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GIFTS DISCERNMENT

The Priesthood of All Believers

Our witness can help governments carry out more of God's will than our silence can.

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A Witness to the Nations

Gifts Discernment is the last in our year-long series on the significance of basic church practices for public policy advocacy. As Jesus' followers, we are learning to implement the ways of God's new community in every dimension of life. When we do this, we honor God and serve as a model of God's will for the nations.

We can also advocate for changes in society at large that correspond to these practices. We do not expect the nations to embrace the reign of God consciously or to the same degree as the fellowship of believers. But our witness can help governments and societies carry out more of God's will than our silence can.

Mennonites and Brethren in Christ affirm "the priesthood of all believers." Every believer has dignity, authority and giftedness. Each has received gifts to build up the church and minister in the world. And each has authority to fully participate in the church's decisions.

Unfortunately, we too often view others by "worldly standards," as the apostle Paul writes (2 Corinthians 5:12–17). We fail to discern the gifts and authority of less assertive sisters and brothers or those identified with groups mistreated and subordinated in our society.

A congregation that practices the giftedness of all believers will work hard to honor the dignity, recognize the authority and discern the gifts of each member. It will make special efforts to receive the wisdom of those

BY MARTY SHUPACK

who seem less prominent or have been under-valued in the world (1 Corinthians 12:22–26). Kate Cudlipp, a member of Church of the Saviour in Washington, D.C., writes about her congregation's efforts to accomplish this.

By analogy, nations which respect the dignity, ability and participation of all people—made in the image of God—will embrace forms of government in which political power is truly shared by all. They will empower the oppressed and give special attention to the voices of the marginalized.

For the United States to move more in this direction, it should humbly contribute to the genuine empowerment of the Iraqi people (p. 2). It should listen to the voices of immigrants, and treat them with respect (p. 3). Instead of forcing its own agenda on less powerful peoples and countries, it must work cooperatively with others in institutions like the World Trade Organization (p. 4) and the United Nations (p. 5). It must stop violating the dignity of its newcomers, and the freedom of its citizens (p. 6).

The community of Christ serves as a light to the world when it demonstrates the giftedness of all believers and calls the nations to authentic democracy and real respect for the dignity of all. ■

BY J. DARYL BYLER

It is a contradiction
of terms to dictate the
timing and shape of
democracy for others.

Dictated Democracy?

Iraqis are fed up with authorities who “decide for us,” scolded the Dominican priest in Baghdad. “Democracy means ‘the power of the people,’” Father Yousif Thomas Mirkis told our MCC delegation in late September. “But occupation is not the power of the people,” he continued, “Americans are acting like a dictator.”

Many other Iraqis we spoke with—both pro-American and not—shared Father Yousif’s view. While most are glad that Saddam Hussein no longer rules their country, they find the U.S. occupation to be demeaning and disrespectful.

Many lament that the occupying Americans don’t seem to recognize Iraqi capabilities and experience. “Tell American leaders that Iraqis are clever and educated,” one church leader told us.

Iraqis want the occupying forces—the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA)—to more rapidly transfer power to the Iraqi people. They are not demanding that the CPA leave immediately, but they want it to serve a behind-the-scenes supportive role rather than to be in charge.

Specifically, Iraqis want more authority to operate government ministries and desire greater input in the day-to-day decisions that affect their lives. “Iraqis want to take charge of their own affairs,” a newspaper editor told us. “Iraqis want to do things their own way,” added one political party leader.

A recent survey conducted by the Psychological Research Center at Baghdad University found that a vast majority of Baghdad residents support some form of democracy for Iraq.

Already one sees the signs of a nascent democracy in Iraq. In the last six months there has been a proliferation of political parties, non-governmental organizations and more than 200 newspapers. Many leaders we spoke with have the vision for a strong civil society.

But the transition from dictatorship to democracy in Iraq will take time. And the end result may look quite different than a “Western-style” democracy. Just as baby chicks grow strong by struggling to peck their way out of a shell’s captivity, Iraqis must be trusted with the struggle of forming their own democracy. It cannot be handed to them. Indeed, it is a contradiction of terms to dictate the timing and shape of democracy for others.

Sadly, it is not only the occupying power that Iraqis are finding to be disrespectful. Several Iraqi church leaders said that “some (Western) evangelical groups have come recently and treated local Christians as if they are Muslims who have never heard the gospel.” Iraqi Christians want Western Christians to appreciate the strength of their faith which has endured many hardships.

Like the church, democracy is premised on the idea that all voices are to be respected and all gifts are necessary for the well-being of the whole. Paul writes to the church at Corinth: “Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. . . . If all were a single member, where would the body be?” (I Corinthians 12:14,19). For this reason, no part of the body can tell another part that it is not needed (v.21).

Iraq is at a crossroads. What emerges in Iraq during the next decade may well depend on how soon the occupying forces learn to act less like a dictator and to show greater appreciation for the vision, giftedness and courage of the Iraqi people. ■

SAVE THE DATE

Mark your calendar for March 28–30, 2004, the MCC Washington Office Spring Seminar. More details to follow.

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All Aboard the Freedom Ride

I cut your grass, I make your bed, I wash your dishes, I pick your fruit. I refuse to be invisible.

—sign at a send-off event for the Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride

Zoe from Liberia earns less than her American co-workers, even when she takes double shifts on weekends. Hesbon from Kenya will wait five years for his children to join him in the States, even though their visas are already approved. And Suely from Cambodia, who worked long hours in a dirty, poorly-ventilated garment factory, reapplied three times for a green card after her papers were “lost” by the INS.

Zoe, Hesbon, Suely and close to a thousand others in the eighteen-bus caravan that was the Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride stopped in more than 100 cities in September to tell the stories of newcomers to the United States.

Immigrants make up one-fourth of the country’s low-wage workers. As dishwashers and farmworkers, they are largely invisible and sometimes designated “illegal,” even though the economy depends on their contributions. Immigrant workers are often exploited by employers, separated from their families and unprotected by U.S. laws.

Clearly, immigration policy is out of sync with economic realities in the United States and the rest of the world. As Octavio from Mexico puts it, “Asking ‘why do you come here?’ is like asking ‘why do you eat?’ People don’t have a choice—they come to the U.S. because this is where the opportunities are.”

In the spirit of the African-American freedom riders of 1961, the immigrant riders are calling for an end to invisibility, urging the government to: 1) legalize the eight million undocumented immigrants already working and paying taxes in the United States; 2) reunite families by increasing the number of available visas and ending documentation backlogs, and 3) guarantee safe passage, labor protections and civil liberties for future immigrant workers.

As long as U.S. employers hold up “Help Wanted” signs, it’s only fair that U.S. lawmakers replace their “Keep Out” signs with policies that recognize the gifts that immigrant workers bring to the U.S. economy and culture.

And in the long run, it’s only just that U.S. foreign policy take an entirely new tack, promoting economic development and human rights abroad, so that immigrants can stay home, if they choose, to bless their own communities with their labor and skills. ■

BY BETHANY SPICHER

“Asking ‘why do you come here?’ is like asking ‘why do you eat?’”

CAPITAL QUOTES

“America wants us to comprehend the evil posed by anti-Western terrorism, and we do; but we want you to equally concern yourself with the terror posed here by hunger and poverty.”

—Blaise Compaore, President of Burkina Faso.

“It seems to me that if you build a 1-megaton nuclear weapon as a bunker buster, you are going to bust a whole lot more than a bunker. I am guessing you bust a mountain, you bust a territory for miles and miles and miles around and you bust any living creature.”

—Sen. Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.), May 21, 2003.

“I am crying out the words to you that have boiled so long time inside my body.”

—note written by Kyung-hae Lee, a Korean rice farmer who killed himself at the WTO meeting in Cancun in protest of the devastation caused by unjust trade rules.

Elite Defeat at the WTO

BY MARTY SHUPACK

Something unusual happened at September's World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in Cancun, Mexico. Developing countries rejected a U.S.-European Union proposal on agriculture. They also refused to go forward with new agreements on non-trade issues, including one that would restrict regulation of foreign investment. The talks collapsed.

It is unusual for developing countries to stand up to the United States and Europe. In theory, the 148-nation WTO requires a consensus of all parties for any formal agreement. In practice, key decisions are made in closed sessions by a few affluent industrial nations and selected developing countries. Other countries are pressured into accepting the agreement reached by the elite minority, for example, by promises and threats involving foreign aid.

The United States and other wealthy countries want the global South to open up completely to the unrestricted movement of their goods, services and capital. At the same time, they want to protect and subsidize their own farmers (currently at \$300 billion annually) and other politically powerful constituencies.

In Cancun, the injustice was too great for many developing nations. As the delegate from Jamaica put it, "There is nothing for us small countries in this proposal. We don't want any of this."

U.S. officials did not appreciate being challenged. Trade Representative Robert Zoellick pointed a finger of blame, saying "A number of countries thought [the Cancun meeting] was a freebie; they could just make whatever points they suggested, argue and not offer and give." Sen. Charles Grassley (R-IA), chair of the Senate Finance Committee, threatened, "I'll take note of those nations that played a constructive role in Cancun, and those nations that didn't."

It was not business as usual in Cancun because developing countries exercised their authority, if only to say "no." A spokesperson for the development organization Oxfam noted, "In the past, rich countries made deals behind closed doors without listening to the rest of the world. They tried it again in Cancun. But developing countries refused to sign a deal that would fail the world's poorest people."

Rich and powerful countries will no doubt keep trying to force their will on the poor. The United States, for example, is likely to focus on trade agreements with individual countries and regional groups. This approach reflects a divide and conquer strategy, making it easier for the United States to wave carrots and brandish sticks. People of faith and conscience must call the nations to a more just and compassionate way. ■

Developing countries refused to sign a deal that would fail the world's poorest people.

Pontius' Puddle



United Nations: Still Relevant

According to its charter, the United Nations was created to “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.” When the war in Iraq commenced without U.N. support this spring, it seemed as if the organization had become irrelevant, as the United States had predicted.

But this fall, as smoke cleared from the invasion, the United States returned to the United Nations, the only structure that offers the international cooperation critical for international action.

The value of the United Nations lies in what it accomplishes on a regular, consistent basis, not in what it may or may not accomplish in the high stakes of a political power struggle. Expansive humanitarian aid programs and peacekeeping operations are at work around the world, and they are possible because of ongoing international cooperation.

For Christians, the value of the United Nations begins with its charter, which fits with a Christian vision of God’s will for the world. In addition to preventing war, it promotes the creation of conditions for justice and upholds human rights and sustainable standards of living for all. Behind the words of the charter is a deep commitment to the inclusion of all nations.

This inclusion is what makes the United Nations both a possibility and a marvel. It is the only international institution where the most powerful are accountable to the least powerful. This collaboration implies that the good of one will be the good of all.

Including each nation, with its own culture, identity and agenda is a two-sided coin. On one hand it gives dignity, respect and care to each party. It is a privilege to be present at the table. On the other hand, without the consent and involvement of all parties, the United Nations would not have the power to fulfill its vision for the world: resolving threats to peace through negotiation and promoting the sustainable, holistic development of every society.

The United Nations, then, holds close and holds responsible each nation. It is a relationship of giving and taking, supporting and challenging. The strength of the system lies in the hands of the participants. If each party contributes, the system will enrich the whole. If each party grasps its own agenda, the system will be limited to particular instead of universal goals.

For these reasons, U.S. involvement in the United Nations should be supported. And, whether the United Nations rises or falls in relevance and influence, people of faith should always support its vision. It not only provides standards to aim for, it models the inclusion that allows each nation to hear and be heard, to help and be helped, to protect itself and to protect the whole. ■

BY ALICIA MILLER

Alicia Miller is a Mennonite Voluntary Service intern at the MCC United Nations Office.

The United Nations is the only international institution where the most powerful are accountable to the least powerful.

HOTLINES

Join our advocacy action alert network! Sign up for any of the lists below, and you will receive three or four action alerts yearly on each issue. Simply send your name and address to the MCC Washington Office (see page 8).

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Criminal Justice

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Immigration

International Relations & Economic Justice

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U.S. Policy Affecting:

- Africa

- Asia

- Latin America

- Middle East

Women’s Concerns

One Rule for Them, Another for Us

The Erosion of Civil Liberties and Community

BY DAVID M. WHETTSTONE

If the legal rights of immigrants can be undermined, the rights of all are not far behind.

Our civil liberties are eroding. The recasting of national security policy, post-September 11 poses renewed threats of imbalance and instability. They fit a historical pattern. The changes are epitomized in the USA PATRIOT Act (Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act) which was passed and enacted six weeks after September 11, 2001.

The Patriot Act minimizes judicial supervision of law enforcement surveillance, expands the ability of the government to conduct secret searches, grants the Attorney General and the Secretary of State the power to designate domestic groups as terrorist organizations and deport any non-citizen who belongs to them, and enables broad investigations of American citizens for “intelligence” purposes. A proposed follow-up act, not yet pending in Congress, would further extend these points and even enable secret arrests.

After the September 11 attacks, federal authorities initially detained more than 1,100 people—many of whom were immigrants, Arab-Americans or Muslims. The public still does not know who most of these people are, what they were charged with or if they had legal representation. Though deemed suspected terrorists by the Attorney General, only four of the detainees were charged with terrorist-related crimes, after a year.

It is false to think that extraordinary national security measures will apply only to immigrants or enemy foreign combatants. Military prosecution, not civilian

due process, is now being applied to two U.S. citizens: Yaser Hamdi, captured in Afghanistan, and José Padilla, arrested at Chicago’s O’Hare Airport.

Early in the last century, the United States underwent a “Red Scare,” in which thousands of immigrants were accused of being Communists and arrested during the Palmer Raids. A young J. Edgar Hoover, while in the Alien Radical division of the Justice Department, coordinated these actions. The World War II internment of 110,000 persons of Japanese origin (70,000 were U.S. citizens) was orchestrated by Lt. General John L. DeWitt, who said to Congress, “[A] Jap’s a Jap. . . . It makes no difference whether he is an American citizen or not.”

Throughout our history, changes in public sentiment, laws and even judicial rulings have marginalized many. Large portions of the public and the courts have at various times considered Native and African Americans to be non-citizens. The same sentiments have endorsed racial profiling.

Concepts of citizenry, community, right relationships, adoption and mutual respect eclipse both the notions of residing in a democracy and the reign of God. The gospel is not about making strangers—segregating and mistreating aliens. Rather it is about accompaniment—making peace, living with and loving one another. Anyone can be part of the reign of God. We must discern and affirm the giftedness of all who are in the image of God and embrace them within a larger community.

If the legal rights of immigrants can be undermined, the rights of all are not far behind. We must urge the president, the attorney general and lawmakers that due process be extended to all who reside here. This truly helps us work toward being safe and secure. ■

For more about this issue, read David Cole’s Enemy Aliens (NY: New Press, 2003).

US VERSUS THEM?

“To those who pit Americans against immigrants and citizens against non-citizens, to those who scare peace-loving people with phantoms of lost liberty, my message is this: Your tactics only aid terrorists, for they erode our national unity and diminish our resolve. They give ammunition to America’s enemies, and pause to America’s friends.”

—Attorney General John Ashcroft, December 6, 2001

That for Which We Were Created

How One Congregation Practices Gifts Discernment

Every person called by Jesus Christ into his Body is given a gift, and he or she is to employ it on behalf of the whole Body. Our primary calling as Christians is to call forth the gifts of other people, to set them free, to throw the lifeline to them and be the ones who, under God, help a person discover that for which he or she was created.

Gordon Cosby's words explain the central place of gifts discernment in the original Church of the Saviour. As a second-generation congregation that grew out of the Church of the Saviour, we at Seekers Church continue to see gifts evocation as central to our existence.

Most members of Seekers Church belong to one of several mission groups. Members come together around a common calling—for example, one mission group provides the ongoing adult education for our church—or to support each other in their individual vocations, for example, an artists' mission group includes writers, musicians and painters, accountable to each other for bringing their faith to their work.

Before joining a mission group, each member completes two classes in the Seekers Church School of Christian Living, to be educated in the Christian tradition and to experience relationships in community. When a group is formed, members undergo a gifts discernment process to assign various roles, including a moderator and a spiritual guide. However, instead of beginning with the roles to be filled, gifts are first named for each participant, both by the participant and by other group members. As gifts are named there may be some surprises. Someone who has never considered herself a "leader" may find herself moderating the group.

Most of the adults in Seekers Church have a spiritual guide from within the community. One of the primary functions of spiritual guides is to help individuals name and act on their gifts. Spiritual guides, in turn, meet monthly to share questions and experiences, and this is a place to consider how to evoke gifts in others and help them be accountable for the gifts they embody.

A final structure used by Seekers Church is the Growing Edge Fund, a regular part of the congregation's budget. A member may apply to the Growing Edge Fund Committee for financial and spiritual support for a gift or "growing edge" he or she is only beginning to discern. Growing Edge money has been used to help a member pursue her call of documenting, through photography, various women's commitment to sustainable agriculture, and to enable another member to leave his job with a large shipping firm to help establish a foundation that provides health assistance to Russian children.

While these are the gifts discernment practices that Seekers Church employs, effective structures will vary from congregation to congregation. What is critical for all churches is an authentic belief that each member is a gift to the whole, and that belief must be reflected in written statements about the church, in sermons preached and in education provided to all ages. This is not easy work, and it never becomes routine; it must constantly be made new through the grace of the Holy Spirit. ■

IN OTHER'S WORDS

BY KATE CUDLIPP

Kate Cudlipp is one of four part-time members of the Seekers Church Servant Leadership Team.

INWARD JOURNEY, OUTWARD JOURNEY

The Church of the Saviour is a body of ecumenical churches and ministries in Washington, D.C., committed to the "inward journey" with God, self and others, and the "outward journey" with persons at the margins of society. Founded in 1947 by Gordon and Mary Cosby, the church has started a school, a clinic, a coffeehouse, affordable housing programs, AIDS hospices, retreat centers and a multitude of services for the homeless and addicted. With a combined membership of approximately 120, the Church of the Saviour has demonstrated what God can do with even a small number of committed and called individuals.



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SOUND THE TRUMPET!

ISSUE	SUMMARY	ADVOCACY NEEDED
CRIMINAL JUSTICE	The Innocence Protection Act (IPA), recently introduced, will provide greater access to post-conviction DNA testing in appropriate cases, helping to expose wrongful convictions and providing adequate legal representation in state capital cases. The IPA will also supply federal funds to compensate those who have been wrongfully convicted.	Ask your representative and senators to support the IPA, which is contained in H.R. 3214 and S. 1700, the Advancing Justice Through DNA Technology Act.
CLEAR ACT	The Clear Law Enforcement for Criminal Alien Removal (CLEAR) Act would deputize the nation's police officers to investigate and enforce immigration laws, such as overstaying a visa—currently the job of immigration agents. Out-of-status immigrants who are victims or witnesses of crimes—including victims of domestic violence—would be reluctant to report to authorities if they were afraid of deportation.	Urge your representative to oppose this bill, or to reconsider if he or she is already a co-sponsor. For a list of co-sponsors, visit www.thomas.gov and type in "CLEAR Act" or "H.R. 2671," then click "Bill Summary and Status File," then "All Bill Summary and Status Info," then "Co-sponsors."

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