

# North Country Peace Builder

Minnesota Fellowship of Reconciliation

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## MINNESOTA PEACE TEAMS FORMING FOR RNC

By Katherine Wojtan

***A Peace Team acts as a peaceful presence in potentially violent situations to protect the safety of those present. Peace Teams are made up of citizens trained in nonviolent techniques working in small affinity groups.***

***Peace teams do not interfere with civil rights, do not protect property, and do not enforce laws. The role is strictly non-partisan, our focus is protecting human life and human rights.***

Many of us are familiar with peace teams deployed to other, 'scarier' parts of the world, serving as a presence and providing accompaniment. Last May thirty people gathered in Detroit for a 5-day training to explore how Peace Teams can serve domestically, as well as internationally. I was sponsored by the Minnesota FOR to participate in that training. The training was sponsored by Nonviolent Peace Force, in collaboration with the Michigan Peace Team. I attended out of curiosity, not knowing exactly what to expect. By the end I was committed to the goal of organizing a Peace Team in Minnesota. Our initial intent is to have a presence at the Republican National Convention (RNC) September 1 to 4 in St. Paul. Following that we hope to have Peace Teams available in Minnesota for future events that may involve conflict and violence.

For a middle class, suburban girl being involved in this is quite a leap. I believe in the power of nonviolence, and I've facilitated *Creating a Culture of Peace* workshops for the Minnesota FOR. I'm also involved in other justice-focused organizations. But I have had very little direct experience with physical violence. Will I be able to do this? How will I react if confronted with violence?

The training was designed to give me some experience. Participants had deep discussions about what violence is and what causes it, and about white privilege and the difficulties that privilege presents to this work. And we did lots and lots of role-plays. Scenarios were set up to simulate domestic conflict situations – gatherings outside of abortion clinics, KKK rallies, GLBT events, Mexican Border incidents and marches and demonstrations. I had the opportunity to try on the role of antagonist, victim and Peace Team member. At one point I was amazed to find myself voluntarily getting physically between two parties that were about to have a physical confrontation. The debrief of the role-plays was great learning. We got a feel for how to connect with people in an escalating situation, what actions make people feel threatened, and how to effectively intervene.

Tactics used by Peace Team members include: making connections in the crowd, listening to people, using distraction (questions, humor), doing the unexpected (bursting into song), observing and expressing what you observe, finding and enlisting allies in a crowd, modeling calmness and confidence, and befriending your opponent's better nature. The goal is to use words and actions that reduce the need to intervene physically. At times things may escalate to a point where a team will even create a barrier with their bodies, or physically surround a person who is becoming violent.

An estimated 50,000 people will converge on St. Paul and Minneapolis during the Republican National Convention, including delegates, protesters and counter-protesters. Many people are concerned about being able to safely use their political voice.

A Peace Team is being formed and trained for service in Minnesota beginning with the RNC. Trainings will be held in mid August and are 10 hours long. This training is required for Peace Team members. If you are interested in participating or if you have questions you can contact me at 612-483-6041 or [minnesotapeaceteam@gmail.com](mailto:minnesotapeaceteam@gmail.com).

## INSIGHT INTO A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

By Judy Nelson

**When I went to Washington, D.C., I knew I wanted to make a statement about the war in Iraq and I knew that by choosing to go I had done that. What I didn't know was whether I would go the next step and choose to participate in an act of civil disobedience where I risked the possibility of arrest. This is my story of that decision.**

**"DO ONE THING EVERY DAY THAT SCARES YOU."**

**Eleanor Roosevelt**

"Do one thing every day that scares you". This is what I came away with from the Christian Peace Witness for Iraq in Washington, D.C. Cheryl Bjork shared this powerful quote with me during the church service we attended prior to the Christian Peace Witness for Iraq march. When I read this quote I immediately GOT what had been going on inside of me since I had arrived in D.C. I was scared. Scared of what? Scared of the unknown, scared of having to stand for maybe 6 - 8 hours, scared of having to pee and not being able to, scared of being handcuffed and having to have my arms behind me for a long period of time, scared of being physically uncomfortable..... And then I had to ask myself the question "How often does my own comfort get in the way of my walking my talk? Or to say it another way "How often does my own comfort get in the way of my doing the right thing"? And then I had to contrast my own fear to what has been happening in Iraq.

One of the speaker's at the church was telling her story. She was the mother of the first National Guard soldier killed in Iraq. He was killed by gunfire as he stood guard for our troops while they were looking for weapons of mass destruction! I thought of the thousands of young men and women who have since died, or come home without limbs or sight or mind, who will never be the same. And then I thought of the hundreds of thousands of innocent Iraqi children, babies, women, and men who have died, have been permanently scarred for life, are homeless, hungry or who have fled their homeland because of war. Who was I **NOT** to witness that war is wrong and that God is calling us to take action, to be people of integrity, calling us to a higher ground. I knew then that I wanted to participate in an act of civil disobedience. I was filled with courage! But then, as I left the church, it wasn't too long and the doubts were back. I was thinking, "Can I handle it?" "Do I need to do it?" "Wasn't it enough just being here?" And then I realized "Oh, I'm thinking these thoughts because I'm scared" "It's OK to be scared." "Do it anyway!" And then the thought, "You don't have to do this alone!" "Did you forget that God has promised to be with you always?" (23rd Psalm) "Do you remember that God is here with you right now?" "Where was my faith?"



**Judy Nelson witnesses to her beliefs in Washington**

*photo courtesy of Lynn Cox*

We assembled, heard speakers, and I thought of my children, Steve (Joan) and Nicole (Mike) and my grandchildren, Sebastian and Ariana, and asked myself, "What do I want my legacy to them to be?" "When I'm gone how do I want them to remember me?" Then those who felt called to participate in an act of civil disobedience were asked to go to the front of the group. I went to the front of the group. I was not alone. The march began. We entered the Hart Building where the Senate offices are located. We formed a circle, prayed, and sang and then one by one each peacemaker was arrested. I kept on wondering what would happen next. Would I be able to handle it? And then I was arrested. As I placed my hands behind me and the officer put on the handcuffs a sense of peace and love surrounded and encompassed me. I felt a sense of freedom and empowerment I had not experienced before. I had taken an important step for me. I was transformed. Thanks be to God.

*(Judy Nelson is a member of St. Luke Presbyterian Church in Minnetonka. On March 7, 2008, she and six other Minnesotans participating in "Christian Peace Witness for Iraq," were arrested for an act of civil disobedience in the Hart Senate Office Building in Washington, DC.)*

## We Are All Immigrants

by Rev. John Guttermann

Robin Williams wryly observed, "The Statue of Liberty is no longer saying, "Give me your poor, your tired, your huddled masses." She's got a baseball bat and yelling, "You want a piece of me?""

On Monday, May 12, 390 workers at the Agriprocessors Inc. plant in Postville, Iowa were detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents in what was then the US's largest immigration raid.

Then there was this information: most were indigenous Mayans from Guatemala and for many Spanish is their second language.

I knew these people, the Mayans, having meant them in Chiapas, Mexico, during a study tour sponsored by United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities in January 2008. Chiapas, I also learned, was once part of Guatemala.

I learned that though they are among the poorest of the poor, the Mayans have never stopped resisting the western invasion that began with the Spanish conquistadores, and that today they are fighting the neo-liberal economic policies enriching financiers while impoverishing their communities.

We benefit from these policies with designer crops (I get Mexican organic peaches from my local co-op). They lose their lands because capital prefers private over communal ownership, and exportable crops (my peaches) over indigenous corn.

We benefit with new markets for US subsidized corn. Without land to grow corn or money to buy it, they leave their communities searching for work. Sometimes they find it in factories that have left the United States. If they cannot get one of these jobs, they follow the money trail into the United States. We, in return, get the products of countless Postvilles (think McNuggets and packaged chicken breasts).

It is a layered and complex history that I have oversimplified. Nevertheless, this is nothing compared to the simplifications of fear and ignorance that preceded my Chiapas journey (this was my first trip to a two-thirds world country

and a conflict zone). What I 'knew' about the Mayans, Latin America, and Mexico was limited to stereotypes of Speedy Gonzalez, Bogart in the "Treasure of the Sierra Madre," and Santa Anna and 'Remember the Alamo.'

This journey connected me with people doing everything they can to live within, challenge, change, and improve their circumstances. I learned they love their land, corn (they domesticated it), culture, and country. I remembered that my own coming to the United States was in the genes of grandparents seeking both survival and opportunity.

My maternal grandfather was sixteen when, his family unable to support him, he left Sweden for the United States. His future wife came under similar circumstances. My paternal grandfather came to escape the Prussian military draft. My paternal grandmother was an orphan who survived being an abused servant on a Wisconsin farm.

I am riding on the shoulders of people who are separated from the experiences of the Postville Mayans only by time.

I, too, am an immigrant charged to remember my heritage by affirming Lady Liberty's invitation:

*"Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*

**Every Church a Peace Church presents**

**Preemptive Peacemaking:  
Just Peace vs. Just War**

**September 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> 2008**

O'Shaughnessy Education Center, University of St. Thomas

Contact: Joan Haan, joan@pleromacoaching.com, or Rod Olsen 651-228-7224 or www.ecapc.org

*Co-sponsored by the University of St. Thomas, Justice and Peace Studies Program and UST Students for Justice and Peace*



**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.**

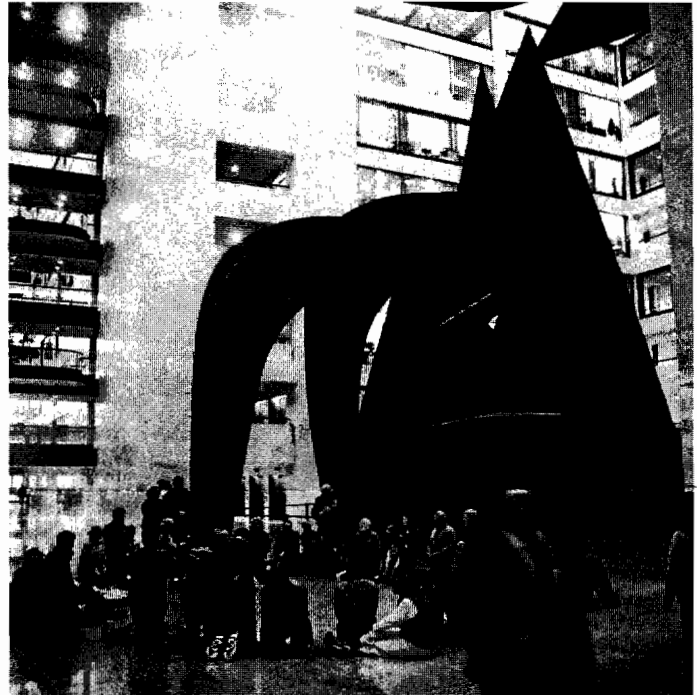
## Joining the Brigade

A letter to her college newspaper by Anne Lawton

Martin Luther King Jr. once spoke about social justice and civil disobedience in terms of a traffic light. There is nothing wrong with a law that stops people at a red light. But when there is an emergency, ambulance drivers race through the light at full speed. In relation to civil disobedience, he said "Disinherited people all over the world are bleeding to death from deep social and economic wounds. They need brigades of ambulance drivers who will have to ignore the red lights of the present system until the emergency is solved."

I was reminded of this story this weekend when I was arrested for civil disobedience in Washington D.C., protesting the War in Iraq. It was the first time I had ever truly put my body on the line for a cause I believe in. Coming up is the fifth anniversary of the war in Iraq. This unjust and illegal war has resulted in the deaths of 3,980 U.S. soldiers and the deaths of an estimated 100,000 Iraqi civilians. Really, numbers do not adequately communicate the true toll this war has taken. One cannot put a number on the unbelievable pain of losing a loved one to war and violence. We are spending \$720 million dollars a day for a war that has torn families apart, maimed soldiers and killed innocent people. I chose to get arrested because I wanted to take a stand against this massive injustice and speak truth to power.

In a class recently, my professor posed to us the question "What are you really willing to risk for?" I am posing this question to everyone in (and outside of) the Hamline community. I am not going to lecture you on how it is our responsibility or our obligation to build a more just and equitable world. On the contrary, I think it is a privilege and an opportunity. Maybe you also would like to end the war in Iraq and bring the troops home safely. Maybe you want to fight global warming. Maybe you want to put an end to various forms of oppressions and discrimination. It's all the same battle. If injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere, then justice anywhere is hope for justice everywhere. Educate yourself on issues of social justice, find something you're passionate about and take action! Overall, my challenge to you all is simple. Make the time to make a difference. Take a risk for something you believe in. Be an ambulance driver!



Anne Lawton joins the Iraq war protest in Washington D.C.

*Photo courtesy of Alex Messenger*

THANK YOU, MEMBERS AND FRIENDS, FOR YOUR RECENT  
FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE MINNESOTA FOR!

Mrs. Katie Bade

Janet Humphrey

Kay Briden

Yleen Joselyn

Thorburn and Marjorie Thompson

Albert Fenske

Joseph Palen

Susan Desmond

Susan Moore

Richard Wildberger

Stephen Lowry

Mearl Marie K. Keithahn

Don Irish

Saint John's Abbey

# Reflecting on Interfaith Peacemaking ...

Editor's note: Minnesota FOR continues to sponsor "Creating a Culture of Peace" workshops for nonviolence training. Two participants at the most recent one offer their reflections and insights about this important work.

By Marlin Olson

I do not join anything easily, and so I did not become a member of Fellowship of Reconciliation without some degree of self examination; this process always leaves me more than a little uncertain.

My weekend at ARC Retreat Center for the workshop "Creating a Culture of Peace" was an important chapter in my examination of violence and active nonviolence. The weekend was by turns active and contemplative. The magnificent lodge and food all served to provide the psychic distance necessary to exploring violence and active nonviolence. As it turned out, though I enjoyed and benefited from conversations about violence -some of them intellectually challenging- I was most and deeply challenged by the group exercises: one, called the "Hassle Line." Across this line we divided into groups opposing each other. We each had a turn at playing the role of demonstrator and then RNC attendee. The other group exercise, in some ways even more challenging, involved several of the group imagining ourselves into roles defined by the issue of illegal immigration over the Mexico/U.S. border. Each of the roles brought a different discomfort and each required confronting largely unconscious feelings. The effort to bring the feelings to the level of consciousness and then make sense of them was at times thrilling and other times exhausting.

Our culture loves violence- terribly. Violence is embedded in our daily lives and its metaphors permeate our language. Some say it is at the core of our being. There are interesting, perhaps convincing, arguments to support such an idea. It would help explain the nearly ubiquitous nature of violence. I really don't know. I have come to believe, especially since my weekend with 16 remarkable people, that we can never prevent violence or speak sensibly of peace unless and until we enter into this love of violence. Unless we move our imaginations into the martial state of the soul we will not understand the madness inherent in the love of violence.

Every day I am inspired by the work and the people with whom I shared the weekend. I look forward to where it will lead me next...

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*For more information about Creating a Culture of Peace future workshops or to schedule one for your community, contact Don Christensen at [rachelanddon@msn.com](mailto:rachelanddon@msn.com).*

By Ira Gordon

This was not a retreat for the multitudes. All told, twelve participants and three facilitators gathered at the ARC retreat center outside of Cambridge, Minnesota on the last weekend in May. Their objective: to investigate the how's of peace making.

The small number of participants notwithstanding, those who came together on May 30th offered an intriguing assortment of backgrounds and philosophies. Eight of the participants and all three of the gifted facilitators were anchored in one or another of the Christian denominations. The other four participants were Jewish: Virginia Rovainen and I from Mayim Rabim; Shimon and Esther Walner, orthodox in their sh'mirat mitzvot (their observance of the commandments) and schooled in Chabad style Hasidism.

As hoped for, I was challenged. The emphasis of the FOR, vigorous in its commitment to pacifist combat with vendors of injustice and violence, at times seemed to foster a white vs. black that evoked in me an allergic reaction. The Walners' strict adherence to orthodox protocol led me to revisit my own involvement in and departure from Hasidic Judaism. (In my gilded youth, I was a student at Merkos Chabad, the Lubavitch yeshiva in Crown Heights, Brooklyn.)

What carried the day was heart. At every step in the three days' proceedings, the conversations, the songs, and the prayers -- some Jewish, some Christian, all optional -- were informed by a powerful commitment to connect, to bear witness, to speak I-Thou. This heartfelt intentionality was deeply supported by ARC director, Rev. Jan Wiersma, and her volunteer support staff who insure that the ARC retreat center is a powerful and welcoming antidote to inner clutter. Capstone of the weekend for me personally was performing Yerushalayim HaZahav (Jerusalem the Golden), a dance I recently choreographed.

This FOR Interfaith Retreat broke new ground. The way is now paved for other retreats, perhaps involving members of the Minneapolis Friends meeting, perhaps other members of Mayim Rabim. Whether the final outcome of the weekend be described as a culture of peace, a heartfelt celebration, or an experiment in new possibilities, the weekend was definitely a SheHechianu, V'Kiamanu, V'Higianu experience.

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# REMEMBERING

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**Frances F. Ford (1939-2008)** died of cancer on May 8, with her son, Nathaniel Seymour by her side. She was a beloved member of the Twin Cities Friends Meeting.

Fran's professional life was one of artistry and creativity in many roles. She was an actor, singer, dancer and playwright. She toured in Europe with the musical, *Oklahoma*. She acted in plays *On Broadway*, *Off Broadway*, in the Dakotas, Florida, California and North Carolina. In Minnesota Fran appeared in plays at the Jungle Theater, Old Log Theater, Jon Hasler, Mixed Blood, Park Square Count, Ordway and Illusion Theatres. She performed in films, on TV, in cabaret and in commercials. She taught drama at the University of North Dakota in Grand Forks and Metropolitan State University in St. Paul.

As a Quaker committed to nonviolence, peace and justice, Fran produced four plays for the War Plays Project, which she co-founded in 2004. *Letters to, letters from ... letters never written* was developed from her research in the diaries, letters, and interviews of participants in US wars from the Civil War to Viet Nam.

*Rachel Corrie: A Life for Others*, tells the story of the young American activist with the International Solidarity Movement, who was killed in Gaza in 2003, when she placed her body between a Palestinian home and the Israeli bulldozer intent on razing it. Rachel's parents, Cindy and Craig Corrie, were able to visit Fran at the hospice shortly before she died.

The last of the four plays in this project, *At War With Women*, is about women's experiences in the military. It will be presented at Hamline University in autumn 2008.

LETTERS TO, LETTERS FROM ... LETTERS NEVER WRITTEN

VETSPEAR

RACHEL CORRIE: A LIFE FOR OTHERS

AT WAR WITH WOMEN

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## "VOTING AND DEMOCRACY" Reflections on My Journey

by Don Irish

During the years our family lived in the South, we were involved in diverse aspects of the "Civil Rights" struggles. Most significant and satisfying was the voter registration project in Warren County, North Carolina, sponsored by the American Friends Service Committee. The population of the county was two-thirds Black, generally very poor and entirely rural. The entire area was dominated by the White minority.

A small group of Black citizens, including Eva Clayton and her husband Theodosius, had the courage to sponsor our endeavors in the community. Eva was a biology teacher in one of the Black schools. Theo was a local attorney. The volunteer trainers for the summer were about a dozen White students from the North. These volunteers lived above a funeral home in a two-story frame building that had a single entrance/exit, with a wooden stairway on one side. We were constantly concerned for the safety of the young people, if a fire were to "mysteriously" occur.

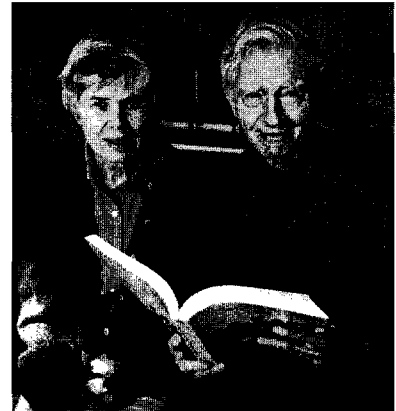
Early on we visited Governor Terry Sanford, one of the "New South" governors, at the Governor's mansion in Raleigh. We were very gratified when he offered us his strong support. He suggested that if we encountered serious problems, we should call the State Patrol, some 30 miles away, and indicate to them that we had been instructed to call the Governor's office as well! The local constable would not be reliable help; he was a member of the community and would therefore be hesitant to challenge his White neighbors.

We visited the editor of the local newspaper, whom we found to be gracious, attentive and candid. He indicated that he was agreeable with our project's presence. However, he said that while he did not feel able to aid us openly, he promised that he would not "hurt us." He proved to be true to his word. There were also two White pastors who risked visiting us in our office, although they too expressed their inability to aid us publicly.

(Continued on page 7)

# PEACEMAKERS

**Charles Richard Johnson (1927-2008)** died peacefully at home on March 29, of pancreatic cancer. His wife, Ava-Dale, six children and 20 grand children celebrate his life of devotion to family and humanitarian service.



After graduate studies in French and anthropology, Charles worked as educator in the Belgian Congo for a Disciples of Christ mission. Returning home before the revolution in 1959, Charles then taught on the Navajo reservation. He earned a PhD in French and joined the Macalester College faculty in 1969. Aided by Ava-Dale and French-speaking Hmong informant, Se Yang, Charles researched and produced bilingual primers and a full anthology of unrecorded Hmong literature and culture. In 1988 Charles retired from teaching, although he remained active in the Twin Cities Friends Meeting and in issues of peace and social justice. For many years Charles and Ava-Dale withheld paying a portion of their Federal income tax in an act of "war tax resistance."

Dan Lundquist, member of the Minneapolis Friends Meeting, wrote about Charles: "With his country at war and duty calling, Charles always responded with love and courage. He picketed in front of the Post Office on April 15, Tax Day. He lobbied in the halls of Congress. He advocated for unlimited treasure for love, and not one cent in tribute for violence.... He and Ava-Dale worked dutifully to finish his last Federal income tax return. This year, as in past decades, Charles would again withhold military taxes.... Charles found that nonviolence is never out of fashion..."

*(Continued from page 6)*

The Northern students had been given instruction regarding voter-registration procedures. They informed new applicants of their rights so that they could "stand their ground" when officially registering. The volunteers met with individuals and groups from the Black community under the oaks after church services, at schools, even door-to-door, preparing them for a more active role in the country's "democracy".

The Black sponsors of our program planned a dinner to raise scholarship money to help their high school youth attend college. In addition to the Black community, the White pastors, teachers, School Board members, county Commissioners and others in the general public were invited to the dinner. None of the White officials attended, nor did anyone from the White community.

The fall after our team left Warren County, the Black community elected a Black deputy-sheriff for the County. The next step took a little longer. In 1992 Eva Clayton became the first African-American woman to win election to the U.S. Congress from North Carolina. In Congress she was elected "President" of the Democratic freshman class of 1993. She served five terms in the House of Representatives. In 1995 she was Hamline University's Putnam Lecturer in Social Ethics.

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## Minnesota FOR supports peace delegates to Israel/Palestine and Iran

The Minnesota FOR has made scholarship money available to assist members and friends of the FOR in Minnesota who would like to participate in interfaith peacemaking delegations to Israel/Palestine ([www.ifpbdel.org](http://www.ifpbdel.org)), and Iran. ([www.forusa.org/programs/iran](http://www.forusa.org/programs/iran)). Contact Don Christensen: [rachelanddon@msn.com](mailto:rachelanddon@msn.com)

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](http://www.osb.org/for). Please e-mail articles, photos, letters and comments to [minnesotator@gmail.com](mailto:minnesotator@gmail.com) or to [lgesling@hamline.edu](mailto:lgesling@hamline.edu) with "NCPB" in the subject line; or write to Minnesota FOR, Attention: NCPB, PO Box 14792, Minneapolis, MN 55414-0792

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**Save the Date**

**Sunday, November 9, 2008**

**Minnesota FOR Annual Meeting**

**“Walking the Long Road”**

Special recognition for all those who have been members 25 years or more

Speaker: Mark Johnson, FOR Executive Secretary