentaries, and newspapers, the negative outcomes for members of these family forms. Children of divorce, or children in single-parent families, have been shown, in many studies, to be different from children in "traditional" families. As children, they have poorer school achievement, more child behavior problems, higher aggression levels, more withdrawn behavior, more depression, lower self-concept, less social competence, poorer physical health, are more likely to use drugs and alcohol, and are more likely to be gang-involved.

Once grown, children in single-parent families continue to be different from their peers who lived in never-divorced families: they marry younger, they have children younger, they are more likely to divorce, they have less education, they have lower income, and they have poorer personal adjustment.

I cannot refute these statistics, but I need to share the other half of the same story—the part that's almost never reported.

When we hear about these negative outcomes, most of us tend to think of two groups or clumps of kids: those in traditional families, who do well, and those in single-parent families, who do poorly. What the press fails to tell us is that adjustment varies widely across *both* groups. Lots of kids, in both kinds of homes, are doing very well, and lots of other kids, in both kinds of homes, are not doing well at all. This means that some kids in

single-parent families are even doing better than many kids in two-parent families. Specifically, researchers say that the top 40 percent of kids from divorced or single-parent families are turning out better than the lower 50 percent of children in never-divorced homes.

*This is news.* Many children in single-parent families do as well as, or even better than, many children in never-divorced families. Being a child of divorce, or living in a single-parent home, does not doom any individual child to the poor outcome reported in the first set of findings above.

### It matters because churches can make a difference.

Why does this matter to us in our churches? It matters because churches can make a difference. Researchers know a great deal about what it takes to help the child in the single-parent home turn out as well as children from any other kind of home. Four factors turn up repeatedly in the research: the role of the child's second parent, the level of family conflict, the presence of a social support network, and the family's income level. Knowing this, we can make a difference in our churches in our pastoral counseling, our inreach, our programming, and our friendships.

**The Child's Second Parent:** In most instances, both children and adults in single-parent families are healthier and happier if the non-custodial parent stays involved in his or her children's lives. Pastoral counseling is the most obvious component of our church ministry that can make a difference here. When couples consult the pastor in the process of their divorce, much can be done to educate them about the need for both adults to continue in their partnership as parents, even if they must dissolve their marriage partnership. Pastoral counseling that stresses mediation, or information and referral to divorce mediation services, can facilitate this process. Besides saving money, divorce mediation generally leads to greater satisfaction and greater compliance with the financial, custodial, and visitation agreements, and results in greater involvement by the



non-residential parent. Couples also need to be aware of the possibility of joint legal custody, which usually increases the involvement and contribution of the second parent.

## **Church programming can also have an impact on the second parent's involvement.**

Church programming can also have an impact on the second parent's involvement. Invitations to special events can be sent to both parents, and the second parent can be made to feel welcome when he or she attends with the children. All of us are familiar with nasty, wrenching divorces, and with our own tendency to blame the more flagrant or obvious offender. Ultimately, such bias is more harmful than helpful to the restructuring family, even though in the short run it may masquerade as "support" for the more apparently innocent victim. Because children need relationships with both of their parents, great effort is needed in our church communities to overcome such a blaming stance and help both parents feel comfortable in our church circles as they join in activities with their children and their children's friends.

**The Level of Family Conflict:** Here the research is quite compelling: high levels of family conflict have an extremely negative impact on both children and adults. Often, children in highly discordant two-parent families turn out worse than children in single-parent families. Again, pastoral counseling is the most obvious entry point for churches to make a difference. Pastors are still the most frequently consulted helping professional for marital conflict. Pastors need training in conflict resolution, negotiation, and communication skills to work with such families. Education about the need to resolve or reduce conflict for the sake of the children can go far in assisting the divorcing or divorced family to diminish conflict. Failing that, families can at least be helped to avoid involving children in the conflict. Children are far more harmed by conflict when they themselves are caught up in it through such behaviors as being asked to take sides, being asked to tattle on the other parent, being pumped for detailed negative information after visitation, or being constantly told only the negative, terrible things about one parent by the other parent.

Unless families are successful in keeping conflict levels low, the positive effects of increasing the involvement of both parents may be washed out entirely. When visitation and decision making are scenes for flagrant

family fights, increased involvement only leads to increased tension and trouble for adults and children.

**The Social Support Network:** Evidence is now strong and clear that all of us, in all kinds of families, are healthier and happier if we feel connected to a trusted group of friends we can confide in and rely on in times of trouble. Research on single-parent families has shown that the presence of such a network can often offset the negative impact of all the other factors listed here. This is perhaps our strongest potential contribution as churches: if in our church fellowship we ourselves can become the circle of friends to whom the single parent can turn, we can help compensate for the effects of an absent parent, high levels of conflict, and even low levels of family income.

This especially means that we should stay involved and supportive during the divorce process. Adults undergoing divorce are in a time of crisis, and may become

anxious, depressed, and withdrawn. It is often hard for friends to stay involved through such a phase when the rewards of friendship may be few, yet this can be precisely what is needed, if we can do so without prying or being invasive. A simple offer of companionship, a cup of coffee, child care for a short break, or just an inquiry about how someone is doing sometimes makes an incredible difference for a parent who is feeling alone and overwhelmed.

In addition, divorcing adults and single parents often need to develop new networks of friends who reflect their own reality: they need connections with other divorced adults and single parents. In our pastoral care and inreach, we need to be aware of divorce adjustment groups and single-parent support groups; perhaps such a group might also fit into our church programming.

Along with direct support for the single parent, a social support network can greatly add to the resources available to that parent's children. Particularly when the second parent is absent from the scene, close personal relationships with adults outside the family can make a difference for a child. In some studies of delinquent children, having a trusted adult to confide in was the strongest factor predicting whether a child would re-offend following treatment. Big Brother and Big Sister are formal programs established to meet these needs. Some churches have established mentoring programs to link the generations in a mutual meeting of needs. Connections to youth group leaders, Sunday school teachers, and the friends of their parents are informal ways churches can provide similar resources for children.

**Many children in single-parent families do as well as, or even better than, many children in never-divorced families.**