



The Vine

April 2006

Becoming a community through which God's healing hope can flow to the world.

First Mennonite Church of Champaign-Urbana
217-367-5353

From one of your pastor's perspectives ...

Larry Wilson

Reviewing the past few weeks activities around First Menno is a reminder of who we are these days. We've had 3 joint Taize Lenten Services of Prayer, Scripture and Worship with Westminster Presbyterian Church, which is one block south of Champaign's Centennial Park. They're a smaller aging congregation, who just celebrated their 50th anniversary. This has been a very positive time of worship with brothers and sisters (not Mennonite), but having so much in common.

On April 2 ... a couple of days from when I'm writing this Vine article ... we will be worshipping with Community UCC congregation on campus, located in the 800 block of south 6th Street. This happened because we were invited to send some singers over to join their choir for a special program of sacred song. Rather than have 8-10 singers take their families, we decided to just all go and worship together that Sunday morning.

This UCC congregation is the same one we built a Habitat house with several years ago. There has been one recent pulpit exchange, and we've used their former Pastor Jack Good's book on the Bible several times.

Often as I look around various classes or committee meetings these days, including Council, I realize how ecumenical we have begun in our regular body life. Yet we are all committed to First Mennonite Church.

At the same time, our Coffee and Conversation Class, after reviewing the Mennonite Confession of Faith, has entered into conversation on various

significant issues in light of this Mennonite way of seeing things. So, we continue to be both unashamedly Mennonite, yet aware we're much richer theologically and relationally because of our broader church connections. None of these happenings were on the drawing board just waiting for the chance to "do" them, but rather we have been trying to be open to the Spirit and what and whom God brings into our lives. It is a faith filled way to live and to be quite honest ... exciting, scary and deeply meaningful! When we grab hold of the wind of the Spirit, living out of serious conversation with the Scripture, open to having the mind of Christ become more and more part of our individual and congregational life ... sometimes one just has to hang on!

BOOK REVIEW

by Gordon Oyer

The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace

John Paul Lederach (Oxford University Press: 2005)

Late last year I spotted a short notice of this book in The Mennonite and decided to use my birthday discount at Pages to order it. As a significant work by one of the Mennonite world's (actually, the general world's) leading conflict transformation experts, it proved intriguing. Since Lederach writes mainly for peers in his profession, the book is peppered with social theory jargon that can distract—unless, perhaps, you are a social scientist! But his creative approach to the topic still made it seem worth sharing with a congregation dedicated to building peace.

What initially drew me to the book was its promise to explore the question, "How do we

transcend the cycles of violence that bewitch our human community while still living in them?” In response, he advocates tapping into the “art of the creative process”—to pursue the “wellspring [that] is not found in the supporting scaffolding” of practical techniques. Creativity and intuition, he asserts, often must engage situations before those tools can effect changes of substance. In today’s western culture, this requires not a “minor corrective” in our thinking, but a “worldview shift.” To assist in this, he proposes four “disciplines”:

- The capacity to imagine ourselves in a web of relationships that includes our enemies;
- The ability to sustain a paradoxical curiosity that embraces complexity without reliance on dualistic polarity;
- The fundamental belief in and pursuit of the creative act;
- The acceptance of inherent risk of stepping into the mystery of the unknown that lies beyond the far too familiar landscape of violence.

One of several specific ideas that intrigued me was his challenge to traditional views on creating “movements” of change. These often focus heavily on raising popular “consciousness” to a “critical mass” that then surges forward to realize the desired change. In doing so, he cautions, we “accept the premise that change is inherently a dualistic struggle” for which we engage on a “battlefield [where] success is measured by the number of people who have joined ‘our side.’” Consequently “we have often fallen prey to the trap of replicating that which we abhor.” Inherent problems with this model include its view of change as a linear process, investment of energy in opposing rather than building, and too much focus on simply effecting a specific change while ignoring the need to sustain change once it happens.

Rather than a linear “critical mass” approach, Lederach offers his “web-based” model that focuses on relationships and linkages. Instead of charting out simplistic steps along a

path to peace, he assumes that change happens through “multiple processes at different levels and social spaces [taking] place at the same time.” In this model, success occurs through “interdependent processes that link people and places to move the whole of the system toward those changes.” And this interdependency requires “strategically building linkages...across not-like-minded and not-like-situated relational spaces.” In other words, it requires building connections among those who do not think or act like each other or live in the same neighborhoods or in houses that look like theirs; connections among people who have different priorities, expectations, values. People hanging out only in their own camps will not bring peace. In communicating this, he creatively draws upon observations both of spiders building webs and of those who study how spiders go about constructing them in order to understand the natural process.

Lederach anchors much of his discussion around four core stories from non-western settings, where breakthroughs came via creative and unexpected responses to situations of intense conflict. Such openness to learning from beyond our western mindset broadens the impact of his writing. For example, Lederach shared his effort to integrate African perceptions of time into his framework...which took years of interaction before he really “got” it. It requires reframing our concept of history from being that which lies behind us to that which lies before us. This seems rather nonsensical from within western culture, which views humanity as “progressing forward” into the future and idealizes anticipating what comes next. A nonwestern view instead understands us as “backing” into the future. All we can truly “see” spread before us is what has already occurred and what is unfolding now; it is silly to assume we can see what happens next. This perspective, Lederach says, takes seriously experiences of the “ancestors” that have shaped the present, and understands that those

experiences must somehow be attended to before we can ever “reconcile” or reconstitute what has done violence to the flow of history.

The Moral Imagination of course does not offer clear answers. Its chapter titles are structured as a series of “Thoughts on...”; rather than delineate steps to follow, they intend to help jump-start the creative process. If others choose to read it, I’d be interested to hear your thoughts.

Addendum: About half-way through *The Moral Imagination* this February, I picked up an article titled, “Toward a Theology for Conflict Transformation: Learnings from John Howard Yoder” [The Mennonite Quarterly Review (January 2006) by Mark Nation Thiessen (one-time director of the now-defunct Champaign-Urbana Peace Initiative)]. Since John Paul Lederach wrote from a social science rather than theological perspective, it offered interesting parallel reading—especially since Lederach acknowledges Yoder’s influence. It reminds that for us, building peace has a core spiritual—not simply “aesthetic”—dimension. Among other things, it addresses ways a particularly Mennonite view of Christ and religious community experience can shape peace building. For example, a sample list of “personal qualities and community resources...valuable for those who would intervene in conflicts” includes: Vulnerability; a readiness to be shot at from both sides; Willingness not to get credit; Long-range holding power that is rooted in something other than immediate success; A network of people...who offer encouragement and accept criticism; Commitment to the dignity of the other party. Interestingly, a “web” analogy also surfaced in the quote of a theologian who defined shalom as, “The webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight.” And “when this web is broken, there has been a ‘vandalism of shalom.’” This fit nicely with

Lederach’s image of the peace-builder as one who constructs webs that link the “not-like-minded.” Also fitting nicely was Thiessen’s comment that “Christians need to have their imaginations, their language, their thought patterns and their lives shaped by the Gospel and the community that attempts to embody it... ‘One of the many ways the church can be of service to the world is to nurture alternative ways of seeing the world that question what are thought to be necessities.’” Peace-building is a community enterprise; we together have a part in nurturing a “moral imagination.”

—Gordon Oyer

**Feeding the needy focus of fundraiser
by Colleen Lehmann
Submitted by Peter Dyck**

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you invited me in.”
--Matthew 25:35

You know the anticipation that Thanksgiving turkey elicits. Stomachs growl and mouths drool from those of us with plenty in our pantries at the mere mention of the holiday feast.

So imagine if you will the reaction of folks wracked by war, famine or natural disaster when life-sustaining meat is bestowed upon them

Such is the mission behind the Mennonite Central Committee’s canned meat drive, an effort that has provided “meaty” sustenance since the first drive was undertaken to help combat hunger and need that developed as a result of World War II.

Since that time there have been millions of

pounds of canned meat shipped to hungry mouths in countries around the world. And the bounty represents not only food for the body, but the soul as well.

“the food and clothing you have brought will help us very much but the most important thing is that you have come here and brought comfort for our souls,” commented a woman evacuated from Chechnya to MCC workers during a previous drive.

The Arthur area, which is well known for its humanitarian efforts both near and far, is for the third year in a row helping out with the drive. All local Amish and Mennonite churches in Arthur, Champaign and Fisher are pitching in.

Our goal is to collect enough donations to buy around 20,000 pounds of turkey meat, and we would be delighted to welcome contributions from anyone interested in helping feed the poor,” said Ervin Yoder, a member of the local committee as well as a representative on the MCC Great lakes regional board.

Last year MCC shipped almost 349, 000 pound of meat to the hungry in Haiti and Bosnia, and distributed \$300,00 worth of canned meat to tsunami victims in Indonesia. Closer to home, victims of hurricanes Katrina and Rita received canned meat at the beginning of MCC’s involvement down South.

According to IOCC emergency field director Frank Carlin, many families lacked refrigeration or resources to purchase meat on their own. They praised the MCC meat as a welcome change from other canned goods.

Planning for this year’s drive began in earnest in August and will be ready for shipment in February. The committee is comprised of nine men: Norman Swartzentruber of Arcola, Lester

Miller of Arthur, Allen Helmut of Arthur, Jerry Kuhns of Arthur, Ervin Yoder of Arthur, Peter Dyck of Thomasboro, Noah Kauffman od Sullivan, and Paul J. Gingerich, Merle Gingerich and Lewis Otto all of Arthur.

While these gentlemen are devoting a considerable amount of time and effort to the cause, they are quick to point out that it is the individuals, businesses, organizations who donate money to the drive who are making the real difference.

While this is the third year in recent history that the Arthur area has been part of this particular MCC mission, there was a precedent set decades earlier.

“Years ago, when there were still local canneries here in Arthur we used to do our own canning for the drive” recalled Kuhns. Local butchers would donate hogs, steers or whatever and we would can the meat.”

When the canneries closed, well over two decades ago, Arthur’s participation in the drive also ceased. A stint on the MCC’s meat canning committee several years ago renewed Kuhn’s interest in the program, and he enthusiastically helped organize Arthur’s reinstatement.

Many communities, most of them larger, that join in the meat drive, avail themselves of the mobile canning unit MCC has. The catch to this is it must be for a two day period and scores of local volunteers must be scheduled of he canning process.

“As much as we would love to have the hands on aspect of using the canning trailer, we weren’t sure if we could pull together all the labor and materials needed for two days” said Kuhns.

As it turned out organizers found that the cost of

having the meat canned at Grabil Country Meats, Inc., out of Grabil Indiana was just about equal to having the canner come to the area.

“Someday, if our efforts in this grow, we would like to do the MCC canner, because directly helping with the work gives people a greater sense of ownership of a project. But for now, this is the most economical way for us to participate,” said Yoder.

NOTE:

The effort this year was a great success.

\$20,416.40 was raised. Six tons of turkey was made into 6,588 cans of turkey. Even the shipping to Akron Pennsylvania was donated. Congratulations to all involved in the campaign. Ed.

From the Editor

It is a real pleasure to be allowed to put the Vine together. Thanks to the contributors to this issue of the Vine.

We have a quick turn around for the May issue so please get your articles, reports, poems, or cartoons to me by the first of May.

Put them in my mailbox, email them to me at:
dw338@shout.net
or mail them to me
at
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FOR JEAN

**You made me
see colors
inside gray
and practice
the art of
drawing with-
out looking
at my hand.**

**Once you cap-
tured impas-
sioned greens of
spring, and brought
them inside
for me to
discover
nothing was
quite as green
as I had
imagined.**

**Now I must
imagine
you in these,
your paintings.
It's what's left
of the flash
in your eyes,
the sudden
strong grasp of
your beliefs.
In these deft
strokes, the quick
gift of life.**

**Lynne Proctor Sancken
June 29, 2005**

