

North Country Peace Builder

Minnesota Fellowship of Reconciliation

Volume 57, No. 1
February 2006

Dancing With the Zapatista

By Don Christensen

[Ed. Note: Don Christensen, Coordinator of MN FOR, traveled to Chiapas, Mexico in January with FOR member Chris Smith, and students of United Theological Seminary. The following is a reflection from his experience.]

“The Maya believe,” explained Father Pedro, “that God does not want us to have ‘hearts that are ‘dry and covered with dust’; God wants us to have ‘hearts moist with the morning dew’.”

With this metaphor Father Pedro, pastor to indigenous peoples in the Diocese of San Cristobal, invited us to participate in Sunday morning worship with the community of Acteal in the Highlands of Chiapas, Mexico. I was visiting Chiapas with Professor Christine Smith and students of United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities. Our guide was Teresa Ortiz of the Resource Center of the Americas.

It was a special privilege to be in Acteal on Sunday, January 22, for on the 22nd day of every month the community celebrates the memory of the 45 persons, most of whom were indigenous women and children, massacred by paramilitary forces on December 22, 1998. Many of those murdered were members of “Las Abejas” (the ‘Bees’), an organization of indigenous women committed to peace and justice through nonviolence. Although the motives of the assassins remain unclear, it is widely believed that these innocents were murdered because of their association with the Zapatista Movement for the liberation of the indigenous peoples of Chiapas.

The Mass began with a solemn procession from the “Pillar of Shame” monument to the open-walled church which overlooks the pine-covered mountains and valleys of the Highlands of Chiapas. The procession was led by ‘Las Abejas’, political and spiritual leaders of the community, and musicians



Photograph by Cami Applequist

playing ancient Mayan harps and violins. During the Mass a choir of young women and men sang ancient and contemporary hymns in beautiful harmonies, and the community leaders, adorned in the traditional indigenous dress, led all assembled in a slow dance which both lamented and celebrated the lives of the victims of the massacre. I was humbled and thrilled when one of the celebrants handed me a single ‘maraca’ to shake so that I might add my music and dancing to the prayers of the community. At the conclusion of the service we walked to the small wooden ‘hermitage’, its walls scarred with bullet holes, where the ‘Abejas’ had been praying when they were attacked. (Continued on page 3)



The Fellowship of Reconciliation envisions a world of justice, peace, and freedom. It is a revolutionary vision of a beloved community where differences are respected, conflicts addressed nonviolently, oppressive structures dismantled, and where people live in harmony with the earth, nurtured by diverse spiritual traditions that foster compassion, solidarity, and reconciliation.

The New Romans and Imperial Tactics

by Don Irish

The epochal event during the summer of 1969 was the moonwalk of an American astronaut, extending America's reach into space. My associated insights crystallized while reading *The New Romans*, a compilation of essays by Canadian scholars and journalists alluding to their neighbor to the south. Since then, well before the term became commonly used here, and without apology, I have referred to the USA as an "empire." A gradual fulfillment of our self-believed Manifest Destiny has been developing since President Adams eyed the Caribbean. A bald statement of that presumption appeared in a statement of the "neo-cons" (neo-conservatives) in the 1990s that America should dominate the world economically and militarily (including space), and "tolerate no rivals."

The thesis advanced here is that consolidating and maintaining our imperial reach around the world threatens our democracy. Empire and democracy are incompatible! Our current executive leadership has chosen the former as its priority. Like the Romans of history, we have become the 'known world's' greatest power. Our ambitions and actions lead to over-reaching, very troubling to our traditional friends. Civil rights are being curtailed at home, with terrorism replacing communism as the common threat, augmented by manipulations of fear.

Early colonists subdued or killed off the native Americans east of the Appalachians, then moved inexorably over time westward to the Pacific, conquering and occupying lands of the indigenous people, without their consent or in violation of treaties made with them. The Louisiana Purchase from France doubled our nation's size in 1803. In 1848, the Mexican-American war resulted in our taking one-half of that nation's territory. Alaska, bought from Russia in 1867, added an area twice the size of Texas. In 1898 (Spanish-American War) we acquired the Philippines and Puerto Rico, both ready to declare their own independence. That same year we officially "absorbed" Hawaii. After WWII, we acquired as trusteeships, Micronesian islands in the South Pacific. These small beginnings developed into the world's most powerful and currently dominating power, maintaining hundreds of military bases in more than 100 countries.

Since WWII and the war in Vietnam, the USA has developed numerous means for controlling or influencing less powerful nations as a means of supplementing or avoiding direct force. Many of these tactics are indirect; many are covert, of which the American public has been kept ignorant for years. Using 'low intensity conflict' which spares our citizenry of intense suffering, we impact others with total war.

A South American resistance to our policies (NAFTA, CAFTA, WTO) is arising, involving seven countries having 80 percent of that continent's population.

Watch carefully what the USA does in the coming months. We have viewed Latin America as our backyard and our own playpen. Major shifts are underway, and we are an empire in decline. Let's work to regain our democracy.

The tactics of empire often include:

- Using surrogates replacing our personnel and minimizing our casualties. E.g., Vietnamization, Contras in Nicaragua, KLA in Kosovo, Northern Alliance in Afghanistan, and now training Iraqi troops to fight and die for our purposes.
 - Economic mean such as denial of multilateral loans (I.e., World Bank, IMF, in which USA is dominant), partial/total embargoes, corporate-government collaboration building unmanageable debt on weaker nations. (See: *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man* by John Perkins, 2004)
 - Sabotage of peace efforts. (E.g., Contradora, Oslo).
 - Covert terrorism against human rights lawyers, union organizers, religious leaders through assassination, torture, disappearance, or massacres which we aid through their militaries or paramilitaries. (I.e., School of Americas training)
 - Psy-Ops: Manipulation of information in host country; spreading rumors, fomenting civic disturbances, disinformation, faking events, broadcasting or having published propaganda without indicating foreign sources.
 - Bombing of civilian infrastructures in violation of the Geneva Conventions – water & sewage plants, electrical grids, hospitals.
 - Manipulating/financing election parties we favor; supporting elites oppressing a nations' citizens (e.g., Nicaragua, El Salvador, Venezuela.)
 - Military aircraft flights over others' territory, or stationing our naval vessels off their shores to intimidate or secure information.
 - Diplomatic endeavors isolating a country from other nations' support (e.g., Cuba, Iran, North Korea), or to undercut international treaties, (e.g., ICC, Kyoto).
 - Pseudo-aid to win hearts and minds with window-dressing; short-term rebuilding of damaged buildings, dental outdoor clinics, food distribution.
 - Provisions of humanitarian aid on a partisan basis, in violation of Geneva Conventions.
 - Denying essential humanitarian aid offers (Katrina) from countries we oppose (Cuba, Venezuela).
 - Manipulating elections to legitimize results we prefer in other nations (via Endowment for Democracy.)
 - Misleading rationalizations, pseudo-facts on the homefront to maintain support.
 - Violating international laws/treaties with 'no fly zones', preemptive strikes, ignoring world Court decisions against us.
 - Buying allies' support with agreements to pay for their troops, other financial arrangements.
 - Arranging coups against 'uncooperative leaders' (e.g. Noriega, Allende, Aristide, Arias, Chavez)
 - Leverage others to gain the leadership we want for their country (Karzai, Iraq, Nuremberg).
 - Trials held by and for the victors, ignoring the crimes of the latter. (Iraq, Nuremberg)
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Nonviolence Training Transforms More Minnesotans

by Jeremy Corey-Greunes

Late last October, I spent two days cloistered in the Christ Episcopal Church in Albert Lea with 15 others crazy enough to believe that *Creating a Culture of Peace* is possible. Led by Don Christensen and Jean McElhaney, we embarked on FOR's *Active Nonviolence for Personal and Social Change* training.

A member of our local peace organization had suggested last summer that we contact FOR and set up training in our community. She had described the training as being "transforming", and I was immediately intrigued.

The training began with a wonderful breakfast followed by some sharing of hopes and fears about the weekend. We also called upon peaceful spirits of the past and present to be with us that day. We later attempted to actually define violence, first verbally and then by responding to hypothetical situations and placing these on a "continuum of violence".

After that exercise, we could all agree that a physical assault in any form is violent, and most of us agreed that business practices promote discrimination or that pollute the environment

could also be considered acts of violence. But other situations were not so easy to pin down.

For example, is refusing to speak with a difficult co-worker also an act of violence? Is it violent to label political leaders and others currently at-odds with the peace movement as hopelessly lost or evil? When do thoughts, assumptions, words, and tone reach the level of violence? And can our own passion for nonviolence actually become violent and thus unhelpful?

The discussion of questions like these throughout the weekend proved very enlightening. I learned that most of the violence in my personal life is not physical, but rather verbal, mental, and spiritual. Moreover, this sort of "soft" violence can be as harmful and debilitating as more extreme forms of physical violence, especially when left unchecked.

Three additional lessons have stuck with me. The first is that the journey toward nonviolence can be a long and difficult one, but we must keep our paths to peace in sight and attempt each day to travel further down them. These

paths lead to many places but must begin within our own hearts and minds.

Secondly, we cannot underestimate the value of intergenerational relationships when working toward peace. Our group included 16 year olds just beginning their peacemaking journeys, peacemakers in their seventies whose activism had called them to three continents, and many others (like me) who fell somewhere in between. Together we formed a very unique and nourishing group for such training.

Finally, the *active* part of active nonviolence is extremely important. After all this great training, what do we do? Being a peaceful person means putting those beliefs into action, which can mean risking much more than mere convenience.

After experiencing FOR's *Active Nonviolence for Personal and Social Change* training, I agree wholeheartedly: It is indeed transforming. We hope to continue bringing FOR facilitators to Freeborn County and sharing this transforming experience with others.

Jeremy Corey-Greunes is a high school English teacher in Albert Lea and a member of Paths to Peace in Freeborn County.

*When do thoughts, assumptions, words, and tone reach the level of violence?
And can our own passion for nonviolence actually become violent and thus unhelpful?*



FOR Interfaith Peace Builders Delegation to Israel and Palestine.

(Photo courtesy of Candace Lault)

(Dancing. Con't from p. 1) The same day that we danced and celebrated death and resurrection with the people of Acteal, indigenous people of Bolivia were celebrating the inauguration of Evo Morales, the first indigenous person to be elected president of that country. The Mexico City newspaper, *La Jornada*, reported that when invested with the symbol of his office, Evo Morales wept, and tens of thousands of

indigenous gathered in the plaza of La Paz wept with him. Uruguayan writer, Eduardo Galeano, described the significance of this event with these words, "This is the final day of fear in this Andean nation." As he concluded his inaugural remarks, President Evo Morales quoted these words of Zapatista leader, Subcomandante Marcos: "I will lead the people by obedience."

Fellowship of Reconciliation Iran Delegation

The Fellowship of Reconciliation sent its first People to People delegation to Iran from December 1 to December 12, 2005. I was fortunate to be among the 18 people from all parts of the USA plus Puerto Rico and Germany. Pat Clark, FOR President, led the group. We traveled to Shiraz, Persepolis, Isfahan, Qom and Tehran. Everywhere we went people greeted us with enthusiasm. "We don't like your government, but we love Americans," was the common response. Most of the people we talked with had misgivings about the direction their own president was taking them and we shared the same feelings about ours. I was surprised that many people, especially school children and young people, spoke excellent English.

We met with Muslim, Armenian Orthodox, Jewish and Zoroastrian religious leaders. Highlights of the trip were meetings with the leadership of a women's environmental group, students in a college of journalism and, of course, a visit to a Persian carpet shop.

I am hoping to be invited to meet with various groups to talk about Iran.

Nancy Parlin

[Note: Contact Nancy at nparlin@pressenter.com]

Smart Strategy and Interfaith Dialogue: the Divestment Debate

by Alice Kloker

At its 2004 General Assembly, the Presbyterian Church (USA) initiated a “process of phased, selective divestment in multinational corporations operating in Israel.” At its 2005 Synod, the United Church of Christ (UCC) passed a resolution directing member churches to provide resources “to discern how economic leverage can be used to support the development of Palestine and Israel as two independent, secure, economically viable states.”

When it comes to the Israeli Occupation of Palestine, many in the U.S. peace movement feel a particularly urgent need to do something. After all, it is U.S. taxpayer money that finances the Occupation to the tune of approximately 15 million dollars a day in grants and loan guarantees. Without U.S. support, the Occupation would certainly prove untenable.

Among the Protestant left, selective divestment has emerged as a particularly attractive strategy. Although different from the divestment campaign against Apartheid rule in South Africa in the sense that selective divestment does not call for a blanket boycott of the state of Israel, the idea is similar: to combat state-sponsored repression through nonviolent economic means. Increase the moral as well as the economic cost of Occupation through a targeted campaign against the

corporations, which benefit from it and the end of the Occupation will be hastened.

The idea sounds sensible, and it is a tactic I have advocated for years. I also think that targeted divestment it is the right thing to do. However, I am starting to doubt that it is the smart thing to do, especially in an interfaith context.

I take this distinction between right and smart strategy from Rabbi Michael Lerner’s cover story in the March/April 2005 *Tikkun*. I do violence to his nuanced argument with this parsimonious summary, but for the sake of brevity I use this quote: “A smart strategy pushes people who were not yet on your side to join with you; a dumb strategy creates a split so that people who were with you in principle feel that they can’t be with you when you are advocating it.”

I feel that peace activists in the United States are in not such a different situation from Israeli peace activists. We both live in countries whose governments practice military occupation in the name of national security. A smart strategy against Occupation in Palestine would combine the nonviolent power of dissenters from both countries in a language of universal rights that attracts new adherents to the cause. It would strengthen the position of anti-Occupation Jews calling for justice

in Palestine within the Jewish community.

A dumb strategy would be for the Protestant left to dominate this inter-faith conversation in such a way that anti-Occupation Jews are further marginalized within their own community, their ability to articulate a principled position against Occupation weakened. This is the case with any strategy that reinforces the notion the peace movement in general and Protestant activists in particular do not care about Jews and hold Israel to a higher standard than any other torture-practicing, occupation-promoting state (such as the United States).

Right now is a critical historical moment for an inter-faith movement of active nonviolence against Occupation. As religious intolerance spreads in a climate where faith is wielded as a tool of destruction rather than liberation, the prospects for coexistence diminish. If a truly inter-faith movement toward reconciliation is to gain influence and strength on the matter of Occupation, the Protestant left must really listen to what anti-Occupation Jews need to feel supported in their work. It is out of this interfaith dialogue that a smart strategy must emerge.

Alice Kloker joined the FOR in 2004. She was raised from birth in the United Church of Christ and currently lives in Minneapolis.

General College: World Class Education for All

By Jonneke Koomen

The University of Minnesota's General College (GC) is the "most diverse college on campus." The College serves the majority of first-generation, low-income, disabled, and students of color who came into the University. In 2004, for example, General College admitted 65 percent of all incoming African-American students, 40 percent of the Chicano/Latino/Hispanic students and 43 percent of the Native American students at the University, even though GC is responsible for only 15 percent of undergraduate admissions. Unlike other colleges at the U of M, General College did not rely primarily on standardized test scores (SAT and ACT) that routinely disadvantage rural, poor and minority students.

Every time I visited GC, professors and advisors were deep in conversation with students on stairwells, in lunchrooms....

Last spring (2005), we heard about the impending closure of General College. I heard about it on the radio. Others read it in the paper. It was an enormous shock, particular for the General College community. No one was consulted on this decision – not even David Taylor, the College Dean.

I work in the U of M's College of Liberal Arts. But I can honestly say that in all my time working and studying in Higher Education, I have never seen anything like General College. Every time I visited GC, professors and advisors were deep in conversation with students on stairwells, in lunchrooms and in offices. I have watched GC staff treat students with incredible love, care and concern. One day, I spent time with a mathematics teacher who had heard that his brilliant student, a young Latino man who had overcome enormous obstacles to succeed in college, had not been admitted to a particular nursing school. He spent much of the morning talking to this student's other professors and advisors, looking in to alternative programs and possibilities for this young man. This is what GC does. Unlike other colleges at the University, GC is able to provide students with at least two years of small classes, a multi-cultural curriculum, a supportive community, and a world-class advising program that prepares students to transfer to other U of M colleges. This is not "remedial education" but developmental education that is sensitive and responsive to individual differences and special needs among learners.

General College was established in 1932

during a time of labor unrest and working class victories in Minnesota. GC became a place where people who had not traditionally been General College was established in 1932 during a time of great the labor unrest and working able to consider higher education - GIs, rural poor, urban working classes - could become part of the U of M. After the civil rights movement, GC provided opportunities for African-Americans and later to immigrant communities from East Africa, Asia and Latin America, as well as to countless white working-class students.

In my experience, the hallways of Appleby Hall are always filled with students representing the diversity of local communities such as African-American, East African students, Asian, and Latino/a. In fact, 175 students in the General College freshman class of 2004 are African-American. Twenty-eight percent of General College entrants come from urban high schools. This is the case for only 6 percent of students in all other colleges at the University.

The *General College Truth Movement* and the *Equal Access Coalition* are fighting to keep General College alive and to make the University of Minnesota a place where all people living in Minnesota can get a world class education. The Coalition is a diverse group of Twin Cities area high school students, college students, educators and workers. The effort is building movement inside and outside the University among the communities that will be affected by the closure of General College. This is a national issue; similar cuts in education that are happening all over the US. Speakers address audiences at high schools, community groups, churches and political rallies – and are available by contacting the website below. The coalition invites everyone concerned about equal access to higher education to join us in the efforts to keep the General College at the University of Minnesota. For more information visit the website www.webegc.org.

Jonneke Koomen is a graduate student in political science at the University of Minnesota and a member of the MN FOR Board.

North Country Peace Builder is produced quarterly by the board of the Minnesota Fellowship of Reconciliation. It is also available online at www.osb.org/for. [Note: Volume 56 (2005) has three rather than four issues.] Please email articles, photos, letters and comments to minnesotafor@gmail.com or write to Minnesota FOR, Attention: NCPB, PO Box 14792, Minneapolis, MN 55414-0792

Let Iraqis Decide US Pullout

by *Abigail A. Fuller and Neil Wollman*

NORTH MANCHESTER, Ind., Nov. 26 (UPI) -- Give us three minutes and we can find an op-ed piece in a U.S. newspaper calling for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq, or arguing that they should stay. The arguments are varied and numerous: If the U.S. leaves, anarchy will ensue. Occupation forces are a target for foreign terrorists. Bush should set a timetable for withdrawal. Setting a timetable would embolden those using violence in Iraq. And so on.

What is missing from this picture? Any discussion of what the Iraqi people themselves want. The opinions of those most affected by this war should count the most. A nationwide referendum should be conducted in Iraq on the question of whether U.S. troops should stay or go, in which every Iraqi can vote directly.

What the U.S. public wants is much discussed in the media - nearly every week poll results are announced indicating how many people believe the United States should withdraw all or some troops from Iraq (63 percent, according to the latest USA Today/CNN Gallup Poll) and how many believe the United States made a mistake in sending troops to Iraq (59 percent, from the same poll).

As U.S. citizens we certainly have an interest in whether the troops stay. Our tax money funds the U.S. military presence, and our young men and women are being killed and injured there. So our opinions matter.

But what about the Iraqis? There are inherent difficulties in polling in an unstable, war-torn environment. Furthermore, most polls of Iraqi public opinion ask such ambiguous questions as, "Do you think the country is headed in the right direction?" -- to which a "yes" answer could mean any number of things, from a belief that the insurgents are defeating the occupation forces and that's a good thing, to a belief that a democratic government will be established soon in part due to the U.S. presence.

Neither is it sufficient to simply allow the Iraqi government to

determine whether or not U.S. troops stay. Thirty-seven percent of Iraqis, a significant minority, feel that the Iraqi National Assembly does not serve the interests of all Iraqis (according to an International Republican Institute poll in July 2005).

Some polls have asked Iraqis specifically about the presence of U.S. troops, and guess what: they want us to leave. A February poll by the U.S. military, cited by the Brookings Institution, found that 71 percent of Iraqis "oppose the presence of Coalition Forces in Iraq." This poll was taken only in urban areas, but others have found much the same sentiment.

According to a January 2005 poll by Abu Dhabi TV/Zogby International, 82 percent of Sunni Arabs and 69 percent of Shiite Arabs favor the withdrawal of U.S. troops either immediately or once an elected government is in place. But an opinion poll does not carry the weight of a referendum, in which all Iraqis could clearly and definitively vote on whether or not U.S. troops should remain in their country.

It can be done: Kurdish activists organized a referendum on independence during the January national elections in Iraq, which found that over 90 percent of Kurd voters want independence for the region. On Oct. 15 Iraqis voted in another referendum, ratifying a new constitution.

It appears that we as a nation are so self-absorbed that both the hawks and the doves among us have forgotten to ask what those most affected by the war -- the Iraqi people themselves -- want. Let us remedy this situation by supporting a referendum and then abiding by the results. Let the Iraqi people decide.

Abigail A. Fuller is associate professor of sociology and social work and Neil Wollman is a senior fellow of the Peace Studies Institute at Manchester College in North Manchester, Ind.

Originally published as a United Press International's "Outside View" commentary and reprinted with permission.

North Country Peace Builder
Minnesota Fellowship of Reconciliation
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Minneapolis, MN 55414-0792

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The Minnesota FOR and Mac-Plymouth Peacemakers invite you to a community forum with Sami Rasouli:

Tuesday, February 28, 7:00 PM, at Macalester-Plymouth United Church, at the corner of Lincoln Av. and Macalester St. in St. Paul.

Sami is an Iraqi American who lived in the US for 17 years, running Sinbad's Market in Minneapolis. In 2004 Sami returned to Iraq to participate in re-building his war-torn country and do what he can to contribute to peace. He returns to the US periodically to visit family and friends and share his experiences as one who is completely 'unembedded'. Sami is currently working for the Karbala Human Rights Organization and has had close contact with Christian and Muslim Peacemaker Teams.

Upcoming Events

Back Home From My Home in Iraq: A Conversation with Iraqi American Sami Rasouli. Tuesday, Feb. 28, Macalester-Plymouth United Church, St. Paul. 7:00 p.m.

Report from Israel and Palestine. Candace Lutt and Phil Stoltzfus reflect on experiences from their FOR Interfaith Peace Builders Delegation to Israel and Palestine. Wednesday, March 15, St. Martin's Table, 20th & Riverside, Minneapolis. 7:30 PM.

News from Iran. Nancy Parlin will share experiences and impressions from the first FOR Peacemakers Delegation to Iran. Thursday, April 20. St. Martin's Table, 7:30 PM.

Building A Culture of Peace: Nonviolence Training for Trainers. June 1-4, 2006. Circle Pines, MN. Contact Don Christensen, chris385@umn.edu, for information.

FOR Interfaith Peacebuilders Delegation to Israel and Palestine.

July 15-29, 2006. Join Don Christensen and a national FOR delegation. See forusa.org, for information.