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HONORING SABBATH

A Day for Rest and Justice

Delightful Rest, Delightful Work

BY BETHANY SPICHER

The quote above my desk is by Josiah Gilbert Holland: “That which grows fast, withers as rapidly. That which grows slowly, endures.”

Beside the quote is a picture of a horse-drawn cart driven by an Amish man, silhouetted black against a blazing sunset. I imagine he’s driving home slowly, listening to the clopping of the horse’s hooves and the soft sounds of twilight.

That picture contrasts vividly with the one out my window. Here on Capitol Hill, things grow fast. Taxis honk, cell phones ring, heels click down the sidewalk. Bills get written overnight, meetings are convened in minutes. Even the flowers across the street are ripped up and replaced as soon as they fade. Nothing’s allowed to rest.

In contrast, God commanded us to rest, even ranked neglecting rest with murder in the Ten Commandments! While Jews keep Sabbath on Saturday, and Christians choose Sunday to honor Christ’s resurrection, Sabbath is less about legalistic rules or specific days than about intentional times of rest—and celebration. “If you call the Sabbath a delight . . .,” reads Isaiah 58:13–14, “I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth.”

But how can I celebrate when there’s so much to do? It’s tempting to believe that the more meetings I attend, the more articles

I read, the more action alerts I send, the better the world will be. But it’s not so. When we move too fast, take on too much, we’re apt to throw quick fixes at complex problems like poverty, crime and global warming. Our best intentions go awry.

“The world aches for the generosity of a well-rested people,” writes Wayne Muller in his book *Sabbath*. When we take time to delight in God, each other, the natural world—and even in ourselves—we cultivate things that grow slowly: wisdom, honesty, creativity. We listen for enduring solutions to problems. When we remember Sabbath, our rest *and* our work become delightful, and the world is better.

In this issue of the *Memo*, we imagine what might happen if Capitol Hill took a Sabbath to consider its policies. Might we cancel debts of poor countries? Care for the environment? Lose our obsession with security that causes violence at home and war abroad? In Scripture, Sabbath is closely linked with justice and *shalom*: true security.

Also in this issue, we hear from our conservative Mennonite and Amish brothers and sisters who remember the Sabbath by attending church, visiting family or even going fishing—and always by refraining from working or buying. For one day, the Amish remind us to recall that the world turns without our striving, to see the sunset and pause to offer praise. ■

“If you call the Sabbath a delight . . . I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth.”

—ISAIAH 58:13–14

IN THIS MEMO

Keep it Holy	2
Sabbath from Guns	3
Capital Quotes	3
Rest for the Land	4
Jubilee Justice	5
Tired of Depleted Uranium	6
Gas Tank Sundays	7
Sound the Trumpet!	8

BY J. DARYL BYLER

Work that grows out of Sabbath rest has an unmistakable quality of beauty and goodness.

Keep it Holy

It was visible in his body language and clear from the tone of his voice. The Senate aide felt too busy to visit with a Christian Peacemaker Teams colleague and me. We had scheduled an appointment to talk about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But it seemed that our very presence was creating conflict for him! Still, as we talked and listened, he relaxed.

Life on Capitol Hill is an unending string of demands. I try to remember this when visiting congressional offices. Everybody wants something. Washington is a whirl of activity. People walk fast, talk fast, work fast and eat fast—stuffing far too much activity into every day. Most staffers last only a year or two in their jobs. Few seem to find time to nurture their spirits. It is a miracle when just and life-giving legislation is birthed in such an environment.

As peace and justice advocates, we often find ourselves in the same boat. We are passionate about good causes but sometimes lack the spiritual depth to sustain us for the long haul. Paul Connolly writes: “We cooperate in violence, most of us, every day—the violence of myriad demands, concerns, and projects that fracture our lives into a thousand broken reflections.”

Sabbath is God’s gift intended to interrupt our self-destructive spiral and to restore a sense of perspective, balance and right relationships. The practice of Sabbath calls for restricting activities—not in a rigid way, but for the purpose of reordering our lives.

Sabbath is a holy—set apart—time meant to create in our lives a rhythm of rest, remembering and re-commitment.

Rest. We are called to rest because on the Sabbath God rested from “all the work of creating” (Genesis 2:2–3). We are to rest even when (perhaps especially when) we don’t feel we have time to rest—during “the plowing season and harvest” (Exodus 34:21). Rest restores our body, mind and spirit, and offers us a chance to enjoy God’s goodness and the fruits of our labor.

Remembering. The Sabbath is to be a day “to the Lord” (Exodus 16:23, Deuteronomy 5:14). It is intended to be a time of worship and reverence—an antidote to our tendency to make idols out of ourselves and our work. The Sabbath offers space to remember God’s acts of creation, provision and deliverance (Deuteronomy 5:15). Failing to do so distorts our perspective, feeding our illusions of grandeur and our sense of ultimate responsibility for running the world.

Re-commitment. But rest is not meant to be a long-term escape from the world. And remembering God’s acts is not a substitute for our own commitment to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly (Micah 6:8). Precisely, Sabbath is meant to restore us to greater faithfulness in the life-giving things God has called us to be and do. This is why Jesus felt free to heal and do good on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1–14, Luke 13:10–17). Like God’s creation, work that grows out of Sabbath rest has an unmistakable quality of beauty and goodness.

In the MCC Washington Office, we recognize our tendency to get caught up in the chaos of Capitol Hill. For this reason, several years ago, we began taking monthly retreat days—times set apart from our “regular work” to reflect on the roots of and reasons for our work.

Our hope is that, as a result, our daily work offers greater clarity and grace to the church and, in a small way, contributes to an environment on Capitol Hill that nurtures more just and life-giving policies. ■

WASHINGTON MEMO is written by Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office staff. It interprets national legislation and policy, seeking to reflect biblical concerns for justice and peace as represented in the work and statements of MCC U.S. and Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches. All biblical quotes are from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

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To contact the MCC U.S. Washington Office, please see our address on the back page. See our weekly commentary at www.thirdway.com and visit our web site at www.mcc.org/us/washington.

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A Sabbath Ban for Guns

I will appoint Peace as your overseer and Righteousness as your taskmaster. Violence shall no more be heard in your land, devastation or destruction within your borders; you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise (Isaiah 60:17–18).

The United States is awash with guns—some 250 million firearms. With at least one gun for every adult, it is doubtful that this number will decrease soon. In fact, we are probably heading in the opposite direction. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms reports that about 3.9 million firearms were produced in the United States in 2000.

The Violence Policy Center study, *Officer Down*, found that at least one in five law officers slain in the line of duty between 1998 and 2001 were killed with assault weapons. These are not hunting and sporting firearms. Rather, their design and development are for military purposes. Such weapons are meant to deliver a massive amount of bullets to a specific area in seconds with great ease, maximizing harm and killing.

The federal assault weapon ban is due to expire September 14, 2004. The president and the attorney general both support reauthorization of the current ban. But the gun industry has flagrantly evaded the ban, producing virtually disallowed guns by making, in effect, cosmetic changes. So, the ban must be strengthened and improved.

Gun violence prevention advocates and this office call for the support of the Assault Weapons Ban and Law Enforcement Pro-

tection Act of 2003 (H.R. 2038 and S. 1431). If enacted into law, this renewed ban would:

- Provide a clear and simple definition of assault weapons and their characteristics;
- Ban gun tool kits that allow for makeshift conversions into assault weapons;
- Limit high-capacity ammunition cartridges;
- Regulate transfers of pre-ban legally possessed assault weapons via background checks and state laws; and
- Make the ban permanent.

The nation might not be near to turning our swords (in this case, guns) into plowshares. Yet, I believe most Mennonites can firmly support outlawing civilian access to assault weapons. This stance is consistent with our concerns regarding military weapons. We can encourage each other and our fellow citizens to refrain from and curtail the market for lethal assault weapons. Maybe a little bit of peace and rest from deadly gun violence can be had here at home. ■

BY DAVID M. WHETTSTONE

CAPITAL QUOTES

“The world had promised us so much and yet . . . what have they done for us? I have yet to see them put two bricks together.”

—Nasser, a traffic policeman in Kabul, Afghanistan who says he has not been paid for three months.

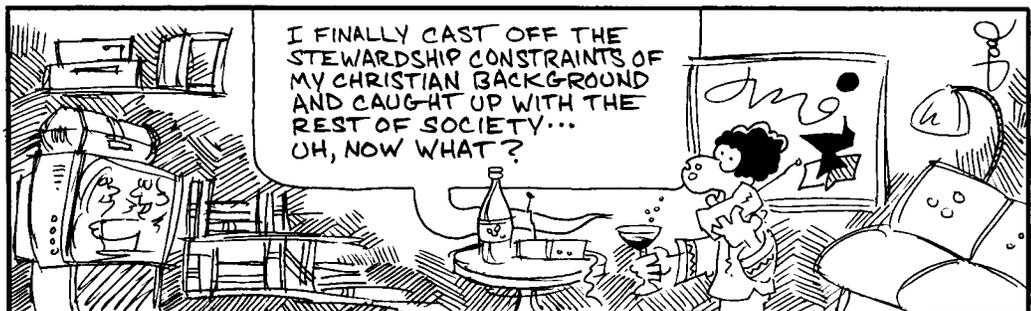
“Most soldiers would empty their bank accounts just for a plane ticket home.”

—Anonymous U.S. Army soldier in Iraq, in a letter to Congress.

“The big transnationals are making a heap of money, but we are getting less than ever before. . . . You see children dying of hunger along the side of the highways.”

—Blanca Rosa Molina, Nicaraguan coffee farmer, on the impact of the global coffee crisis.

Pontius' Puddle



Rest for a Weary Earth

BY RACHELLE LYNDAKER
SCHLABACH

The Sabbath is a day for us to worship and for the trees to also cry out in praise.

And on the seventh day God rested” (Genesis 2:2). Barely into the second chapter of Scripture we already encounter the idea of Sabbath. Sabbath is an integral part of the creation story.

Later, God tells the Israelites that, when they enter the Promised Land, “the land shall observe a Sabbath for the Lord” (Leviticus 25:2). Every seventh year they are to let the land lie fallow. Even without human tending, God promises the land will yield enough food that year to feed them, their livestock and wild animals.

Many of us in North America have lost track of this rhythm of work and rest. We fill our lives with frantic activity. But our endless car trips, our love of gadgets and our zeal for fast food all take their toll on the very earth God created.

Earlier this year, Earth Ministry, a Seattle-based organization, called for a Car Free Sunday. They asked people to take public transportation, carpool, bike or walk to church. A car-less Sunday not only slows us down to a Sabbath pace, but gives the earth much-needed rest. It is a day for us to worship God and for the trees to also cry out in praise.

Having a Car Free Sunday this past spring, as the U.S. military invaded Iraq, also served as a reminder of how our nation’s policy priorities reflect our dependence on oil.

As I write, the Senate is considering a large energy bill. As in years past, an amendment to increase fuel efficiency for cars and light trucks failed. The defeat was not surprising, given the success the auto industry has had in defeating such legislation before.

Car-makers rightly claim that fuel efficiency is not in consumer demand. Indeed, sales of sport utility vehicles—some of the least-efficient vehicles on the market—continue to climb.

Another amendment to the energy bill would require industry to reduce their carbon dioxide emissions, which are a major cause of global warming, to 2000 levels by 2010. This amendment, too, will likely fail. Senators fear that such steps could hurt the economy. But with scientists predicting that global warming will bring with it more severe weather events, one wonders how long the earth can last without Sabbath rest.

Our waters, too, get little rest. We use them for drinking, bathing, washing our clothes, swimming, and to water our gardens and lawns. Only 2.5 percent of all the water on earth is freshwater, and we are using it up at an unsustainable pace. Thirty years ago dismal water pollution prompted Congress to pass the Clean Water Act.

Now the Bush administration has proposed removing isolated waters, such as creeks that don’t run year-round, from federal protection under the Clean Water Act. The problem, of course, is that these small creeks feed larger ones, which then feed rivers, lakes and oceans. They also fulfill a critical role within their ecosystem. Members of Congress have introduced the Clean Water Authority Restoration Act (H.R. 962 and S. 473) to prevent the administration from making this change. The bill clarifies that the Clean Water Act was intended to protect *all* waters of the United States.

The water we drink and bathe in, the land which produces our food, and the air we breathe all need rest from the stresses we put on them. God commanded the Israelites to give the land a Sabbath, and promised their needs would be met if they did so. The same promise holds true for us today. ■

TRANSITIONS

After serving five years in the MCC Washington Office, Rachelle Lyndaker Schlabach left in August to attend Eastern Mennonite Seminary. We will greatly miss Rachelle’s many contributions. We celebrate Rachelle’s new academic journey and her marriage to Keith Lyndaker, June 14.

Bethany Spicher is the new editor of the *Washington Memo*. Lora Steiner from Dalton, Ohio, picks up Rachelle’s legislative portfolio—the environment and issues related to Asia and Colombia. We welcome Lora, a 2001 graduate from Eastern Mennonite University.

Sabbath Jubilee

I heard debt relief means we would be getting more money . . .
and now we're getting more money.

BY MARTIN SHUPACK

—MR. ZIVANE, PRINCIPAL OF BOANE SECONDARY SCHOOL, MOZAMBIQUE, FEBRUARY 2001

The Sabbath is intended both as a period of rest from ordinary labor and as a time of rest and release from oppression and hardship. For example, in ancient Israel, debts were to be canceled every seventh year (Deuteronomy 15). The Jubilee 2000 campaign sought to apply this principle to the burdensome international debts of impoverished countries.

Debt relief won by Jubilee 2000 has made a vital difference in the lives of men, women and children in 26 impoverished countries. These countries have channeled the savings from debt cancellation into education, health care and poverty reduction.

Yet the 26 countries' annual debt service payments have been reduced on average by only one-third (from a combined total of \$3 billion to \$2 billion annually). There is no justification for these desperately poor people continuing to send money to rich countries, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). Another urgent reason for canceling additional debt now is the need for countries to channel more money to address HIV/AIDS.

This spring Congress passed—and President Bush signed—legislation in support of deeper debt relief for heavily indebted impoverished countries. If implemented, the 26 countries would see their combined debt service payments decrease from \$2 billion annually to \$1 billion. A large amount of debt stock would be permanently canceled.

The catch is that Congress said only that the U.S. Treasury Department “should” work to implement this program. And even if the U.S. government does support this, other wealthy countries also have to agree. So far, the U.S. Treasury Department has opposed this plan and has been hesitant to act.

Letters to U.S. Treasury Secretary John Snow can help persuade him to comply with the legislation and work with other creditor countries, the World Bank and IMF to see that this relief is actually provided.

The international debts of impoverished countries were imposed on them by former oppressive governments and the rich countries that collaborated with them. The citizens of these countries repay these debts with the lives and futures of their children. As the *MCC Response to the Debt Crisis* says, “Given that international debt deprives some people not only of the means to meet their needs, but of life itself . . . the debt is a faith issue for those of us who believe in a God of life.”

Write: Secretary John Snow
U.S. Department of the Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20220

WHAT A DIFFERENCE JUBILEE CAN MAKE!*

- \$13.9 million increase in health spending
- 500,000 children vaccinated against tetanus, whooping cough and diphtheria
- \$10 million for electricity for rural schools and hospitals, and rehabilitation of infrastructure following the devastating floods of 2000
- \$3.2 million to increase the number of girls attending school and construction of many new primary schools

**Use of money freed from debt service payments for life-giving programs in Mozambique in 2001.*

Sick and Tired of Depleted Uranium

BY DEBORAH SCOTT

Sabbath is a time for humanity to set aside desires and fears, and remember that we, too, are a part of God's creation. War, by contrast, breeds on human desires and fears, encouraging dehumanization and disengagement from one's environment.

But even after peace is declared, the rest, renewal and rejuvenation needed by the affected communities often remains out of reach. In Laos, cluster bombs dropped during the 1970s still litter the countryside, making it dangerous to farm, build or play on the land. In the Philippines, the U.S. military still has not cleaned up decades of chemical contamination on its former military bases. And in Iraq, even as the latest war takes its toll, the 1991 war continues to deny true Sabbath rest to beleaguered land and sick children.

While incidents such as oil fires and heavy pesticide use contributed to the environmental devastation and health problems of Iraqis and U.S. soldiers, a growing segment of scientists and policymakers believe that depleted uranium munitions were also a cause.

The United States has used depleted uranium (DU) munitions in its wars since 1991. When uranium is mined for use in nuclear weapons or nuclear reactors, it is separated into "enriched" uranium (containing the most radioactive isotopes) and "depleted" uranium (about 40 percent less radioactive than its original state).

DU is valued by the military for its affordability, high density, and pyrophoric (fire-starting) properties. Munitions tipped with it can pierce armored tanks. It bursts into flames upon impact, becoming a fine dust that is easily inhaled by anyone in the tank before or shortly after the hit. Afterwards, the dust drifts in the wind, settling over the area. Children who play on abandoned military equipment breathe in and ingest DU.

While scientists, politicians and physicians do not agree on the extent of the destructive powers of DU, there is little dispute about its chemical toxicity. DU is a heavy metal, similar in toxicity to lead, and thus it can harm the kidneys and other organs if it gets into the blood stream.

Debate focuses around DU's radioactivity. Most experts agree that external radiation from DU has insignificant health effects. However, when DU is ingested, inhaled or embedded in a wound, the effect of the low-level, persistent radiation is less certain. Some studies indicate that it causes leukemia, cancer, birth defects and other illnesses. But because no large-scale epidemiological study has been conducted, it is hard to say how directly DU exposure is connected to the U.S. Gulf War Syndrome or Iraq's increased childhood leukemia rate.

The Depleted Munitions Study Act of 2003 (H.R. 1483) has been introduced in the House. It would require human health and environmental studies and cleanup of contaminated domestic sites. While a moratorium on the use of DU and a commitment to clean up abroad would be ideal, this bill is a small step toward the United States addressing the consequences of its weapons systems. Please encourage your representative to support H.R. 1483. ■

War continues to deny true Sabbath rest to beleaguered land and sick children.

THE MCC U.S. COFFEE PROJECT

Coffee prices are at an all-time low, spelling disaster for some 25 million small coffee producers, their families and communities. Your church can help. In collaboration with Equal Exchange, the MCC U.S. Washington Office and MCC regional offices are inviting Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches to purchase and serve fairly-traded coffee. Fair-trade coffee pays farmers a guaranteed minimum of \$1.26 per pound—more than double the world market price. For more information, visit www.mcc.org/us/washington/coffee or call 202-544-6564.

As Far as Our Gas Tanks Go

Amish and Mennonite Communities Take Sabbath Seriously

We like Sundays. The day offers a break in routine. Unlike other days, we do not feel drawn to our daily work, but reserve Sundays primarily for worship, visiting and resting. This long-standing principle is rooted in the Ten Commandments, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8, NIV). In keeping with many Christian traditions, Mennonites and Amish observe the Old Testament Sabbath on the first day of the week.

In our communities, attending church services is a central tenet of Sabbath observance. This commitment may mean joining the worship of other groups while traveling. We experienced meaningful worship with an African-American congregation near Fairbanks, Alaska, when traveling there in 2002. While culture and practice might separate people, the act of worship draws diverse Christians together.

Of nearly equal importance to church attendance is maintaining relationships within the congregational community. In the Amish tradition this is cultivated by having a church meeting only every other week. Visiting family and friends occupy much of the “off Sunday.”

Worship and visiting are good ways to spend a Sunday. Avoiding unacceptable activities, as defined by one’s faith community, is equally important. Our fellowship avoids financial dealings on Sunday, including purchasing restaurant meals, buying gas and paying for recreation. One guide for Sabbath activities is that we travel no further than our gas tanks and our stomachs can take us!

Recreational activities within our communities vary. In years past, Mennonites and Amish avoided recreation on Sundays. More recently, however, Amish youth gather for volleyball, croquet or ice skating. Interestingly, most Amish communities will not tolerate fishing on Sunday while this is a favorite activity for Old Order Mennonite boys during the “off Sunday.”

Many of our communities are agriculturally based, and have developed a system to define essential activity. For example, running silo-unloading equipment to feed cattle is deemed permissible. However, taking equipment into the field to cut fresh hay oversteps the bounds of appropriate activity. In all our years of farming we never had the urgent need to do field work on a Sunday.

Sometimes it takes creativity to maintain the sanctity of the Sabbath. In our neighborhood, a Mennonite farmer discovered that his corn dryer belts were ruined on a Sunday. He visited his Amish neighbor who stocked a supply of belts. The Amish brother refused to *sell* a replacement belt to his neighbor on a Sunday, but he was happy to *give* him one!

Similar patterns of avoiding Sunday work inform activities in the kitchen. Sweet corn can be husked and tomatoes picked on Saturday, and those who prepare meals in Amish homes know that peeled potatoes immersed in cold water will hold their color overnight.

We remember Jesus’ words, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27, NIV). We sometimes wonder if those treating Sunday as just another day are aware of the blessings of rest, fellowship and rejuvenation they deny themselves. May we glorify God in all we do. ■

IN OTHER’S WORDS

BY LEROY AND NAOMI STOLTZFUS WITH KENNETH SENSENIG

Leroy Stoltzfus is on staff and Naomi Stoltzfus volunteers at MCC’s Material Resources Center in Ephrata, Pa. They attend Westhaven Amish Mennonite Church near New Holland, Pa. Kenneth Senseenig works in church relations in the MCC East Coast Office.

We avoid financial dealings on Sunday, including purchasing restaurant meals, buying gas and paying for recreation.



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SOUND THE TRUMPET!

ISSUE	SUMMARY	ADVOCACY NEEDED
NORTH KOREA	Tensions between the United States and North Korea continue to grow. North Korea, named part of the "axis of evil" by President Bush, fears a military attack by the United States. The United States, meanwhile, is concerned that North Korea may be developing nuclear weapons. Immediate diplomacy is needed to ensure that the rhetoric does not escalate into military action.	Ask your representative and senators to: urge the Bush administration to pledge it will not use military force against North Korea, support efforts to resolve the crisis diplomatically, and continue to provide food aid to North Korea.