

North Country Peace Builder

Minnesota Fellowship of Reconciliation

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SAMI RASOULI LAMENTS AND INFORMS ABOUT IRAQ

by Molly Redmond



Sami Rasouli at Macalester Plymouth United Church Photo: Jim Johnson

On the evening of April 26, Macalester Plymouth United Church (MPUC) hosted Sami Rasouli talking about life in Iraq. His presentation included an overview of events on the ground in Iraq, slides from Iraq, a lively session of questions and a display of children's art, posters, and letters of peace. It was a moving conversation, full of information not seen in the mainstream media. About eighty people attended, about half of whom were from MPUC.

Mr. Rasouli, who was born in Iraq, spent many years in Minneapolis running Sinbad's Restaurant before selling it and returning to Iraq after the war started in 2003. He then

founded the Muslim Peacemaker Team, which often coordinates peacemaking and reconciliation projects in Iraq with the Christian Peacemaker Team. He returned in March after 8 months in Iraq, whence he will be returning soon to continue his work. His appearance was cosponsored by MPUC PeaceMakers, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and the Peace & Justice Task Force of the Twin Cities Presbytery.

MN FOR GOES "LIVE" WITH WEB REDESIGN

by Jo Clare Hartsig

This summer our MN FOR will be discovering many new ways our web address (www.mnfor.org) can be used by members, friends and seekers. Clearly, "new media" is the way to be part of the information and inspiration for peacemakers. In addition to having a variety of downloadable resources, we hope to include a 'blog which will be available to media outlets and an "Ask A.J." (Muste) column to examine classic questions of nonviolence in a Q and A fashion. Some recent grant requests may make it possible for us to have a Web Keeper who will be able to respond quickly to requests, stimulate conversations, and create or import peacemaking and nonviolence resources for our Fellowship to use. If you have some ideas for us, please contact Jo Clare Hartsig at maddenuf@aol.com.

Of course, we intend to continue to print and mail copies of *North Country Peace Builder* but will also have the newsletter available on line for those who prefer to receive it electronically.



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.

MEET THE PEACEMAKERS: A Conversation with FOR Members Charles and Ava-Dale Johnson

by Don Christensen

As I stood by and witnessed a hapless Congress acquiesce to the threat of a veto by President Bush and once again vote to fund the war in Iraq, I received a dose of courage and hope, as well as a personal challenge, in a conversation with my friends, neighbors and long-time war tax resisters, Charles and Ava-Dale Johnson:

“I was listening to a speaker against the war in Viet Nam,” recalled Charles, “and I asked him, ‘what can we do to stop it?!’ “He gave me a book from the War Tax Resisters League entitled, If You Want Peace, Don’t Pay for War. We also had just heard Mulford Sibley speak on pacifism. Sibley had said, ‘WWII did not begin with Hitler. The causes of that war go back to WWI. and even before that.’” “I had never heard anyone speak about pacifism,” Charles continued. “It gave us a rationale for war tax resistance – a way of nonviolent activism and a quiet witness that we have continued to follow.”

I was inspired and challenged by the stories of Ava-Dale and Charles; I wanted to explore the roots of their deep and abiding commitment to service and to pacifism, so I inquired about their formative years: “We met at college,” said Charles. “Phillips University in Enid, Oklahoma, a college of the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ. Our college saw itself as a corner of heaven on earth. It was a kind of utopian religious community where nearly everyone, including us, was preparing for full-time Christian service.”

“Our families were poor, devoted church people,” added Ava-Dale. None of our parents was formally schooled, just barely through high school. Yet my mother became a church pianist and organist and taught music; and Charles’ father taught adult Sunday school for more than 40 years.” Charles recalled the family story that when he was still an infant his mother took him to meetings of the American Missionary Society in a basket.

The day after Charles graduated from college, in the spring of 1949, he and Ava-Dale were married. “We experienced the same calling,” reflected Ava-Dale, “to lives of Christian service.” Charles was heading for ordination in the Christian Church, and Ava-Dale would have followed the same path, had it been open to women at that time. Together they accepted the call to missionary service in Africa. After extensive training with the Board of Missions of the Christian Church, Ava-Dale and Charles were off to the Belgian Congo (now Democratic Republic of Congo), where they spent the next five years studying the local Bantu language and culture, raising three children and teaching in the French language in rural schools of Congo.

In addition to the challenges of living, working and parenting children in an African colonial society, the Johnsons faced obstacles from the Christian missionary culture: “We were not comfortable having house servants,” reflected Charles. “We came from humble backgrounds. Yet we were so busy learning two languages, teaching school and raising three young children, we had to hire some help. We were criticized by other missionaries for not working our employees on Sundays and for doubling their wages. We also did not want to live in the ‘big house.’ We wanted to live in a house of mud and sticks like the local people, but our supervisors refused.”

By the summer of 1959, as the Congo moved into revolution from Belgian colonial rule, the Johnsons made the difficult decision to return to the U.S. “I experienced deep grief in leaving Africa and coming home,” said Ava-Dale. “I was seeing people in dire need, but were we missionaries really helping them? I was deeply affected by the growing resentment of teenage African schoolboys toward whites, including missionaries. We listened, but I didn’t know what to say to these people. Trust was breaking down, making it impossible to stay.” The Johnsons took their three children and migrated to the Navajo Reservation in Arizona where Charles taught 5th grade in the Window Rock Public School. During these years they had three more children. After five years Charles went back to school, advancing his French to a doctorate level. (Con’t p. 3)



RASOULI: CULTURE OF WAR - MANKIND'S GREATEST TRAGEDY

by Susan Moore

Sami Rasouli moved to Minneapolis in 1987 and in 2004 returned to Iraq to help repair damage. On April 26, at Macalester Plymouth United Church, he shared some of the terrible impact of a military invasion on his former country. He also talked about the second largest oil reserve in the world, of which Iraq (the previous owner) now gets 12.5 percent and oil companies get 87.5 percent. In spite of that economic loss, he has a tendency to say – please just go and leave us alone. “We survived for 12 years eating dates.”

He described tension in the airport as a U.S. citizen who looked Arabic, enduring regular announcements to guard one’s baggage and feeling self-conscious about using his telephone. He is torn in this war as an Iraqi-American, but survives through this work to further the abandonment of the culture of war – “the greatest tragedy of mankind.” He said that as Americans, “we need to grow up” and restore our credibility, so the rest of the world will respect us once again. And we must gain proper perspective since we are not the center of the universe and cannot survive if we do not honor others in the world.

He told us the Iraqi people need their land and their country back. Iraq’s history has been destroyed, artifacts looted and government buildings burned. “You would lose your mind if you stayed for one or two days in Iraq,” said Rasouli. Before the invasion, there were 15 hours of electricity per day. Now there may be 2 hours per day. The high prevalence of cata-

racts, HIV, hepatitis and cancer with no medical facilities or personnel will be a problem for years. This does not feel to him like liberation or democracy. Five percent of the population has decided to use force in response and they are backed by another 85 percent. Many Iraqis believe this is a Christian/Jewish war against Muslims. There has been systematic destruction and the country has been artificially divided.

In response to violence erupting in Iraq since the 2003 invasion, and inspired by Christian Peacemaker Teams, Rasouli co-founded Muslim Peacemaker Teams “to bring all Iraqis together in peace” through training about nonviolence in Islamic teaching; promoting exchanges among mosques, synagogues and churches and between Iraqis and Americans; responding to emergencies with food, medicine and shelter; escorting endangered people; and educating about the role of women in rebuilding a peaceful Iraqi society.

Rasouli brought the opportunity for young people to write simple, friendly letters to children and youth in Iraq, expressing their wishes for “a peaceful world, a world without war.” He also brought small original paintings, posters and cards from Iraq. Proceeds from the sale of these items support Peacemaker Teams

Finally, Rasouli shared with us that he has a loving family made up of both Sunni and Shi’a. He left us with the common message of the Bible, the Koran and the Talmud: human evolution. We are to evolve, be good to ourselves and others, and do no harm.

(Johnson, from p. 2) Ava-Dale worked as an instructor of early childhood education and later served for four years as a teacher of teachers in a Tucson barrio.

In 2002, Charles retired from 19 years of teaching French at Macalester College. He and Ava-Dale became deeply involved in the re-settlement of Hmong refugees from Laos. Charles worked with French-speaking Hmong interpreters to record and transcribe Hmong oral literature as told by Hmong-speaking elders. He then translated this material, and with Ava-Dale’s assistance, edited and adapted it into Hmong myths, legends and folk tales for use by Hmong adults and children learning to read and write. Charles continues to maintain collegial relations with Hmong leaders and is involved in activities promoting inter-cultural understanding, peace and social justice. Ava-Dale worked as lead teacher in St. Paul Public Schools’ TESOL Center, coordinating American, Vietnamese, Hmong and Hispanic-American staff and volunteers. For eleven years she taught English as a Second Language at the International Institute of Minnesota. She continues to study the Hmong language.

“We never found a place to slow down,” mused Ava-Dale. “There was always something else to do and to learn. . . . We tried to do a lot that was too hard for us. . . . Fortunately, we were given lots of good training by the United Christian Missionary Society and people of the Disciples of Christ. . . . As different as Charles and I are from each another, our path is virtually the same. We are committed to loving our neighbors and walking gently on the earth.” Minnesota FOR is honored to share this recent conversation with Charles and Ava-Dale Johnson. May we draw inspiration from their lives of service and witness to peace and social justice through active nonviolence.

DEVELOPMENT ETHICS IN JAMAICA

by Duane Cady

I have been teaching philosophy at Hamline University for 33 years. Eight years ago I began teaching a course on Ethics and International Development. I teach it in our January term and limit it to a dozen students so I can include an experiential component: we spend two weeks living and working on school construction in the rural interior of a “Third World” country.

I left college for graduate school in the late 1960s. When I first set foot on the Brown University campus I immediately knew that I didn’t belong there; Brown wreaked of old money and upper-class sophistication, but I was a blue-collar kid, the first generation of my family to graduate college. That experience taught me more about class stratification than I could learn from books or a lecture.

What has my grad school experience to do with my ethics class? I have spent most of my career trying to bridge between the academic world of ideas and theories and the ordinary world of everyday experience. I love, and live in, both worlds. In preparing to teach ethics and international development I knew that the key was somehow to convey the reality of life in the so-called “developing world,” and I knew that weeks, even months in a library doing research couldn’t replicate being in a “Third World” place.

Because Hamline is a United Methodist University, we have access to what Methodists call “the connectional church,” organizations within Methodism that reach across geographic and political boundaries. So, I arranged for my class to become an “Operation Classroom” work

team during the middle two weeks of the course. Operation Classroom has sent four or five teams of volunteers each year for the past twenty years, all to St. Ann’s Parish, Jamaica. In the “developing world,” rural area schools often are built by churches. Once built, governments supply teachers. It takes 3-5 teams to get one project completed.

My class meets on campus for the first week of January, reading about international development, and then we travel together to Montego Bay, Jamaica, where we’re met by Methodists from a rural church (different folks and different project each time I’ve led teams). We’re driven to the community, provided meals and a place to stay, and work alongside locals for two weeks. Each student pays \$1500, above regular tuition, to participate. About a third goes for the plane ticket, a third for in-country travel plus room and board (more-or-less indoor camping), and the last third goes to buy materials and pay professionals who lead the work on the site. Locals get the resources to provide a school for their community; my students get immersion in that community, and with it (con’t on p. 7)



Student participants in Operation Classroom and Duane Cady in Jamaica. Photo: Duane Cady

A Review of *Moral Vision: How Everyday Life Shapes Ethical Thinking*

by Marlin Olson

Duane Cady, with broad strokes, tells the story of thinking about ethics or morality. It is a story, particularly since the enlightenment, of increasingly specialized efforts to solve logical problems, which developed when philosophers consider particular ideas beyond debate. A sort of absolutism, really.

While Cady presents a thoroughgoing criticism of philosophical ethics, he does not leave it at that. His latest book, *Moral Vision* is not just a challenge to professional philosophers thinking about ethics. Maybe more importantly, Cady challenges his readers to ask not only “How shall I live my life?” but also “By what stories do I live my life?” Inevitably, answering these questions leads us to reflect on those influences (families, mentors, our own choices etc.) that form the background of our lives.

As each of us moves about our daily lives, the various ways we relate to events and people, including the judgments we make along the way, are organized by our particular view of life and how to live it. When asked for reasons for this or that action or inaction, many of our answers will draw on this history. For professional philosophers, on the other hand, the answer will depend largely on only two categories of ethical thought: *What is my duty?* and *What are the consequences?* You can see the disconnect.

In addition, while these two strains of philosophical ethics largely dominate ethics talk, a multitude of excluded voices parallel the conversation about ethics. And here is where the story really becomes interesting. Cady proposes that these voices really should be heard. The contexts of our lives will change as a result. The project is not merely adding to the knowledge we have so far accumulated, but transforming knowledge. The pluralism Cady offers is beyond both absolutism and relativism. While pluralism may look like “anything goes,” it is actually far more demanding. Cady writes, “Pluralism asks us to remain open to a more complete view that may result from considering the perspectives of diverse others.”

Cady’s proposition is deeply challenging. A pluralistic conversation must be founded on the realization that each of us brings a set of presupposed values to any conversation. Listening to the other half of the conversation may well require us to set aside deeply held beliefs about how we should live.

Often the questions we face today are not very different from those asked by previous generations. Cady asks us to return to them and look at them in a new way. The dogmatism so often associated with the current religious and political “right” and the relativism of the “left” are responses to fear—fear of the ambiguity implicit in diversity. The absolutists fear loss of some kind of overarching standard by which life may be controlled. Relativists have an impression of diversity but are unsure how to acknowledge it while holding onto their values; and so it just seems easier to accept all approaches to the question of how we ought to live our lives as equally valid.

Neither absolutism nor relativism is a genuine answer, but both are common responses that leave us divided against ourselves. Perhaps we fear losing a sense of who we are if we reconsider our basic values.

Cady’s sense of pluralism involves public action: public in the sense of getting out there to experience, first hand, the very different lives of others and public in the sense of debate or negotiation that goes on directly between people. This corresponds to the human condition of plurality, which is a necessary condition for disclosing who we are to each other. Cady says, “Not every conflict gets the win-win outcome that is sought, but aspiring to it persistently, rather than aspiring to defeat other values and prevail with one’s own, does alter the nature of conflict and the prospect for resolution.”

We have to act. We must continually return to the conversation, leaving behind the notion that *I’m right, you’re wrong, and I must present an argument such that you come around to my way of thinking and are convinced of my rightness.*”

Genuine pluralism requires the whole person, not only the intellect. We need to encounter our neighbors over the backyard fence, the immigrants who live in our cities and the people with whom we most disagree. Very possibly, we will not know the outcome of these conversations, and they may turn out differently than expected. Still, we must have them. Reading and internalizing Cady’s *Moral Vision* is a great start.

A VIEW OF 'WHINSEC' FROM THE INSIDE

by Don Irish

Since the founding of our republic, the U.S. military has intervened almost 100 times in Latin America and in some nations, numerous times. Our forces occupied five of them for more than a decade. Since the Vietnam War, our government has employed tactics of "low intensity warfare" – low for us, high for the recipients of our means. We have instigated coups in Chile, Haiti, Panama, Venezuela, Grenada and Guatemala.

We have created surrogates to do the fighting and dying for our 'interests' (e.g., the "Contras" in Nicaragua). We have supported numerous dictators for years (e.g., the Somozas, Batista, Noriega, Hernandez, the juntas of Uruguay and Argentina). Ignoring UN decisions, we have employed almost total embargos (in countries such as Nicaragua and Cuba).

We manipulate Latin American media. We seek to influence their elections with money (e.g., El Salvador, Nicaragua, Venezuela), yet it is illegal under U.S. law for those in other nations to influence our elections. Through institutions that we dominate, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, we maintain leverage over them via 'perpetual debt'. We impose "structural adjustments" on their economies via NAFTA (1994) and CAFTA (2005), trade agreements that benefit our corporations but hurt their poor. U.S. corporations exploit their lack of environmental controls and regulations regarding labor. Clearly the 'American empire' is not about fostering democracy or ensuring peace and prosperity. Empire is about controlling peoples and gaining access to their resources.

Training the militaries of the nations of Latin America at the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC) is one of the instruments used by our government to support powerful elites in Latin America in resisting efforts by their majority poor to secure more just societies.

In November 2006, following the annual SOA Watch protest vigil at Ft. Benning, GA, I was part of a delegation that was given the opportunity to visit WHINSEC and interview the commanding officer, Col. Gilberto Perez. Let me share some observations and reflections from that visit.

We first noticed aspects of 'military culture.' A warrior culture has its own values and basic assumptions about life. We observed that both the U.S. and Latino soldiers wore distinctive uniforms with varied insignia; we sensed a strong ethos of pride and mutual respect for their inter-related roles.

In examining the program of the Institute, we noted the lack of student exposure to an 'unvarnished' history of U.S. – Latin American relations. We were uneasy that Commandant Gilberto Perez seemed unable or unwilling to recognize the possibility that WHINSEC and its personnel might in any way be complicit in the assassinations, massacres, and brutalities that Latin Americans have experienced. His repeated response was, "We don't make policy; we implement policies. Those who disagree should contact the President and Congress!"

I departed WHINSEC confirmed in my belief that over the past dozen years the thousands who have demonstrated at SOA/WHINSEC have had an impact. Changing the name of the institution presumably was done by Congress to separate SOA from mounting criticism. The creation of a "Board of Visitors," with Congressional representation, has provided more independent oversight of the program and greater "transparency." Also there have supposedly been changes in the curriculum. We appreciated learning that some of the students are taken to Washington, DC (Con't p. 7)

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(WHINSEC from p. 6) where they meet with staff of Human Rights Watch, Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), and even SOA Watch.

I value the opportunity to have visited WHINSEC. I appreciate the graciousness with which we were received by Commandant Perez and other staff persons, especially Lee Rials, Public Affairs Officer. Nevertheless, my view remains that the U.S. should not be training military personnel of other countries. By doing so we become even more complicit with their problems/solutions. Militaries are not instruments of peacemaking - in their purpose, organizational structures, values or training. Peacemaking is not their area of expertise. Peacemaking is the domain of those trained in the theories, principles and practices of active nonviolence. A 'Global Peace Force' would make far better peacemakers than the U.S. military.



Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, formerly - School of the Americas.

Photo: Don Irish

(Jamaica from p. 4) perspectives on both the "developing world" and on North American and Europe from the "developing world." Both are invaluable to understanding ethics and development.

I have my students make daily journal entries, and each has to do an independent project, to write-up and present to the class after our return to campus, on a topic of their choice: education, environmental issues, tourism, the role of women, economic development, politics, and so on. Students have done amazing and creative work. This has been some of the most rewarding teaching I have done, perhaps because I learn so much each time...and teach so little. I can honestly say the opportunity to work in the rural interior of Jamaica for two weeks through Operation Classroom has changed some of my students lives, sometimes permanently. I know it has changed mine.

MANY THANKS TO THESE FRIENDS WHO RECENTLY MADE A FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE MINNESOTA FOR!

James Joyce & Leigh Jewell	Macalester-Plymouth United	Susan Nixon & Walter Lentz
Art & Mary Bjornjeld	Church	Bill Berneking
Thoburn & Marjorie Thompson	Sandra & Duane Cady	Joan & Phillip Hahn
Nancy Parlin	Joanne Church	St. Luke Presbyterian Church
Matthew Byrnes	Stewart & Kay Shaw	Diane Williams Peace Fund
Maryrose Dolezol	Lowell & Carol Erdahl	Joe Palen
Leigh Lawton	"Virkelyst"	Katie Bade
Mearl Marie Keitham	Union Congregational United	Rhoda Gilman
Gary & Denise Stelzner	Church of Christ	Geraldine Braden
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MARK YOUR CALENDAR FOR THESE UPCOMING EVENTS

- **MN FOR Summer Picnic**

Sunday, July 15, 4:00 – 6:00 p.m., Newell Park,
900 Fairview Av. N., St. Paul. Bring a dish to share. Beverages and cutlery provided.

- **Intergenerational Nonviolence Gathering**

Friday, July 20 - Sunday, July 22

Shalom Hill Farm in Windom, MN

For information contact Alejandra at 612.423.1073, or email grassrootsnonviolence@gmail.com

- **“Peace and Violence in Our Religious Traditions: An Interfaith Dialogue”**

Monday evenings, October 8 – November 12, 2007, 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.

A 6-week series featuring presentations by local religious leaders and dialogue among participants from different traditions. Interfaith Dialogue” is co-sponsored by the St. Paul Area Council of Churches, Jay Phillips Center for Jewish Christian Learning, the Minnesota FOR, and other religious groups and organizations in the Twin Cities. Sessions will be held in St. Paul area mosques, churches and synagogues.

- **Creating a Culture of Peace (CCP) Nonviolence Training** on August 16-19, 2007 and **Training for Trainers** on November 7-11, 2007 at Kirkridge Retreat Center. (610)588.1793