

WITNESS MAGAZINE

**RESISTING A CULTURE
OF PUNISHMENT**



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RESISTING A CULTURE OF PUNISHMENT

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Darby Tillis, freed from

Illinois' Death Row

after being found not guilty

© Loren Santow Photography

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Since 1917, *The Witness* has been examining church and society in light of faith and conscience — advocating for those denied systemic power as well as celebrating those who, in theologian William Stringfellow's words, have found ways to "live humanly in the midst of death." With deep roots in the Episcopal Church, we are a journal of spiritual questing and theology in practice, always ready to hold our own cherished beliefs and convictions up to scrutiny.

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About Peace

In the midst of all the disaster on September 11, I saw Peace run free. He ran down the streets full of rubble and he was beautiful, happy to be free and just running. And I realized that so often Peace only runs free when there are great disasters, when something happens that strips the bars of difference away, and we treat each other with the love and equality and dignity that expresses the heart of who we really are. In great disasters we pay no attention to race, color, creed, politics, culture or any of the things we generally use to separate each other. We see each other in the face and in the heart, and we help each other no matter what. What I learned from September 11 is that we have to see that Peace runs free in times other than tragedy. We have to let this beautiful creature have space in our lives so that he can breathe and live and show us the joy and hope and freedom he is made of. Peace is always beautiful, but Peace is most beautiful when he is outside the cages of our prejudices and preferences. Peace is most beautiful when we are most beautiful; when we greet each other heart to heart, when there is no difference between your heart and mine.

Jane Lee Wolfe, President

World YWCA

Little Rock, AK

Gateside signs of hope

Relative to “reimagining faith and action” (TW 7/8-01) during these days of great sadness in New York, let me add to your growing list of remarkable signs of hope and healing appearing in spite of profound tragedy.

Thirty years ago, on September 13, 1971, tragic events took place in Attica, N.Y., that left folks in that community and throughout the state grieving and vengeful, raging, fearful and numb. But not long after autumn passed and winter settled in at Attica that year some church folk and civic leaders and corrections staff noticed and began to pay attention to an old fact. On the morning of each visiting day scores of mothers and wives and kids and brothers and sisters were showing up in the facility parking lot, waiting to visit a loved one and hopefully pre-

serve and strengthen family ties. So from a couple of local station wagons they began to offer simple “tailgate breakfasts” and respond to questions.

Some months later an unused building alongside the walls was made available and by 1976 Attica’s small local volunteer committee of hospitality providers was there each morning, seven days a week, serving an average of slightly more than 40,000 city family members a year. Spontaneously, local citizens in Auburn and in Plattsburg also began to provide gateside hospitality to families arriving after overnight bus trips from Manhattan.

As small groups in other upstate prison-hosting villages caught the spirit, we worked with them: place by place, year by year. Gateside buildings were built with non-tax-revenue funds to shelter visiting families, local sponsor committees organized, volunteers recruited and trained, long-range financial support developed. Now, 30 years later, families making a visit at 36 of the state’s 70 prisons have access to professional civilian-staffed gateside services when they arrive and after they’ve said goodbye again. At those front gates this year over 500,000 city family members will find hospitality. One in five will be a child. Our people will be there: without fanfare, without claims to be doing something.

Planted and born in Attica’s 1971 atmosphere of violence and hatred and death, the visitors’ centers quietly actualized a latent culture of hospitality for strangers in a strange land. The idea took wings across the state and now grows from corner to corner. With uncertain funding, no official sponsor and only “a Benedictine/Buddhist agenda,” the Gateside Hospitality Centers are a living witness to a community’s natural need to extend hospitality to strangers and a family’s natural need to be with a loved one. So in the wilderness stress of a front-gate situation, to reduce obstacles for folks hoping to preserve and strengthen family ties, the hospitality centers try to “make straight in the wilderness” a pathway.

James W. Bergland, Executive Director

Patmos Associates, Ltd.

New York, NY

What's in a visit?

by Julie A. Wortman

IN EARLY NOVEMBER fellow *Witness* staffer Ethan Flad and I were in Garden City, Long Island, taking the pulse of that particular corner of the church. Asked what justice issues had been capturing his attention, Orris Walker, Long Island's Episcopal bishop, spoke of an eye-opening visit he had made the previous spring to a Queens immigration detention center run by Wackenhut Corrections Corporation, a private company, under contract with the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). Walker had been part of a 22-person delegation, most of them religious leaders, investigating the treatment of people seeking political asylum in the U.S. under the unwelcoming provisions of the 1996 Immigration Reform Act.

The Wackenhut facility, tucked away in a dismal warehouse district near JFK Airport, made Walker think of a "concentration camp." The 200 asylum seekers held here arrive in shackles. Locked in 12- to 40-bed dormitories and segregation cells with open-stall toilets and showers for 22–23 hours a day — and under the constant scrutiny of armed guards — their unenviable uphill task is to convince authorities that they have a "credible fear of persecution" back home. Depending on their access to legal and other forms of help — and on their ability to overcome language barriers — this can take many months.

One teenage woman Walker saw was from the Congo, detained at JFK Airport in transit to Canada, where she was to rejoin her mother. Four months later, there seemed to be no prospect of her release any time soon.

"It seemed crazy that she was being held here — her intent was not to enter this country, but to go to her own people in Canada," Walker said. "We asked a lot of questions about her case, but didn't get many satisfactory answers." He paused, smiling wryly. "A couple of days later I got word that she had been allowed to continue her journey to Canada — a miracle!"

Richard Parkins, the director of the Episcopal Church's Migration Ministries office, says the situation for asylum seekers and refugees coming to this country will only get worse as our leaders pursue their vengeful war on "global terrorism." At this writing, our president has issued an emergency order that gives him the power to dismiss "the principles of law and the rules of evidence" that form the basis of this country's judicial system, all in the cause of protecting us from aliens who might wish us harm. Even conservative columnist William Safire is outraged by the move. "Not content with his previous decision to permit police to eavesdrop on a suspect's conversations with an attorney, Bush now strips the alien accused of even the limited rights afforded by a court martial," Safire wrote in *The New York Times* on November 15. "His kangaroo court can conceal evidence by citing national security, make up its own rules, find a defendant guilty even if a third of the officers disagree, and execute the alien with no review by any civilian court. No longer does the judicial branch and an independent jury stand between the government and the accused. In lieu of those checks and balances central to our legal system, non-citizens face an executive that is now investigator, prosecutor, judge, jury and jailer or executioner. In an Orwellian twist, Bush's order calls this Soviet-style abomination 'a full and fair trial.'"

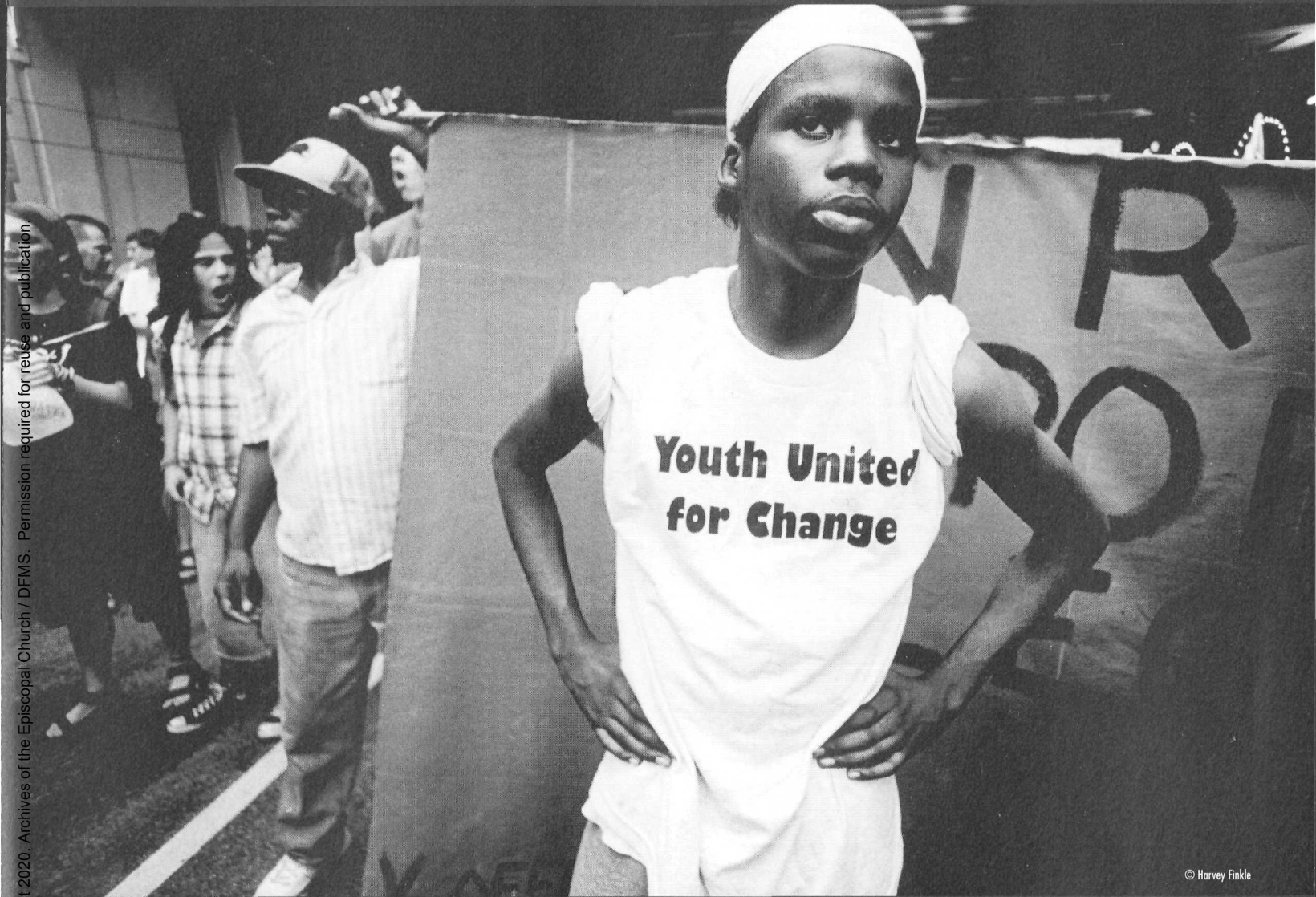
Criminal justice activists have long maintained that this sort of xenophobic, punitive mindset — aimed, they argue, at securing the privilege, power and profit of the establishment — permeates this nation's understanding of law and order. In this issue we probe that claim in light of evidence that there are a growing number of people on death row who are being proven innocent, signs that "three-strikes" laws are filling our prisons with lifers whose crimes are disproportionately minor and reports of police violence that are difficult to understand except in the context of entrenched racial prejudice.

For people of faith, the call is to become personally involved. We're asked to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, visit the imprisoned. In the process, we are told, we will encounter God. In the process, as Orris Walker discovered last year, we might become catalysts for justice. ●

Julie A. Wortman is editor/publisher of *The Witness*.



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And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
to give knowledge of salvation to his people
in the forgiveness of their sins,
through the tender mercy of our God,
when the day shall dawn upon us from on high
to give light to those who sit in darkness
and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.

— Luke 1:67-79 (Revised Standard Version)

Challenging America's incarceration industry — an interview with Van Jones

by *Ethan Flad*

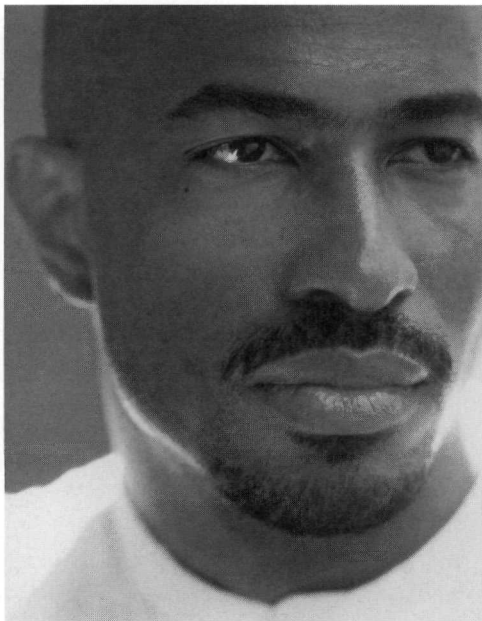
VAN JONES is Executive Director of the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights in San Francisco, which documents and challenges human rights abuses by U.S. law enforcement agencies. In 1998, Jones was one of three recipients of the Reebok International Human Rights Award, given to people under the age of 30 working for human rights anywhere in the world. Jones, who was chosen by a selection committee headed by former president Jimmy Carter, was the first person to receive an international human rights award for fighting police abuse in the U.S.

ETHAN FLAD: Before you began PoliceWatch I believe that you were working with the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights. What drew you to civil rights work? And then what drew you more specifically into founding PoliceWatch and eventually the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights?

VAN JONES: Well, I graduated from Yale Law School in 1993 and then came out to California to work with the Lawyers' Committee. I worked there about three years. One of the things that I saw happening repeatedly was that we would be working on an issue — whether it was environmental racism up in Richmond, Calif., or public housing in San Francisco — and we would hear reports from parents of tremendous police brutality. We would be in meetings and people would say, "Are you guys lawyers?" And we'd say "Yeah, we're lawyers." "Hey, well, can the police just come in my house and, like, just go through everything and throw all my clothes on the floor and dump everything out of the cabinets?" And, "Hey, if the police are going to do an anal cavity search on my child, they can't just pull his pants down in front of everybody, right? They have to like take him around the building or something, right?" We would hear these horrible stories from these parents trying to figure out how to navigate life with young black and Latino and Asian kids and the main problem they were having was with the police. I felt as a young lawyer that someone should do something about it.

There is a project down in Los Angeles called Los Angeles PoliceWatch which is a lawyer referral service, and I thought, "Gee, we should have one in northern California!" So I worked with the National Lawyers' Guild and the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and the ACLU and a few other community groups to create the Bay Area PoliceWatch, which ultimately became a state bar association-certified lawyer referral service. It just took off. At first we would get two or three phone calls a week, then it became two or three phone calls a day. Now we get from between 12 and 20 phone calls a day. We opened an office in New York City in 1998.

We took steps in 1996 to create the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights — named after an unsung civil rights heroine — to use as a platform to create other projects. The idea was, where are the challenges to human rights coming from inside the U.S.? We kept coming back to police issues, so we started working on that. Well, after we had gotten the hotline set up and were getting phone calls, we realized that there was going to have to be some more pro-active organizing. There was a rash of police killings, very suspicious and controversial police killings of unarmed civilians here in San Francisco, so we focused on one of those cases, the case of Officer Mark Andaya, who helped to beat and pepper-spray to death Aaron Williams, an unarmed African-American young man over in the Western Addition neighborhood. We worked on that case for quite a



Van Jones



SHMENT

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The WITNESS 7

while and ultimately prevailed and got the officer fired in the summer of 1997.

We've now grown to the level of not just focusing on the police abuse and police harassment. Slowly but surely we've wound up taking on tougher and more systemic problems within the criminal justice system such as cases of prosecutorial misconduct and abuses by immigration police. We also got calls and complaints from inside the San Francisco County Jail and helped some organizing efforts there.

ETHAN FLAD: I heard you at a report-back event in San Francisco the week following the Seattle WTO protests. It was a great panel. One exciting aspect was that five of the seven panelists were younger than you and I, who are in our 30s. There was one older fellow from the Rainforest Action Network, and he made a negative comment about religion. You chose to respond to that, which I found very intriguing, because within the context of Bay Area activism — or West Coast activism in general — mainstream religion is not seen in a positive light.

VAN JONES: My grandfather was a minister. He actually wound up being the senior bishop in the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, Bishop Chester Arthur Kirkendoll. I went with him in the summertimes to church conferences and church gatherings, listening to a lot of preaching and singing and stuff. That had a big influence on my development. When I got to college I stumbled upon black liberation theology, and that really struck a chord with me in terms of where I was politically at that time — being really concerned about racism and the African-American experience here. So whereas a lot of people, when they go away to college take a big step away from their faith, I was still engaging even as I was getting more politically active and radical. Then I went to law school on the East Coast, and came out here to work on an internship. At that time the Religious Right was really huge. It just basically shamed the faith as far as I'm concerned. When I first came out here the word "Christian" was synonymous with the word "bigot" or "idiot." I really felt that

people needed to see another face of Christian faith in activist politics.

I've always thought it was important to complicate the view of the left on some of these questions around faith and spirituality. Certainly the Christian church as it exists now is basically a state religion that is a part of the functioning of the government and the economy. It's certainly not an oppositional force as an institutionalized entity. The same is true, frankly, of labor unions, at this point, and non-profits, NGOs and foundations and any number of social institutions. Over time they tend to accommodate themselves to the prevailing order, or they don't survive. That having been said, the faith of Jesus as a historical mystic and social actor can be distinguished from the institutional church. And it's the faith of Jesus that I think is very instructive for people who are oppressed and trying to liberate themselves.

ETHAN FLAD: So it informs you still in a personal context, but you don't see it in terms of institutional connections?

VAN JONES: You know, I attend church regularly.

ETHAN FLAD: Are you still in the C.M.E.?

VAN JONES: No, recently I've been attending the East Bay Church of Religious Science, which seems to be an offshoot from mainstream Christianity. They have this African great-grandmother who is a minister and they focus a lot on the power of forgiveness, positive thinking, the possibility of healing. I think the mainstream, institutional church is still trying to beat people up to convince them that they're sinners. The harder thing is to convince people that they are actually good! And that they have the spirit of the Divine Creator within them that they should be trying to act from and in alignment with.

ETHAN FLAD: It seems like there are some connections to the criminal justice system and prison system.

VAN JONES: Yeah, the whole punishment/punitive thing. I'm spiritually engaged in try-

ing to deal with a society that's addicted to punishment and allergic to preventing the root causes of crime. The huge expansion of the incarceration industry is a concentration of a number of crises in this society — not the least of which is the failure of policymakers, decision-makers, and the public as a whole to embrace the humanity of all of the people who live here, to see the divine within the other and to try to relate from that basis.

That is a very difficult thing to do anyway, but very little in our society supports that. Our social discourse and our social practice is very much about creating an "other" that can be scapegoated and punished. And that goes all the way back down to the initial genocide against Native Americans to the enslavement of African Americans, combined with a lot of Puritanical stuff. So I see the struggle against the mass incarceration of young people of color and poor people in this society as an extension of other struggles to rehumanize populations that have been dehumanized.

ETHAN FLAD: This week I read William Upsi Wimsatt's *No More Prisons*. There was one passage that I think especially connects to what you were talking about. He talks about our nation's love of prisons, but also uses prisons as a metaphor for this country's love of dividing, creating bars, putting up walls ...

VAN JONES: At the Ellen Baker Center for Human Rights we think that the prison walls are a reflection of the fact of the social walls between communities. And so at the center we have every color of the Skittles bag, all working together, you know, lots of different projects. It's not just a black project or a women's project, it's a project where all kinds of people who suffer from discrimination and oppression work together to solve problems. It makes us a much more powerful organization because we can go and talk to transgendered sex workers in the Tenderloin neighborhood one day, and then be over in Oakland talking to young hip-hoppers the next day, and then be back over in Chinatown the next day. We are very consistent about trying to pull down those social walls.

As more and more come down, it becomes much more difficult for people to stand by when people they experience to be their human neighbors are thrown in jail.

There are these wake-up calls along your own road in life. I had the experience of going to Yale Law School and I knew people who were 18, 19 years old who had drug problems, who were involved in drug sales, who were undergraduates at Yale. And I also knew people who were similarly afflicted who lived three or four blocks away from me at public housing projects. The kids at Yale who ran afoul of the law were given treatment, counseling, their papers were put on hold, their final exams were put on hold, sometimes they went to Europe for a year and came back and were able to get their lives back on track. Those people are now doctors and lawyers.

ETHAN FLAD: Or presidents.

VAN JONES: People with similar problems who lived three blocks away went to jail. That taught me something. There is no lack of understanding of what it takes to turn a kid around if a kid runs into problems. If we see that kid fully as a human being with great potential, we will bring a tremendous amount of monetary resources to get them turned around. If we have dehumanized them, we will spend a tremendous amount of monetary resources to segregate, isolate, and punish them. When we get to a place where the kid with a drug problem in public housing three blocks from Yale has the same opportunity as the kid with a drug problem on campus, then we have a just society.

I take a lot of comfort and direction from Isaiah. One of the things that God orders him to do is to go and open the prison house door. And so for me, my spiritual journey and my political journey are coming closer together.

I spent a long time doing a lot of protests and rallies and trying to figure out how to be involved in all sorts of politics of confrontation and outrage, and I got really burned out. About a year and a half ago I had to take a step back from the pace and the approach and the frenzy that I was using. I just couldn't do it any more. I went through a real personal crisis. I went to the Windcall Retreat Center for about two weeks. I just slept and wept and tried to get my

WHEN I PURCHASED *No More Prisons* at an independent bookstore, I assumed I had picked up a "manifesto" for demolishing the prison-industrial complex. The author, William Upski Wimsatt, was young (mid-20s), a graffiti writer and school dropout, and had previously penned a provocatively titled book *Bomb the Suburbs*. Surely this was some sort of "how to build your own bomb and destroy the system" handbook.

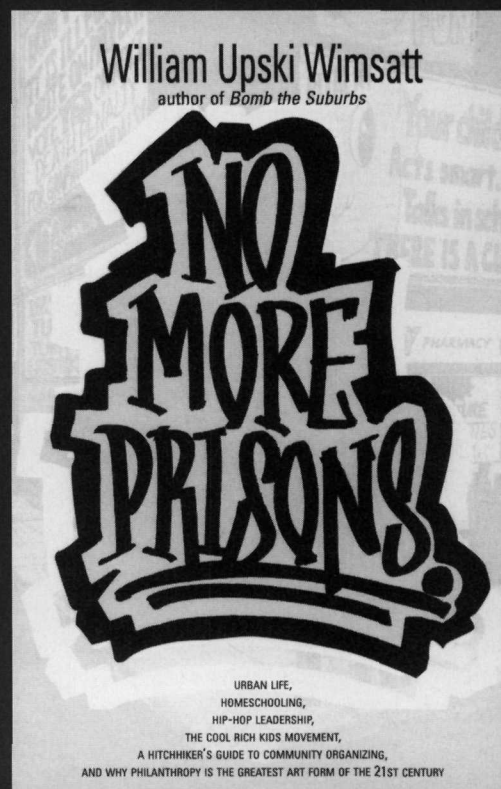
Nothing could be further from the truth. Interestingly, *No More Prisons* hardly discusses the criminal justice system, much less prisons. Rather, the book addresses a handful of issues the author believes will change an inequitable social structure: philanthropy, homeschooling, city-suburb "regionalism" urban planning, and youth-based organizing.

Born to a white, academically elite family, Wimsatt's personal stories are the focus of the book, and reveal his ability to relate easily to rich and poor, to older adults and young hip-hop heads. He achieved notoriety by hitchhiking around the U.S., shortly after having written *Bomb the Suburbs* as a teenager. In each city he visited, he sought out the "most feared neighborhoods," walking through them alone at all hours. It is an indictment of our cities' racial polarization, and is central to his theories for community organizing — an active engagement of the "other."

The most appealing aspect of the book is that it offers solutions. Whether or not one agrees with his proposals (and many will disagree), Wimsatt does not merely complain about social problems. Ardently opposed to endless suburban sprawl, the author interviews urban planners who advocate for metropolitan coalitions that unite urban centers and their immediate suburban communities. Dissatisfied with his education in the public school system, he researches the controversial topic of homeschooling, and strongly recommends it. Initially hesitant about the world of philanthropy, he is now committed to helping build a "Cool Rich Kids Movement." He writes, "From all my experience with grassroots organizations, I believe that organizing people with wealth is the most powerful work I do." In the past two years, he has co-founded the Active Element Foundation (grassroots youth activism) and the Self-Education Foundation (alternatives to traditional schooling).

Even though this book hardly discusses prisons, I now understand why it was sitting in everyone's mailbox at the Prison Activist Resource Center. Brief, provocative, and personal, *No More Prisons* is an accessible resource for anyone who is concerned about the systemic reasons for the unparalleled growth of the prison industry. You can order the book from Raptivism Records, 61 E. 8th St. #251, New York, NY 10003 for \$12.95 plus \$2 S&H.

— Ethan Flad



head together. I started going to church more and got into counseling — you know, everything I could think of just to try to figure some stuff out. And one of the things that I've come to is the real need for progressive people to know what it is that we're saying "yes" to. Julia Butterfly Hill says we've gotten so good at defining what we're against that what we're against is beginning to define us! I agree with that and so now I'm really wanting to do my politics from a place of having a more positive and holistic view of where we're trying to go. That requires time for reflection, which activists often don't give ourselves time for. We go from meeting to protest and from meeting to protest. It requires some real personal healing. I think we get involved in political protest work for mixed reasons — some personal anger as well as some political concern. But at a certain point I believe you have to address those political concerns from a clear-eyed and wise place. You have to deal with that personal anger. A movement that can help address some of the material concerns that people have and some of the environmental concerns that people have, but that also addresses some of the spiritual hunger that

people feel, will be welcome and powerful and have a chance to change society in a really fundamental way.

ETHAN FLAD: A very good friend of mine did political prisoner and police brutality work in New York City, yet two of her immediate family members are police officers, and she is close to them — it's not "I'm doing this to spite you." As your work evolves, from PoliceWatch to the Ella Baker Center, is there now more of an engagement with police? Or is it still an oppositional politics proposition?

VAN JONES: Well, first of all, my favorite uncle is a police officer! And I have a cousin who is a prison guard out here for whom I have affection and fondness. But I'll paraphrase Phil Graham on this one and say if the lion and the lamb are going to lie down together, I want to make sure my community is a lion. I don't think that we have enough counterweight power with the law enforcement establishment yet to be involved in a politics of collaboration. I think we're still at a place where there's a need to build up a real counterweight to the power of the police

officers' unions and the prison guards' unions which so overwhelmingly mis-shape public policy. We need human rights organizations on the other side that are also big and to some extent belligerent and obnoxious in their defense of the other constituencies that stand to lose out as the police and the prison guards eat up more and more of the public budget and command more and more of the public dialogue.

Do you get to a tipping point where you can move from confrontation to some other politics? I'm open to that being a possibility, but progressives have yet to transform our relationships with each other! A lot of activists, especially in the Bay Area, have often said, "I feel like I'm coming off a football field where I got tackled a whole bunch of times, but everybody that tackled me had on my jersey!" Just based on all the internal fighting. It's not all government spies manipulating people against each other. My observation about this in-your-face direct action politics that I've come out of, and am still a part of, is that it tends to shape people's approach to problem-solving in a way that is highly adversarial — such that when you do have problems among your own folks things get real adversarial real fast. Coalitions fall apart, organizations fall apart, you get some poor soul that tries to show some leadership eaten alive by the piranha politics of the self-martializing left. Those kinds of politics won't change society.

ETHAN FLAD: What is it about criminal justice activism work that draws in young people so much?

VAN JONES: Well, it's a combination of things. One is that the massive frustration of two million (and growing) people imprisoned in the U.S. mostly for non-violent offenses is a stench in the nostrils of God! It is just a howling human rights problem that anybody who hears about it in its full dimension is horrified — left, right or center. The reality is that young people are capable of more outrage than two people once they've got two jobs and 3.5 kids and a bunch of other problems. Another thing is the work



Mumia Abu-Jamal demonstration in Philadelphia.

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Opening dialogue through quilting



FOR SIX YEARS, ALICE ROBERTS has served as the chaplain at the New Hampshire State Prison for Women. The prison houses people with a sentence of one year or more, but it also serves as a jail for Hillsborough County, so inmates are serving anywhere from 30 days to life. Nearly all the women — 97 percent of them — will eventually return to the community. Some of the women are able to leave the prison on work release and community service programs.

Most of the time, there are 110 women in the prison. "It's a manageable size," says Roberts, who averages one day a week at the facility. "I often end up doing crisis management, dealing with domestic violence issues especially."

Most of the women in the New Hampshire State Prison, like inmates across the country, come from what Roberts describes as "unsettled backgrounds. Their education is low. Many dropped out of school. There is a preponderance of domestic abuse. They have been beaten, abandoned, and raped. Sexual abuse issues are large. When someone is abused, she is full of pain, of course, and often wants to numb herself. Many women take drugs: prescription drugs, street drugs, and alcohol.

"Many are guilty of victimless crimes. They harmed only themselves. This doesn't go for everyone but most of the women have

had a terrible background and managed to survive. Their coping skills are pretty amazing.

"One of the most important things I say to them," explains Roberts, "is that I don't work for the Department of Corrections. They breathe a huge sigh of relief when they hear that and everything starts pouring out. They see their time with me as a time to vent.

"The Department of Corrections is just a monolith," Roberts says. "People don't know what is going on behind the walls. The prison can become this empire and all kinds of terrible things can happen. Inmates have no credibility to complain. Officers don't want to see the problems."

Although she describes the New Hampshire prison as generally safe and clean, "any situation where people have so much power over others is going to create abuses," Roberts says. "Officers have so much power over people who are living in cages."

A former fabric artist, Roberts has joined her work in ministry with her artistic talent to start a quilting group within the prison. She explains, "A bed covering is the only thing inmates can make and keep there. One of the women came to me and asked if I couldn't get together a quilt that said something about domestic violence.

"So we made a quilt. It has a black and blue color scheme. Twenty-five women each made a square with some kind of statement about domestic violence on it. The women took fabric ink and drew their stories. I've been taking it around to churches and groups."

The quilt has opened a dialogue. "People who have seen it have wanted to say something to women who are in prison," Roberts says. She has been keeping a notebook filled with comments from people who have seen the quilt. Some have been abused themselves and thank the women for sharing.

"It is a new experience for these women to think that they have a voice at all," Roberts says.

Roberts travels the state to educate people within the faith community about the prison system. She recently addressed a feminist liberation theology luncheon and asked for an inmate and a guard to go with her to tell their stories. Later this year, she will convene a day-long workshop in the men's prison in New Hampshire. Representatives from all the parishes in the diocese will attend to learn about prison conditions.

Roberts was recently honored by the Leadership New Hampshire Association. The award not only acknowledges Roberts' hard work but also, she says, is "a good statement — for New Hampshire to hold up prison ministry as something it is proud of."

— Camille Colatosti

dovetails neatly with a certain kind of anti-authoritarian rebellion that adolescents go through anyway! Through shifting demographics there are many more young people in the country. And many more of those young people being people of color means that you have a generation that is more under the gun of police violence and harassment.

Now some of that seems to be changing, at least in New York City as the N.Y.P.D. decides not to harass black, Latino and Asian youth as much. It has now focused a lot more of its harassment on people who appear to be Middle Eastern or Muslim. You're starting to see black and Latino kids walking around with N.Y.P.D. baseball caps and all kinds of weird stuff! So this new "War on Terrorism" context, if it really fully supplants the "War on Drugs" context — and we have a different racist war — then that may reshuffle the deck here a little bit. But one thing we have to be very clear about among people of color is that the secret war against a secret enemy with brown skin, an enemy that's both within the country and outside of the country, a war with no clear objectives and no timeline — that's the "War on Drugs." That framework was used to oppress black and Latino folks primarily, both in the U.S. and in the Caribbean and in Central and South America. The War on Terrorism has the same basic characteristics. And so for Africa and Asia this kind of open-ended secret war against the secret enemy is called the War on Terrorism.

Mass incarceration here inside the U.S. is supposedly to reduce the use of drugs, even though the use of drugs is continuing to go up. If reducing drug use is what the policy was trying to do, they would try something different. This mass incarceration agenda is clearly about more than curtailing drug use. It seems to be about social control, it seems to be about profiteering. Similarly, although there is certainly a need to deal with the fact that there are terrorist movements in other countries, I believe this War on Terrorism also probably has something to do with oil and geo-politics, and that's not being talked about as much.

What we have to be very, very careful about as we move into this new century will

be a lot more government-sponsored violence, whether it's inside the U.S. borders with more police and National Guard in the airports, or at the U.S. border with more militarization, or beyond the U.S. border with covert and other military operations. Civil society has to speak back to that and try to keep it in check and keep it honest and try to pull problem-solving away from the punitive and the violent over to the political, the social, the economic, the spiritual — where the solutions actually solve problems before creating new ones.

ETHAN FLAD: You recently won a battle against the prison system in Oakland. How do you think that fits into the challenges of what lies ahead?

VAN JONES: Well, Alameda was on track to build one of the biggest per capita juvenile halls in the country — we called it the Super Jail for Kids — and we decided to oppose that. They wanted to build a 520-bed juvenile hall for Alameda County, which has 1.5 million people. To give you a comparison, Chicago has 498 beds total and 5 million people! We got the state Board of Corrections to withdraw \$2.3 million in funding for this thing and got the county administrators to reduce the size of it from 540 to 420 — which is still way too big. And so we're still fighting them to bring the size way down.

ETHAN FLAD: Who is the "we"?

VAN JONES: The "Books not Bars" campaign — www.booksnotbars.org — which is a campaign that the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights houses. It's working in close partnership with the Youth Force Coalition. This Super Jail was signed, sealed, delivered — all but approved — and these young folks jumped in last spring and have protested and disrupted meetings and done sit-ins and everything imaginable.

ETHAN FLAD: I loved the piece that was in the *Oakland Tribune* — it was like council members were running, fleeing kids.

VAN JONES: It's a youth-led movement

against the punishment industry. Its core is potentially very powerful because it's about rehumanizing people that society wanted to throw away and that people are making money off of. When we were talking about how having a different kind of spiritual lens changes the politics of this movement — well, rather than polarizing it and saying, "It's people of color against the world," and, "Those racist white people want to see us all in jail," a different lens lets you say, "Wait a minute. The number one economic development strategy for California for rural white depressed areas is to site prisons there and then raise up little mini-industries around the prison."

I mean, think about it. The state government is creating a situation in which my black kid is going to spend all day in jail as a prisoner and your white kid is going to spend all day in jail as a prison guard. This is a positive solution for my problems or for your problems? This is a non-solution! Why don't we join hands — rural whites and urban people of color — and say to the state government, "We want you to be investing millions of dollars into job creation that helps both and doesn't hurt both." There is the opportunity for real leadership and the opportunity for real change. Especially if you add onto that an environmental lens. Shouldn't California be investing billions of dollars into a green economy and not a Gulag economy? Well, the money to create a green economy is going into the Gulag account and so the environmentalists, the white working class, people of color in inner cities — we have a common interest.

ETHAN FLAD: What is the role of the religious community in supporting this work?

VAN JONES: I certainly think all faith-based institutions should review their investment portfolios and divest from companies that profiteer off prisons.

ETHAN FLAD: Is there such a list?

VAN JONES: We're working to develop a list. We want to do to the punishment industry what was done to the tobacco industry. We

want to put it on trial and create a consciousness so that people don't want their money in the incarceration industry.

Beyond that, certainly people who are Christians — this whole thing around redemption, this whole idea that God is going to “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us” — that's heavy stuff! And that whole thing about loving your neighbor — that's serious stuff. I mean, it's just a few little words and you can run right over them, but that's the challenge of being a Christian — a real Christian, not a Bible-thumping hypocrite. Walking in the world in a Christian way and walking our personal lives in a Christian way in the new century full of fear and conflict is a real challenge. It's very easy to point the finger at other people; it's very easy just to run and hide; it's very easy just to sort of watch it all on TV and hope it doesn't come and getcha. It's a lot harder to be engaged in the world and engaged in your faith and to have those two things inform each other such that things change for the better in society. That's what Jesus did. So that's what it's supposed to be about. And Jesus, you know, clearly wasn't in with the Romans, clearly didn't run around with Caesar. Jesus was with the prostitutes. And Moses, he was trying to get away from Pharaoh, he wasn't trying to snuggle up to Pharaoh.

I don't see any examples of the faith-walk that snuggles you up to the existing order. I think a real faith-walk sometimes takes you away from the institutional leaders of your faith and your government. But that's what the prophetic call is: to seek the truth within, to seek the truth in dialogue with God, and to seek the truth in society.

And to stand in the truth. That's needed now more than ever. ●

Ethan Flad is The Witness' web site editor/producer. He lives in Oakland, Calif.

Community activism wins drug treatment

LAST YEAR, a coalition of 17 religious congregations in Daytona Beach, Fla., entitled FAITH (Fighting Against Injustice Toward Harmony) proved that the prison industrial complex might have a weakness — an engaged and active community.

FAITH entered into discussion over local correctional policies in January 2000 when problems of drugs and crime continued to surface as a serious problem among its members. After months of research conducted by FAITH leaders, they concluded the single greatest systemic change they could make with regards to the problem of drugs and crime would be to call for the implementation of a treatment program within county jails.

Volusia County jailed 26,127 people in 2000 and research suggested that 80 percent of them had a substance abuse problem. Despite the vast numbers, no treatment programs could be found in the county's jailing system and correctional staff told members of FAITH that the current administration did not believe that treatment in jails was necessary.

Meanwhile, statistics from across the country showed that substance abuse treatment programs introduced in jails reduced addiction, recidivism, taxpayer costs, and behavioral problems of inmates. Those outside the county's correctional system were adamantly supportive of treatment during jail time.

FAITH concluded the problem was real and a good solution existed, but what was missing was the political power to make it happen. For congregational leaders with FAITH the failure to implement commonsense solutions to serious problems due to a lack of political will was a common phenomenon.

They had grown adept at becoming a serious grassroots powerhouse in the region. Under the direction of Haley Grossman, a young, trained organizer from the DART Organizers Institute, the group had fought and won important victories — including education reform and new community policing programs — within two short years of their formation.

On the jail issue, FAITH decided to take action directly with the person who could give them what they wanted. They called a public meeting to discuss the matter with the County Director of Corrections, Terry Moore. Over 1,200 representatives of FAITH packed the church sanctuary along with advocates from several substance abuse agencies. They clapped, sang and heard testimonies and research findings while they waited for the Director of Corrections. He never showed.

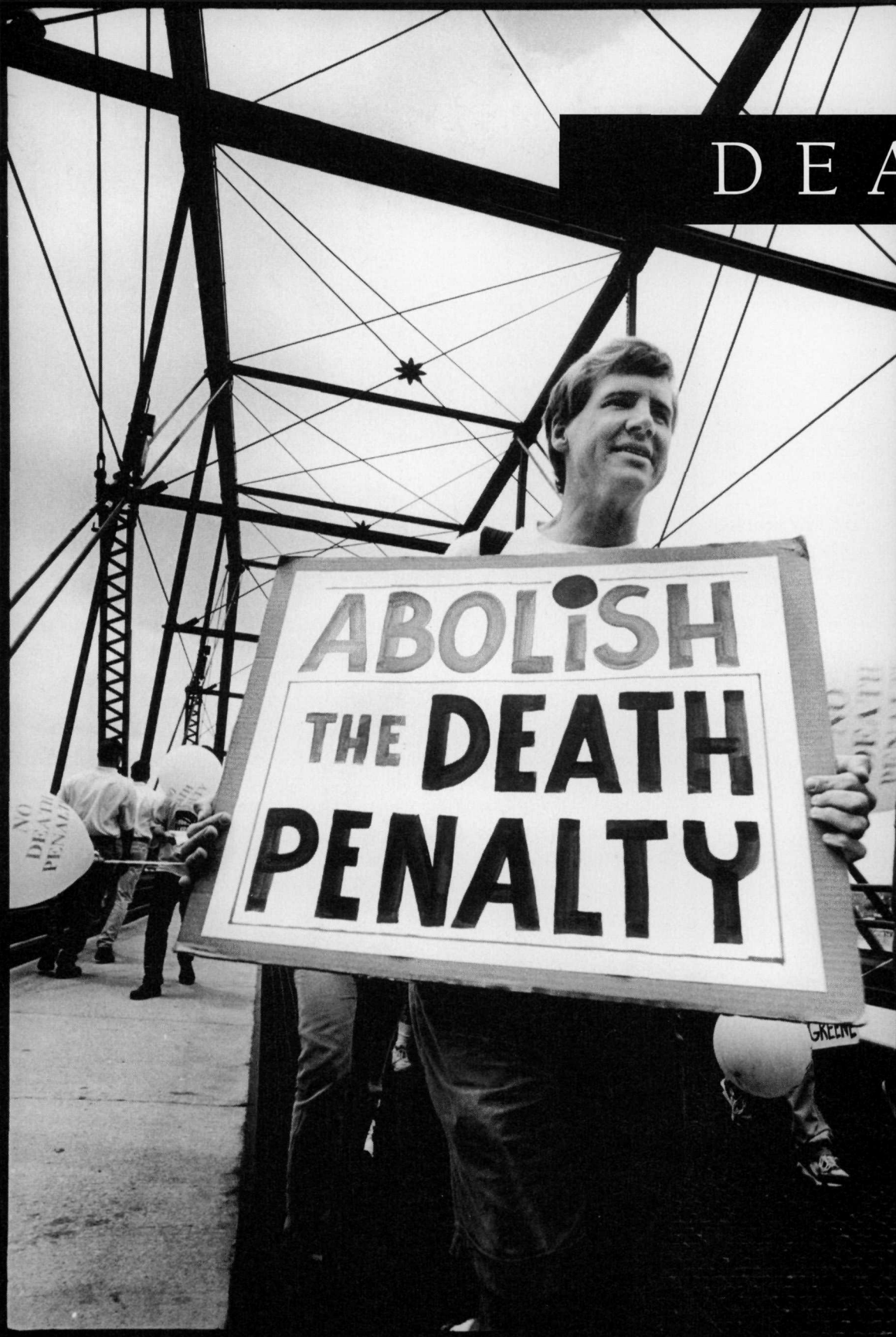
In response, FAITH launched into a full campaign. They began working with the media, conducting prayer sessions within the walls of the jail and pressuring county council members for some accountability within the correctional system. Finally, after five months the Director of Corrections committed to yet another public meeting with FAITH. This time he showed and within 30 minutes FAITH leaders left his office with a full commitment to create a substance abuse program within county jails. Recently at FAITH's annual assembly, treatment providers and correctional personnel offered glowing testimonies about the immediate effects of the program.

Haley Grossman, the lead organizer with FAITH, can point to many people in terms of their success. “The leaders of this community just won't back down. Even when the administration pretended we didn't exist, the leaders persisted. But I would have to also credit the grassroots training provided by the DART Center staff. We couldn't have done what we've done without their direction.”

— Ben MacConnell

[The DART Organizers Institute is now taking applications for its paid training to start next summer. If you are interested in applying or finding out more about FAITH and organizations like it, please log on to: <<http://www.thedartcenter.org>> .]

DEATH



© Harvey Finke

PENALTY ACTIVISM

Bringing faith and creativity to the struggle

by Joe Wakelee-Lynch

FOR SEVERAL YEARS, people fighting to stop the death penalty have reaped benefits from the nation's willingness to turn its attention to questions about its fairness and morality. The governor of Illinois imposed a moratorium in January of 2000, newspapers across the country have launched investigations into the system's racial disparities, and the number of states passing prohibitions on executing prisoners who are retarded increases steadily.

Since the September terrorist attacks in the U.S., however, the nation's attention has been diverted from this and other causes. But the work against capital punishment goes on. Most activists see the abolition of capital punishment as a long-term project. Perhaps more important, they are profoundly engaged with the issue through personal ministries.

"What about bin Laden?"

One prominent group that has seen firsthand the recent change in political climate is Murder Victims Families for Reconciliation (MVFR), an organization made up of people who have lost a loved one to violence, including family members of prisoners who have been executed. Because MVFR both opposes capital punishment and advocates for policies and programs that help family

members who have lost loved ones to violence, MVFR leaders expected an increased demand on their time after September. People have asked MVFR members what they can expect as they go through the grief process, said Renny Cushing, MVFR's executive director.

"I can see your position when it comes to murderers of one person or a few, but what about mass murderers? What about Osama bin Laden?"

"There are thousands of victims," he says, "and we've had lots of conversations."

Cushing admits that the attacks have had a "profound impact," and the question of how to punish terrorists has entered the capital punishment debate. He finds himself addressing it almost every time he speaks.

"It's usually the first question," said Cushing. "Someone will say, 'I can see your position when it comes to murderers of one person or a few, but what about mass mur-

derers? What about Osama bin Laden?'"

Yet nothing has occurred that changes MVFR's stance or its work, he said.

"There's a lot of attention across the country on how to respond to the attacks. There's a bit of hysteria today. But nothing has changed for us. As for the victims, we don't want to replicate the pain that we already live with."

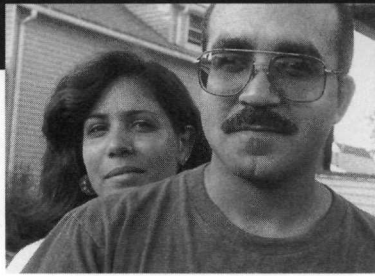
Victory in Santa Clara County

If proof is needed that recent events have not derailed the movement to stop the death penalty, one place it may be found is in California. In late October, the Board of Supervisors of Santa Clara County, a county that rims the southern portion of the San Francisco Bay and includes the city of San Jose, approved a resolution calling for a moratorium on the death penalty in the state.

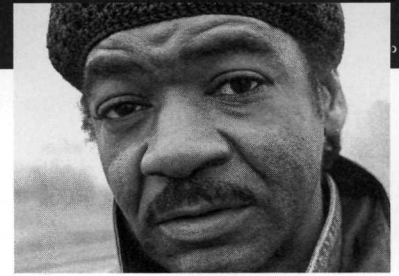
The resolution, which passed by a vote of 4 to 1, calls upon the governor to impose a moratorium "unless and until discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin or economic status is eliminated," as well as the risk of executing innocent people.

Terry McCaffrey, a member of the Human Concerns Commission of the Catholic Diocese of San Jose and an area coordinator for Amnesty International, said religious and secular people in the county have been

"Nine Lives" project, photographs of men who had been awaiting execution on Illinois' Death Row who were later found not guilty and freed
©Loren Santow Photography



Alex Hernandez



Anthony Porter

working on this project for 18 months. It required building grassroots support by enlisting a broad range of religious and secular organizations to go on record in support of a moratorium.

One of the key early steps, said McCaffrey, was to exploit the organizational opportunity provided from a visit to San Jose by Helen Prejean, author of the book *Dead Man Walking* and chair of the Moratorium Campaign, an organization working for a death penalty moratorium nationwide. Prejean's visit not only offered a vehicle to spread the message but an event to connect with a range of people

who could be recruited for the project.

McCaffrey also worked with California People of Faith Working Against the Death Penalty, an interreligious coalition opposing capital punishment in the state, as well as with the Diocese of San Jose, which gave the growing coalition access to Catholic parishes throughout the county.

The coalition chose to focus on the death penalty at the county level for very strategic reasons. The county government is an overlooked yet utterly crucial stage in the execution system.

Although the state of California carries out the sentence of execution, McCaffrey pointed out, prosecuting a murder defendant in a capital case is a county district attorney's decision, and the funds required are borne by the county. Compared to cases with lesser murder charges, a capital case requires a huge expenditure of funds — more court costs, more legal fees, more appeals, more lawyers' time.

"It's the county that prosecutes, that funds the county defender and that tries the person in the county court system," said McCaffrey. "So it's the seat of power in the local area when it comes to the death penalty."

In California in particular, county funds are stretched far, and the decision to pursue a capital conviction can be as much an economic decision as a judicial one. In fact, one of the many sources of unfairness in the death penalty system, say its opponents, is the fact that two people can commit the same type of murder in two different counties yet end up with widely disparate charges. Some counties prosecute few or no capital cases simply because they haven't the budget to do so.

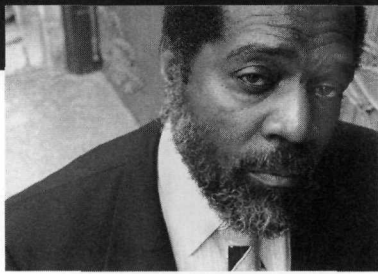
In Santa Clara county, McCaffrey said, the resolution could never have passed without a broad-based team effort that included many groups and individuals with a wide variety of skills and knowledge. The coalition included Catholics, Methodists, Jews and Muslims.

They also found crucial support within the county administration. "We had an 'insider' on the human relations commission of Santa Clara County who helped steer us through the county bureaucracy. That kind of person was invaluable in this process."

In a major step last May, the coalition held two days of public hearings in the board's chambers. Spokespeople from group after group — priests, nuns, ministers, rabbis, leaders of mosques, a technology company CEO, lawyers, a high school student, a county public defender, a murder victim's mother — presented their testimony to the public to urge the supervisors to call for a halt to executions.

Anti-death penalty organizations

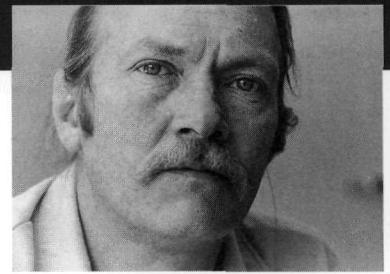
- **American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)**
1501 Cherry St., Philadelphia, PA 19102; (215) 241-7000;
www.afsc.org.
- **Amnesty International Death Penalty Program,**
600 Pennsylvania Ave., SE, 5th Floor, Washington, DC 20003;
(202) 544-0200; www.amnesty-usa.org/abolish.
- **Death Penalty Information Center (DPIC)**
1320 18th St., NW, Washington, D.C. 20036; (202) 293-6970;
www.deathpenaltyinfo.org.
- **For Whom the Bells Toll,** c/o Dorothy Briggs,
19 Dearborn St., Medford, MA 02155;
www.curenational.org/bells.
- **National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty (NCADP),** 1436 U St., NW, Suite 104, Washington, DC 20009; (202) 387-3890; www.ncadp.org.
- **Murder Victims Families for Reconciliation,**
2161 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA 02140;
(617) 868-0007; www.mvfr.org.
- **The Moratorium Campaign,** P.O. Box 13727,
New Orleans, LA 70185-3727; (504)864-1071;
www.moratoriumcampaign.org.



Darby Tillis



Gary Gauger



Joe Burrows

When such a wide range of citizens and groups assembled and spoke with a single voice, said McCaffrey, the board had to listen.

“It suddenly put some breaks in the system,” he explained. “When you’re confronted with an organized demonstration of strength, it makes you pause.”

An anti-death-penalty parish

Farther up the San Francisco Bay, on the north side, activism has also been going strong. St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, in San Rafael, is in a unique position. Its geographic boundaries not only take in homes and businesses but also San Quentin State Prison, home of California’s death row for men and its execution chamber. That fact hasn’t been lost on the parishioners. In 1996 they decided that because of their proximity, they have a call to minister to the men on death row (women are housed elsewhere in the state).

Today, that ministry involves the work of about 30 parishioners, said Joan Peterson, one of its leaders. Some visit death row prisoners, as does the rector, Bruce Bramlett. Bramlett, in fact, was a spiritual advisor to Robert Lee Massie, the ninth person executed by the state since the practice was resumed in 1982.

Communion is taken to the prison every Sunday. Parishioners also correspond with prisoners and, when appropriate, write to Gov. Gray Davis seeking commutations for prisoners. Whenever the state carries out an execution, church members hold a vigil. The church bells are rung and a meal is provided to participants in the Walk for Life, a 25-mile walk from San Francisco to the prison gate.

The church also has reached out to family

members of death row inmates. Three close friends of Tommy Thompson, executed in July 1998, have found a church home at St. Paul’s.

“They met me while I was visiting Tommy Thompson on death row,” said Bramlett. “As we all went through the process leading up to Thompson’s execution, St. Paul’s was the place that held prayer services and vigils. And we held the memorial services for Tom after he died. That really bonded them to us, and they are still active members.”

Not everyone at the church opposes the death penalty.

“There are people in the parish who are pro-death-penalty,” Peterson said. “And it’s a one-on-one process of trying to change their hearts and minds. But all in all, I’d say we are an anti-death-penalty parish.”

Keeping a parish identity to death penalty work, especially when the ministry originates in the congregation, can be important, said Bramlett. “That’s one of the reasons why California People of Faith Against the Death Penalty was formed,” he explained, “to try to maintain some of the faith commitment.”

The San Rafael rector believes in the need for broad coalitions that fight the capital punishment system. But religious groups must take care to ensure that their voices aren’t submerged, he said. They speak to the issue with a unique moral authority that is crucial to the movement.

Bramlett is also aware of the risk to a local congregation when it launches a death penalty group that later is folded into a non-religious coalition. As this kind of ministry gets farther from the rest of the parishioners, it also gets farther from their moral attention, he said.

“It allows the death penalty to become a

secular moral issue in parishioners’ eyes,” said Bramlett. “and that’s not the case at all.”

A ministry of accompaniment

On the other side of the country, Churchill Gibson has been visiting Virginia’s death row in Waverly for nine years. He spent 20 years as chaplain and professor of pastoral theology at Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria.

Along with Edward Fraher, a layperson at St. Michael’s Episcopal Church in Richmond, Gibson visits death row every other Monday to see prisoners who are locked down for 23 hours a day. Gibson goes right to the cell of the man he wishes to visit and pulls up a chair. Before he can begin a conversation, he has to wait for a guard to open the food slot on the cell door.

Gibson builds relationships with prisoners through his regular visits.

His ministry, he said, is “to do all that we can to bring the Spirit of God in an isolated situation.” He tries to help the prisoners use their jail time positively.

“God doesn’t waste anything,” said Gibson, “so he’s not wasting their time there. We try to work with them to help them use their time well.”

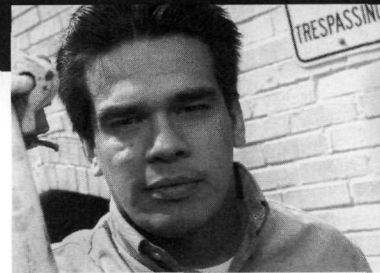
They urge prisoners to take responsibility for their actions and to deal with forgiveness — “God’s forgiveness of them and their forgiveness of themselves.”

“The distressing thing about the penal system,” said Gibson, “is there’s no element of redemption expected anywhere in it. In Virginia, [prisoners are] warehoused and punished.”

Sometimes Gibson’s ministry takes him to death’s door, the execution chamber itself. When a prisoner is executed, Gibson will



Perry Cobb



Rolando Cruz

From Death to Life: A Statement on Capital Punishment

While we acknowledge that Christians of good conscience hold a variety of opinions about capital punishment, and while we recognize the depth and difficulty of this subject, the Community of Deacons of the Diocese of Louisiana speaks out now on the issue because of its importance and timeliness.

We believe that capital punishment should be abolished for the following reasons:

- It is unnecessary for public safety and civil order.
- It has unsubstantiated and dubious value as a deterrent.
- It is less effective than life imprisonment, which addresses the legitimate need of society to punish the worst kinds of criminal behavior.
- It is applied in an inconsistent, unfair, and discriminatory manner.
- It involves the possibility of execution of innocent persons.
- It perpetuates violence and destruction.
- It deprives the criminal of the opportunity for reform, rehabilitation, and restitution.
- It deprives the survivors of the opportunity for forgiveness.
- It is at odds with the teaching and example of Jesus Christ to fight evil with good and to forgive injury.

While abolition of the death penalty is not a simple solution for the complex problems of crime and violence, it can and should be part of an overall approach that supports human life and dignity, spiritual healing, and restoration. We invite all Christians and others of good will to join us in calling for abolition to capital punishment.

*Community of Deacons
Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana
11 June 2001*

accompany him throughout most of the day if asked. If a prisoner doesn't request that Gibson walk with him to the chamber itself, then Gibson leaves the prison and holds vigil, candle in hand, in a field by the prison. It's the end of a process that in his eyes offers nothing good to anyone involved.

"We're so far from any ability to forgive," he said. "It's tragic. Hate is just a corrosive, negative, horrible element."

Deacons against the death penalty

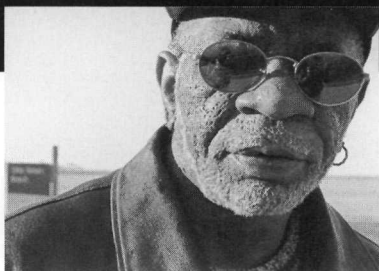
In Louisiana last June, frustration with the senselessness of capital punishment led to the signing of an anti-death-penalty statement [see sidebar] by the Community of Deacons, a small group of deacons active in ministries throughout the state.

Louisiana has a thriving diaconate, partly due to the work of Ormonde Plater, archdeacon of the diocese and author of several books on the role of deacons in the church. The ministry of deacons is focused on mercy and justice, said Plater, and in recent years it has seen something of a revival.

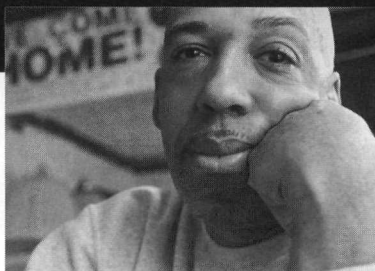
"The statement was prompted by the execution of Timothy McVeigh," Plater said. "As the execution approached, we thought that we ought to be saying something on this as a matter of justice."

The statement was written by Charles deGravelles, a deacon at Trinity Episcopal Church in Baton Rouge who also serves a mission church within the Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola [see sidebar].

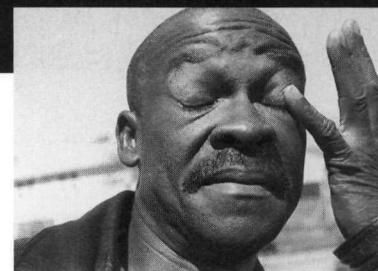
"There is a real logic to the fact that deacons produced this statement," deGravelles explained. "One focus of the role of the deacon is serving those in need: the poor and the marginalized. And it's clearly been demonstrated that people who are faced



Ron Jones



Steve Smith



Verneal Jimerson

with execution are poor and marginalized in many ways. Some of them can't afford a lawyer or they can't afford a good one.

"Ormonde Plater asked me to draft a statement," he continued, "and we hammered out the language. I hope it will be a catalyst for conversation and that the [death penalty] issue will stay in the front burner, or at least on the middle burner. We intended it for the clergy in our diocese, and we hoped to spark continuing debate nationwide."

The statement was sent over the internet to more than 300 deacons in the U. S. and around the world.

For Whom the Bells Toll

One of the simplest and most widespread forms of death penalty opposition has been the tolling of bells. "For Whom the Bells Toll" is a project that asks religious organizations or groups to toll their bells whenever there is an execution. On the day of an execution, bells are rung for two minutes, starting at 6 P.M. Churches, monasteries, abbeys, temples and synagogues in at least 35 states have joined in this somber practice.

Organizers say it began in the Philippines at the urging of Cardinal Jaime Sin. When Roman Catholic Bishop Walter Sullivan visited that country, he decided to do the same within his Richmond, Va., diocese. The campaign, organized by Citizens United for the Rehabilitation of Errants (CURE), will continue until there is a moratorium on the death penalty or until the death penalty is abolished in the U. S. [See the "Criminal Justice" section of <www.thewitness.org/agw> for a story on the project by Dorothy Briggs.]

continued on page 20

Friendship within "a world of pain"

CHARLES DEGRAVELLES is a deacon in charge of the Episcopal Chapel of the Transfiguration in Angola, Louisiana. For 12 years he has been visiting the prisoners at the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola. This 24,000-acre prison is, says deGravelles, "physically large, just an enormous piece of farmland. It was a plantation in the 18th and 19th centuries. Because many of the slaves who worked this property came from the country of Angola, that is how the land got its name."

There are more than 5,000 men at the Angola penitentiary. About 80 percent are serving life sentences, and, says deGravelles, "in Louisiana, these are real life sentences. These men are not coming out. There is a cemetery to accommodate those who die and there is a geriatric center for the aging population." In fact, deGravelles was instrumental in bringing a hospice program into the prison — run by prisoners — to care for the aged and dying men. The prison itself has one main complex and several satellite complexes. "It is," says deGravelles, "a hard place to live."

The hardness comes largely from the lack of hope. "It was, in the 1970s, known as one of the bloodiest prisons in the country," says deGravelles. "Since then there have been a number of capable wardens who have gotten the prison up to standard. But it's hard to be in prison when you're not coming out. There is a lot of hopelessness and a lot of despair. The political climate in the state and in the country is not one that gives much hope for a pardon or parole."

In 1989, when deGravelles started going to Angola, he was a layperson who, as he explains, "wanted to get my hands dirty with front-line ministry. Gradually, over time, the ministry grew and now we have a congregation that is a mission of the diocese."

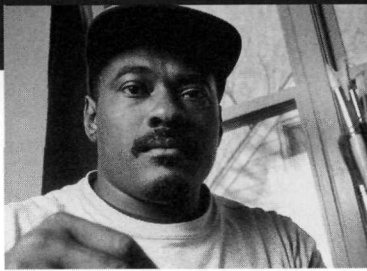
As deGravelles explains, "About 100 guys come to the monthly service. They come from different faith backgrounds. These guys are spiritually hungry and will go to any number of services."

Before or after services, deGravelles visits the men. "I have the run of the place and will spend all day visiting guys," he explains. "I take communion with me, but I am really in the role of being a friend and supporter. Many men have no outside family who come to visit. We are their family."

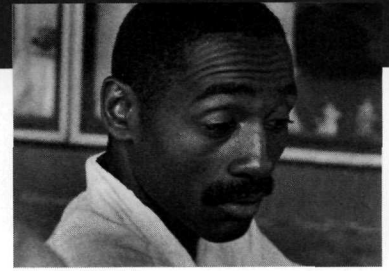
Prisoners have also helped deGravelles. "Lots of the men I've worked with have been there for me, just as I've been there for them," he says. "I see myself being a friend at a critical time."

Certainly the most critical time in anyone's life is when he or she is facing death. For three years, deGravelles worked as a spiritual advisor for a death row inmate who

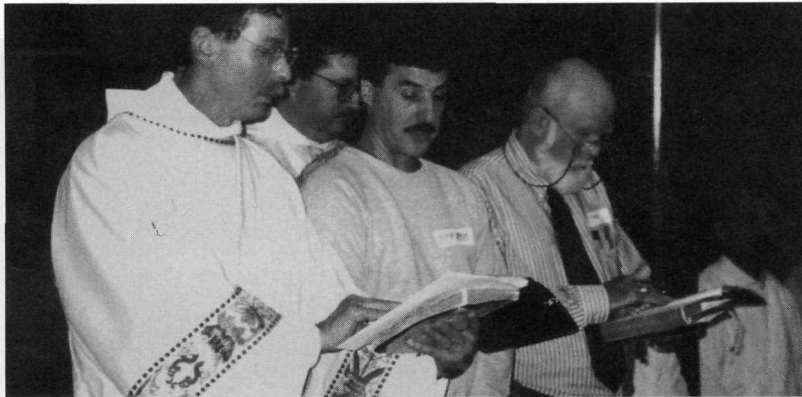
continued on page 20



Dennis Williams



Carl E. Lawson



Charles deGravelles [left], at Kerry Meyers' confirmation

was executed in June 2000. DeGravelles describes Feltus Taylor, Jr. as "a remarkable fellow who did a horrible crime." They began by reading together, and then by talking about Taylor's crime. "I encouraged him to write his story," says deGravelles, "and he did write his autobiography." DeGravelles currently has an agent for the book and is trying to get it published. Taylor killed one woman and critically injured another who is now a paraplegic as a result of the crime. Proceeds from the book will be put into the Feltus Taylor Memorial Trust, with one-third of the profits going to the surviving victim and victims' families, one-third going to Taylor's grandmother and one-third going to fund programs for at-risk youth.

"Taylor was able to address the people who survived his crime," deGravelles says. "He achieved peace and closure."

DeGravelles sees his time with Taylor as "the most meaningful work" that he has ever done. "How do you help a person deal with the death sentence? In some ways, it was like the work I do with hospice but it had a whole layer of issues about guilt. I helped him to try to make contact with the surviving victim of his crime so he could express his remorse. All of these were painful, hard, difficult issues that we worked through. He was just a wonderful man and it was gratifying to know I was there for someone in need."

This experience reinforced deGravelles' desire to see the death penalty abolished. "The feeling that you get," says deGravelles, "is that it is a terrible waste. I'm not convinced this does a great deal for the people who are the victims of the crime either. Their pain and anguish is immense. It's a difficult thing to reach out both to a perpetrator and a victim. But think of a man who has come all this way in his personal story and has changed. To kill a man is just such a waste, does no good and does a lot of harm. The death sentence is tragic. It's a world of pain for families on both sides." — Camille Colatosti

The politics of burial

In Atlanta, Ga., the Open Door Community, a center of ministry for homeless people, has worked against the death penalty for more than 20 years. Two pastors, Murphy Davis and Ed Loring, have visited prisoners on the row throughout that time. But the Open Door, along with the Jubilee Community in Comer, Ga., offers another poignant ministry as well. They bury executed prisoners.

Elizabeth Dede of the Open Door said that if someone on Georgia's death row requests it, or if a family is too poor to afford funeral services, people at the Open Door, along with the Jubilee Community in Comer, will conduct a burial on the property of the Jubilee Community, located in rural Georgia.

"Some prisoners have asked to be buried at Jubilee just because they know that it's a place where they would be wanted," she said.

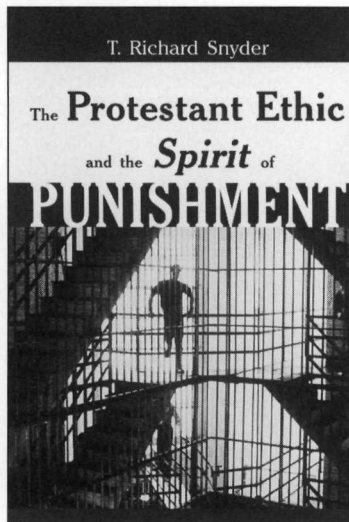
Burying prisoners is part of the fight against the death penalty, in Dede's view, because it is a political statement. The death penalty system is designed to deny and erase all traces of the humanity in people on death row. The ministry of providing a loving and Christian burial to the victims of state execution is a way of proclaiming life in the face of death.

"You visit someone and come to know them as infinitely more than some terrible act," Dede said.

Lately, some prisoners have made a new request — to be cremated.

"They've told us that they've spent too much time in a box that they don't want to be buried in one. They'd rather be cremated and have their ashes spread around outside. One said, 'Spread my ashes, so that I'll be free.' "

Writer Joe Wakelee-Lynch lives in Berkeley, Calif.



The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Punishment

by T. Richard Snyder
W. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 2001

RICHARD SNYDER writes as a mainline Protestant, a seminary dean and professor, but also as one involved in the lives of the incarcerated. From teaching in the Masters program at Sing-Sing Prison in New York State, Snyder documents the rampant growth of a desire for revenge against those who have committed “crimes,” and reflects on this theologically. His work has implications for our lives: How do we constitute communities that are restorative, healing and just at their core? Echoing Max Weber’s work on the relationship of capitalism and the Protestant ethic, Snyder argues that within the majority Protestant understanding of grace and redemption, there are tendencies that support a punitive view of those “unworthy” of redemption. Grace so understood emphasizes the fall, and does not recognize “creation grace,” grace that defines people “[not] by their condition but by their humanity.”

The Protestant “individualistic” understanding of grace and redemption with its strong doctrine of the fall provides some of the intellectual framework for the “spirit of punishment” that has pervaded our nation, much like Christianity offered frameworks for such catastrophic events as slavery and the Holocaust. This is why the understanding of grace is an important place to begin.

Grace’s social dimension

by Kazi Joshua

Grace, Snyder argues, is not only for the worst of us, but for everybody. It is present in all of life. The categories of “fallen” and “redeemed” need not define who a person is, but rather describe where we find ourselves in our journey with God. In using these categories we should seek to “create a response to crime that does not treat criminals as garbage but sees each as a child of God who is beautiful, worthwhile and good in spite of crimes committed.” Because grace is for everyone, evangelism must emphasize redemption as a corporate matter. “Redemptive grace operates in community, through community, and for community. Each person’s redemption is inextricably linked with the redemption and redemptive activity of the community.”

This understanding mitigates the “spirit of punishment.” Thinking collectively, we realize we are also complicit in what happens in community. We do not just place blame on those who have committed “crimes”; we also question what kind of community we have provided them. By way of alternative Snyder explores models like South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Native American sentencing circles, and U.S. victim-offender reconciliation programs. All of these recognize the difference between “retributive justice” — essentially paying back those who have done wrong, and “restorative justice” — concerned with restoring to relationship those who have committed crimes. Snyder believes that we can also draw from Christian traditions such as forgiveness, incarnation, the Trinity, and covenant as ways of trying to reconfigure our relationships in our community.

He gives real examples of what people are doing: visitation programs, houses of hospitality, advocacy work, job training programs, and economic investments. These raise structural questions about a society that is “tough on crime” and yet cutting away fund-

ing for the educational and treatment programs that help people not reoffend. Snyder concludes with a radical call to conversion for all aspects of society: cultural, political and economic. He calls us to turn from a punitive to a healing spirit. The economic systems that leave so many locked in poverty and in neighborhoods of despair have to be rethought if we are serious about addressing the roots of crime. These are not easy questions to address, but the church can be a part of that discussion and action alongside others also struggling to create a new heaven and a new earth.

This is essential reading for all who are serious about crime and punishment questions in our time and indispensable for those working for the abolition of the death penalty or mandatory sentencing, and for all those involved in prison ministries. It comes at a timely point with others like *The Executed God*, by Mark Lewis Taylor, and *Who Owns Death*, by Robert Jay Lifton and Greg Mitchell, as part of this larger conversation about truly restorative and just communities.

Events in New York City have shown us on a national scale that the general response to criminal acts is one of vengeance. Hence, we cannot expect national leadership to bring about the changes Snyder advocates. It is up to every reader. “A battle is raging for the soul of our nation. ... We cannot continue to turn our backs on those who are hungry or thirsty: We cannot continue to lock up those who are oppressed, to ignore the sick, and to close our door to the stranger, or the heart of our nation will shrivel and die of atrophy.” ●

Kazi Joshua, Director of Nurturing the Call, a graduate theological urban studies program for African-American working pastors, is a member of the pastoral staff at Progressive Community Church on Chicago’s south side.

LET MY

An interview with Herbert Thompson, Jr.

by Marianne Arbogast

ON APRIL 7, 2001, Timothy Thomas, an unarmed African-American youth, was fatally shot by a police officer in Cincinnati, becoming the sixth African American to be killed by Cincinnati police in little more than a year. The shooting sparked three days of rebellion. On April 23, Herbert Thompson, Jr., bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Ohio, released a statement in response to the shooting. Titled “Let My People Go,” the statement places the incident in a broad historical and social context, and challenges a criminal justice system that profits from incarcerating increasing numbers of people, largely from black and Hispanic populations.

MARIANNE ARBOGAST: What have the churches in Cincinnati done to respond to the struggles that the city has faced in the past year?

HERBERT THOMPSON: The church — both the Episcopal church and the larger community of churches — have been very much engaged in this matter — the shooting of Timothy Thomas and the unrest and turmoil in the city that resulted. Clergy were the ones on the streets when the place was exploding — our own cathedral clergy were among those who were out there helping to bring some calm and order and to put themselves physically as a buffer between the angry young people and the blue line of police. They went from being in the streets directly to being in the churches talking with one another, calling the community into conversation around this. The film, “The Color of Fear,” that addresses the whole issue of race and racism in America has made the rounds all across the city. So there have been living room dialogues and those kind of things going on, to help people to look at ourselves and to try to understand one another better.

This could have happened anywhere, because I think that every urban area has the same ingredients in its mix that made for the shooting of Timothy Thomas. I think every community needs to address those issues. But Cincinnati has an extraordinary history because it sits right on the border of Kentucky. Cincinnati is in one of those border states where slaves passed through on the underground railroad going up into Canada and on to freedom. And it’s also a place where the fugitive slave laws were enacted to take slaves back into the south. So Cincinnati has this ambivalent history and from the 1820s and 30s onward has had these eruptions in its life around racial issues — most recently around the death of Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1968. It’s not sure whether it’s a southern city looking north or a northern city looking south, and that makes for a certain kind of a dynamic in regard to race.

MARIANNE ARBOGAST: In your statement, you said that the first thing that needed to be addressed was racial profiling. Has there been any attempt by the churches to facilitate a way to address that?

HERBERT THOMPSON: There is a racial profiling suit that is being addressed through the Department of Justice and the city is highly invested in that. There has been a mediation group that’s been meeting at the cathedral that has grown out of that. And what it’s done is to try to call many people in the community together — a couple hundred people or more — from various sectors of the city to look at this whole matter and then to make some recommendations.

Someone asked whether the September 11th event and now the profiling of Middle Eastern people will kind of take the heat off the racial profiling around black young

DEDICATED
MARCH 10, 1994

PEOPLE GO

27 SHOTS



911 = FIRING SQUAD

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Prison, racism & economics:

A historical perspective

THE ECONOMIC RECOVERY OF THE SOUTH [after the Civil War] depended on labor; thus, in the fall of 1865, the legislature of the State of Mississippi passed a series of acts known as the Black Codes. Their aim was to control the supply of labor and to ensure the position of white people in Southern life. ...

At the heart of the Black Codes was the "Vagrancy Act," which provided that all free Negroes over the age of 18 must have written proof of a job at the beginning of every year. The Mississippi Black Codes were copied by South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama and Texas. Lorenzo Wooden, a retired Black priest of our diocese, told me that at age 12 he was arrested and imprisoned in Florida under the vagrancy act for simply being on the street without papers. ...

In the South, Black populations faced threats from white mobs and white courts. The criminal justice system became a dragnet for Black people. The local jails and state prisons would grow darker by the years and a phenomenon called "convict leasing" would emerge. Convict leasing was the system in which the state leased prisoners to private companies, which, in turn, would pay the state for the prisoner's labor. ...

Like the Black Codes, convict leasing spread throughout the South. In the 1870s and 1880s, convicts laid most of the nearly 4,000 miles of railroad track in North Carolina. In Texas, convicts worked in coal mines. In Florida, they labored in desolate, disease-ridden forests in the turpentine industry.

In his book *Worse than Slavery*, author David Oshinsky writes, "The South's economic development can be traced by the blood of prisoners." By 1890, convict leasing in Alabama had become a huge operation, supplying bodies like the slave trade of old: Black males age 12 and older went directly to the mines; black women, children and cripples were leased to lumber companies and to farms. (White men, Oshinsky noted, usually remained inside the penitentiary or local jail.)

The working conditions for these men, women and children were horrible, harsh and brutal. There were terrible injuries and beatings inflicted among them, and many, many deaths. Self-mutilation and suicide were routine events. The convict leasing system is aptly termed "worse than slavery." In slavery, owners had a vested interest in their "property." In convict leasing, convicts were no-cost tools to be used, discarded and replaced. Convict leasing was not about justice, or even revenge, or punishment. It was about economics — profits for the lessee and the state. The courts became a conveyor-belt for labor-starved employers. ...

There are today 2 million people in prison in the United States. Almost 80 percent of America's prisoners are Black or Hispanic. In 1985, 500,000 were locked away; by 1990 one million; today, two million. Behind these startling numbers are draconian laws, Acts of Congress and the Executive branch, accompanied by political rhetoric that drives public fears: "War on crime!" "War on drugs!" "War on users!"

We have moved from President Lyndon Johnson's "Omnibus Crime Bill" of 1968, to the "Anti-Drug Abuse Act" passed under President Reagan, to President Clinton's pledge to put 100,000 police on the street, to successive and increasingly harsh Acts of Congress that eliminate parole and mandate long jail or prison sentences. Federal judges have been stripped of sentencing discretion and of the ability to exercise mercy. The power has now been placed in the hands of prosecutors.

continued in sidebar, top of page 25

people. I'm not sure. Either one is a problem for our society and I think we have to be vigilant to say in every way we can that the profiling of people of any kind is something that we cannot tolerate as a free society.

MARIANNE ARBOGAST: The statement that you issued a few weeks after the shooting is a very strong indictment of the whole criminal justice system in this country. Why did you feel it was important for people to reflect on the events in Cincinnati in that larger context?

HERBERT THOMPSON: Because I think that we are not aware of the fact that the racial profiling phenomenon as it manifests across the country really is driven by a larger phenomenon, namely the prison industrial complex, and the fact of having two million people in prison, and prison being such a growth industry that cities and communities are vying to have them built in and around their own communities for the sake of the economy. And if you're going to build it, then you have to put somebody in it. And how do you do that? Well, the way it works in American society — it may not be an actual thought-out methodological thing — but the way it works is the racial profiling phenomenon. And so they shot Timothy Thomas because he had 14 outstanding warrants. Well, not one warrant did he have that was more serious than a traffic violation — driving without a seat belt. What happens is that these young black men are stopped by the police and if they can't find anything else for which to charge them, they charge them for a violation like that. And you accumulate enough of those and you become someone who is wanted by the police and a candidate for prison. So it begins to create a population out there who are part of the feeder system for the prisons. And that's why I wrote it, to make people aware of this insidious thing that we have developed, built and honed almost to a fine art here in this country.

MARIANNE ARBOGAST: I was struck that you talk about the prison system as a mod-

ern form of slavery — you say that America's prisons are the "leading edge of the continuing fault-lines of the racial divide that runs all across our nation." It would seem to follow that trying to change this system is key to any progress toward racial reconciliation in this country.

HERBERT THOMPSON: Exactly. As long as we have a system in place that has two million people who are being warehoused and not rehabilitated, then at some point turned back out into society, then returned back to prison again, what happens is you get a group of people who are profiled either as prospective prisoners, or ex-prisoners, or somehow identified with the prison population — because more than 80 percent of that population are African-American and Latino young men and women.

MARIANNE ARBOGAST: You say we have to begin the movement toward decarceration and dismantling of the prison industrial complex. How do you think we can begin to do that? Are there efforts to create alternatives that seem hopeful to you?

HERBERT THOMPSON: Well, yes. I was at a prison just yesterday, we were called in to work with a particular young man and to have this young man placed not in prison, but under house arrest. The situation is such that he does not need to be in a prison, with all that that means in terms of the possibility of harm to him and also his carrying that particular stigma. I think that we have a huge number of people in prison who are no risk to our society. It does us no harm to have those people in some other kind of context.

We also are working on trying to head off the business of incarcerating our young people in the first instance, so that juveniles who are charged with a misdemeanor don't even get a record, and there is more likelihood of their growing up without being incarcerated, or being an ex-convict with all that that means.

Federal law currently mandates five and 10-year prison sentences for drug dealing. Under the provision of the law, one form of cocaine known as crack is treated far more harshly than the powdered form. Since crack cocaine is cheaper to produce than other forms, it found its way into the poorest American neighborhoods. Powdered cocaine became the drug of choice among middle-class Americans. Someone has termed these apartheid laws. These federal laws have had a devastating effect on Black Americans.

Meanwhile, at the municipal level, came the Zero Tolerance Revolution. We first heard it expressed by Mayor Rudolph Giuliani in New York City. The philosophy underlying zero tolerance is that if government aggressively addresses the small quality-of-life offenses, violent crime will diminish. One of New York City's so-called "squeegee people" was interviewed on TV. He said: "Let me understand this. If the police arrest me for washing car windshields, the heads of organized crime will start quaking and say, 'We'd better get out of town, we're next.'" The zero tolerance idea moved quickly across America's cities.

Author Christian Parenti, in his book *Lock Down America*, writes, "Zero Tolerance is often selectively enforced against people of color and the visibly poor. Enough unpaid tickets and outstanding warrants leads to the criminal labeling of non-deviant populations."

This quote comes with a timeliness that I could not have imagined just days ago. Timothy Thomas, the 19-year-old young man who was shot and killed here in Cincinnati on April 7, was running. Why was he running? He was afraid.

Thomas had 14 outstanding warrants for such misdemeanor criminal acts as driving without a seat belt. He was faced with another violation, another ratchet up towards prison; not to mention the humiliation of arrest and worse, injury. As the Dean of our Cathedral said, "If I were an African-American male, I would be afraid, too." ...

It is extraordinary that despite America's technological growth, our economic and military dominance, our supposed growing enlightenment, our support of liberation movements both within our country and around the world, the growth of prisons and prison populations continues upward. Two million people in prison, another three million are doing time outside, on probation or home detention, or on the invisible leash of electronic surveillance. There are millions on the other end who make their living from prisons, directly or indirectly. And prison conditions are in many ways worse than they were in the days of convict leasing and penal farms. ...

What about the economics of all this? We have been made aware that our country's prisons are a growth industry. We have heard the term "Prison Industrial Complex." It is true: Prisons are big business. In 1996, contractors broke ground on 26 federal and 96 state prisons. It is estimated that prisons employ almost 600,000 people, more than and Fortune 500 company except General Motors. ...

Through the work of think tanks like the National Center for Policy Analysis, one learns we are embarking on a new era of prison-for-profit. Morgan Reynolds, Professor of Economics at Texas A&M and a director of the Center, sees wardens as marketers of labor and prisons as industrial parks with bars. "They should be built," he says, "not where the crime is, but where the jobs are. That is what the future is if we are going to grow prisons." This represents an intentional, conscious decision to grow prisons as if they were any other industry. Edwin Meese, a former Attorney General of the United States, is chairman of Enterprise Prison Institute, a for-profit group in McLean, Virginia that is pushing for greater access to prison labor. This is the place to which we have arrived — or worse, returned.

— Excerpted from "Let My People Go: A Statement to Cincinnati and to the World," by Herbert Thompson, Jr., April 23, 2001

Working for ex-prisoners' voting rights

IN JANUARY AND FEBRUARY of this year, the Diocesan Councils of all three Episcopal dioceses in Virginia will vote on resolutions supporting the restoration of voting rights to ex-felons in the state.

In 37 states, voting rights are automatically restored when convicts complete their sentences and parole requirements, explains Vaughn Wilson, a former prison minister in Virginia who began working on the issue after reading about it in a local newspaper. In Virginia, voting rights can only be restored after a lengthy and complex process which includes case-by-case approval from the governor and which the majority of ex-prisoners find too daunting to pursue.

"Essentially, in Virginia, you're paying for your felony the rest of your life," Wilson says. "Voting rights are such a basic right of American citizenry, they shouldn't be taken away forever."

One of the effects of the current law is to bar 25 percent of all black men in Virginia from voting — a statistic that prompted Baptist pastor Jake Manley to liken it to the poll tax (*Virginia Pilot*, 9/10/01). Other religious groups in the state — including the Roman Catholic, United Methodist and some Baptist Churches — have already spoken out in favor of voting rights restoration.

"I think the general public is still of the mind to 'lock-'em-up and throw away the key,'" Wilson says. "We have gone on a big prison-building program in the last several years. They have taken away parole in Virginia and cut out a lot of rehabilitative services in prisons. But everyone I've met in the jail or prison ministry area says this is long overdue, to allow people to regain their voting rights after having paid their debt to society."

— Marnie Arbogast

MARIANNE ARBOGAST: Many people are saying that with the war on terrorism, Congress will be asked to cut social spending even more to increase military spending. In your statement, you attach so much importance to addressing issues like education and housing and unemployment. Do you think that this will make things worse?

HERBERT THOMPSON: I think it's going to take the focus off those matters. We're seeing it already in New York City — the mayor is talking about the budget for the days ahead, and so much of the work will be on the rebuilding of the city that the ordinary stuff of the city's life — like education, for example — will not be given attention. That will probably be also true for the country and that's too bad.

MARIANNE ARBOGAST: Maybe the most startling change that you advocate is the decriminalization of drugs. How did you arrive at that conviction?

HERBERT THOMPSON: Well, I first heard that addressed by a bishop, the suffragan bishop of New York, Walter Dennis. I was a priest in New York at the time. And when Walter said it, I was shocked and I could not agree. But over the years, as I have seen this phenomenon move into our communities with a virulent force and recognized that whole nations have been sucked into its lifestream, this drug culture. ... What is Colombia's chief export today? Drugs. Places like Nigeria and Jamaica, even Afghanistan — a major part of the economy is the growing of opium.

MARIANNE ARBOGAST: I just read that Pakistani intelligence services forced farmers in Afghanistan to plant opium to fund the war against the Soviet Union, and that now it's the major source of heroin on the streets in the U. S.

HERBERT THOMPSON: Isn't that extraordinary? It's ironic and extraordinary, but we have created an economy around drugs that makes billions of dollars that goes to support the economy of nations, and therefore

it's got to have customers. And I think now that the legalization of some of these drugs will at least take out of it the high profit, and make it less attractive to people to be involved in it.

There is a book written by a man named Claude Brown, titled *Manchild in the Promised Land*. He made it through the gang and the drug stuff on the streets of New York City, in Harlem, and went on to college and became a social worker, but then would go back to the community to talk to the young people about their lives, about going back to school and making something of themselves and making a contribution. And a kid asked him, "How much money do you make?" And he said, "Forty to 50 thousand dollars a year." And the kid said: "You mean you work all year long and all you make is 40 or 50 thousand dollars? And you're telling me to stop what I'm doing so I can become like you?"

MARIANNE ARBOGAST: And probably for many of them, the choice isn't even 40 or 50 thousand dollars, it's more like minimum wage at McDonald's.

HERBERT THOMPSON: Exactly. So if you legalize the stuff and take out the high profit incentive that there is for these young people — and you've got some places where kids are selling drugs and supporting the whole family — I think we can begin to change something of the dynamic that consumes their lives and draws them into the system — makes them drug addicts, make others drug addicts because they've got to sell it. There's this whole way of life where you begin to seduce kids into using it at a younger and younger age to get more customers. We've got to cut that off.

MARIANNE ARBOGAST: What kind of response have you received to your statement from the larger church — from the other bishops, for instance, or from people in your own diocese and elsewhere?

HERBERT THOMPSON: I have been amazed. The response has been overwhelming. We

printed 20,000 of these. We have gone through that and have put out another 20,000. People are using it all across the church. I just got back from New Zealand — I went for the synod meeting of our companion diocese. They have copies of it and they're using it down there. The situation that we have here in our country with the prison industrial complex is an international phenomenon as well.

MARIANNE ARBOGAST: Do you have any specific thoughts as to what churches might be doing to begin to address some of these issues in concrete ways?

HERBERT THOMPSON: Well, what is happening here in Cincinnati is we recognize that we have to change the whole culture of the police department in this city. That is not an easy task, but it can be done, because in the end they are civil servants and they work for us and they are there to protect us. And so it's a matter of churches and citizens working to reclaim those aspects of life in their communities that belong appropriately to them and are accountable to them. We have in Cincinnati, on the coming ballot for the November election, an amendment to our charter — because currently in our city a chief of police and those in the upper command can only be appointed or promoted to those positions from within the department, which means that you get the same culture over and over again. So there is an amendment calling for a change in the charter to allow for the appointment of a police chief and those second in command from outside. [Ed. note: The amendment was passed on Nov. 6.] The churches are, for the most part, behind that ballot initiative. I think that it's an important one, and I think that it will help to change not just the police department, but the culture of Cincinnati as well. Because it will say to our community that we are serious about change and that we cannot continue in the same way. ●

Marianne Arbogast, who lives in Detroit, is The Witness' Associate Editor.

Addressing the needs of women prisoners

MARY ATTERHOLT IS THE OUTREACH COORDINATOR at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Richmond, Virginia. Her work with St. Paul's began in 1990 when she was hired as a consultant to develop an outreach program. After three years, she realized that most of the program's clientele were men. In an effort to reach women and to look at their needs, Atterholt began visiting the women's prisons.

"When we started," says Atterholt, there were no programs in the community specifically addressing the needs of women prisoners."

More than 80 percent of the women in Virginia's prisons are mothers with children under age 18. Most of the women are young—25 to 35 years old. The greatest percentage are African-American. Many have substance abuse problems. "This population has exploded," says Atterholt, "because of the criminalization of addiction. In addition, 67 percent have mental health issues and rarely are these treated."

Since Virginia is a "no-parole state," says Atterholt, "women serve their full sentences. We run programs that address all sorts of things, like providing housing for women coming out of prison. We have a program called Springhill. This is a house where women can live in community and participate in different aspects of the church when they come out of prison."

Atterholt also runs a program called Ready for Release, for women who are still incarcerated. "It helps them with the transition to the community," says Atterholt. "The program helps women with credit history, living on their own and being responsible. We discuss getting to a job on time and how to avoid cramming too many things into one day."

"We also have a program called Reflections for moms who are there for violent offenses, including homicide, against their children. We address grief issues and also issues about reuniting with their children, for most of the inmates have not lost custody of their children."

For women who are released, the parenting program continues with Parenting After Prison.

St. Paul's outreach program also works with the Diocese of Virginia to defeat the death penalty. Atterholt explains, "We take people to the prison to tour death row. We are trying to educate the Episcopalians in the diocese to see what the death chamber is really like."

Atterholt, who has a master's degree in rehabilitative counseling and is currently working on her doctorate, also teaches at Virginia Commonwealth University. She realized in 1993 that "there wasn't any rehabilitation going on in prison. There was education but not rehabilitation. Education is teaching and helping people get their GED and work skills, but it doesn't deal with the basic issues that took people to prison in the first place."



The changes Atterholt sees in people inspire her. Women coming out of prison often have high hopes for re-ordering their lives, she says. "It surprises me the number who get involved in St. Paul's. They join the parish or are baptized. One-third of the staff at St. Paul's have been incarcerated."

— Camille Colatosti

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Through this section of our website we are offering analysis and commentary from around the U.S. church and the global Anglican Communion. Our aim is to encourage a reclaiming of the Anglican vocation of "public theology" — and to expand awareness of the issues and struggles occupying the hearts and minds of progressive Anglicans and other persons of faith worldwide.



Criminalizing dissent?

by Marianne Arbogast

ON SEPT. 11, shortly after the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks, political prisoners in a number of facilities across the country were placed in segregation, with little or no explanation from prison authorities. Those isolated included Leonard Peltier, Marilyn Buck and Philip Berrigan. Berrigan — who has consistently affirmed a commitment to nonviolence — remained in segregation for 12 days at FCI Elkton federal prison in Lisbon, Ohio, denied contact with family and friends as well as fellow inmates. In some cases, prisoners were refused contact with their lawyers, says Mike Yasutake, an Episcopal priest and director of the Interfaith Prisoners of Conscience Project. “Even in ‘normal’ times, the denial of basic rights is most severe for political prisoners,” Yasutake says. “The word ‘terrorism’ is a very convenient term that has often been used against political prisoners.”

If the freedom of a society can be measured by its tolerance for dissent, there are ominous signs on the post-Sept.-11th horizon. One of the most alarming is the passage, with little opposition, of the USA Patriot Act in October.

“What it seems to do is to give the executive branch an exorbitant amount of discretion in its ability to collect intelligence, to sidestep the warrant requirements of the Fourth Amendment,” says David Walsh-Little, an attorney and member of Viva House Catholic Worker in Baltimore. “We are now going to spy on folks in the U.S. It can’t be good for civil liberties and it will probably have negative effects for the poor, for minorities and for political activists.”

Walsh-Little calls the changes brought about by the Act “Orwellian.”

“There’s a section that allows the feds to search your house repeatedly without telling you at the time. There are a number of provisions that open the door to documents the feds now can get access to — such as educa-

tional records — simply by asserting that they need it for their investigation. There was a pretty good federal law that protected access to your credit — this wipes that out. Historically, the Fourth Amendment requires a warrant, for the government to show probable cause of crime — the exception was for foreign intelligence. Now they can do intelligence-gathering on all U.S. citizens without getting a warrant. I would expect not only an increase in wiretaps of citizens, but that it stays secret — an extremely scary provision.”

These changes are not limited to terrorist investigations, but are “changes to criminal law across the board,” Walsh-Little explains. “They can be used in any criminal investigation that the FBI or any of its subsidiaries engages in.”

The USA Patriot Act also creates a new crime — “domestic terrorism.” According to an American Civil Liberties Union report, you can be charged with domestic terrorism if you engage in illegal activity within the U.S. that “involves acts dangerous to human life” which “appear to be intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population, to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion, or to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination or kidnapping.”

The ACLU “does not oppose the criminal prosecution of people who commit acts of civil disobedience if those acts result in property damage or place people in danger,” their report explains. Their objection lies with an “over-broad definition” that “turns ordinary citizens into terrorists,” and could “sweep in people who engage in acts of political protest as if those acts were dangerous to human life.”

Would World Trade Organization protesters — or those who house them, since charges can be extended to those who offer assistance — be prosecuted as terrorists, they ask? Members of Greenpeace? Protesters

who damage a naval base fence in Vieques, Puerto Rico?

Another provision of the Act — of particular concern to immigrant advocates — permits detention and deportation of non-citizens who assist even lawful activities of a group the government deems terrorist. This creates a “very serious risk that truly innocent individuals could be deported for truly innocent association with political groups that the government later chooses to regard as terrorist organizations,” according to the ACLU. Under the Act, “people can be deported regardless of whether they knew of the designation and regardless of whether their assistance had anything to do with the group’s alleged terrorist activity.” Critics of the Act point out that it was rushed through Congress with little chance for debate. “Almost everyone had to concede that it was impossible to comprehend or even read the bill,” wrote Jesuit priest and former Democratic Congressman Robert Drinan in the *National Catholic Reporter* (10/26/01). “Even those most familiar with the challenges to our freedoms in wartime cannot yet fully appreciate the extent of the evils and errors in the hastily concocted measures alleged to be needed to control terrorism. The climate in which this bill was authored and enacted is a period of almost open hysteria with the administration and intelligence agencies literally demanding that Congress act immediately to give them what they have wanted for many years.” In the name of combatting terrorism, “the entire criminal investigatory make-up has changed,” Walsh-Little says. “If you think law enforcement should be limited in some way, those powers have been distorted. We’re doing what we criticize Afghanistan for doing.” ●

Marianne Arbogast is Associate Editor of The Witness.

One in three could support torture

One in three Americans could accept torture of suspects in the war on terrorism, according to a November *Christian Science Monitor* poll (11/14/01). The question asked was "Could you envision a scenario in the war against terrorism in which you would support any of the following actions taken by the U.S. or not?" Sixty percent of respondents said they could accept assassination of leaders in other countries; 32 percent said they could accept torture of suspects held in the U.S. or abroad; 27 percent said they could accept use of nuclear weapons; and 10 percent said they could accept use of biological or chemical weapons.

Organ transplants from executed prisoners

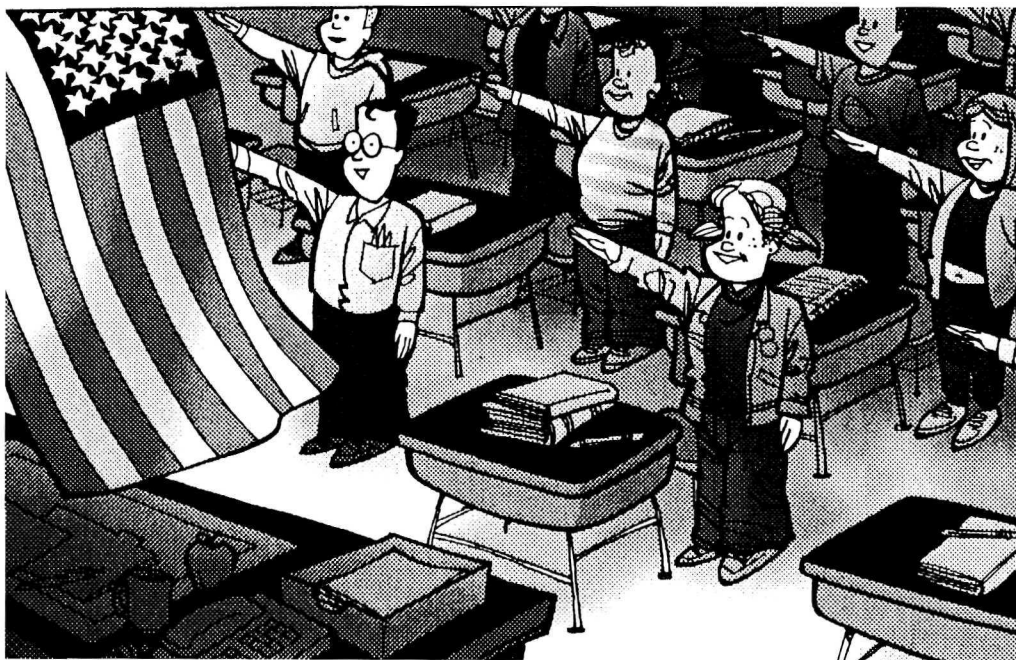
American doctors are increasingly facing the moral dilemma of whether to provide follow-up care for Americans who traveled to China to receive organ transplants from executed prisoners, *The New York Times* reported in November (11/11/01).

"Kidneys, livers, corneas and other body parts from prisoners are being transplanted into American citizens or permanent residents who otherwise would have to wait years for organs," the *Times* story explained. "Many of the patients come back to the U.S. for follow-up care, which Medicaid or other government programs pay for.

"The transplants in China, which doctors in both countries say are increasing, has presented the American medical establishment with an ethical quandary: Should American doctors treat patients who have received organs from executed prisoners and, if so, would they be tacitly condoning the practice and encouraging more such transplants?

"Or should they rebuke patients who, in desperation, participate in a process that mainstream transplant advocates condemn as morally wrong? ...

"Executed prisoners are China's primary source of transplantable organs, though few of the condemned, if any, consent to having



their organs removed, people involved with the process say. Some of the unwitting donors may even be innocent, having been executed as part of a surge of executions propelled by accelerated trials and confessions that sometimes were extracted through torture.

"Various initiatives are under way to protest the harvesting of organs from China's prisoners. One bill would bar entry to the U.S. of any doctors from China who want American transplant training. Chinese transplant specialists now travel freely to the U.S. to take part in seminars and other activities that help hone their skills.

"But American doctors say there is little they can do to stop the flow of prisoner organs to the U.S. because the Chinese supply is growing just like the American demand.

"More transplantable organs are available in China because more people are being executed. This year, 5,000 prisoners or more are likely to be put to death during a nationwide anti-crime drive."

Alternative visions

"It is not naive to propose alternatives to war," Barbara Kingsolver writes in *In These Times* (11/26/01). "We could be the kindest nation on Earth, inside and out. I look at

the bigger picture and see that many nations with fewer resources than ours have found solutions to problems that seem to baffle us. I'd like an end to corporate welfare so we could put that money into ending homelessness. I would like a humane health-care system organized along the lines of Canada's. I'd like the efficient public-transit system of Paris in my city, thank you. I'd like us to consume energy at the modest level that Europeans do, and then go them one better. I'd like a government that subsidizes renewable energy sources instead of forcefully patrolling the globe to protect oil gluttony. Because, make no mistake, oil gluttony is what got us into this holy war, and it's a deep tar pit. I would like us to sign the Kyoto agreement today and to reduce our fossil-fuel emissions with legislation that will ease us into safer, sensibly reorganized lives. If this were the face we showed the world, and the model we helped bring about elsewhere, I expect we could get along with a military budget the size of Iceland's."

Global warming threatens food supply

The United Nations has warned that global warming may threaten the world's food supply, according to a Reuters story (8/11/01)

reported by planetark.org.

“Harvests of some of the world’s key food crops could drop by up to 30 percent in the next 100 years due to global warming, a U.N. agency said. The grim prediction was made by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in a document released in Marrakesh which hosts a U.N.-sponsored climate change conference. The report said scientists have found ‘evidence that rising temperatures, linked with emissions of greenhouse gases, can damage the ability of vital crops such as wheat, rice and maize.’ New studies indicate that yields could fall by as much as 10 percent for every one degree Celsius rise in areas such as the tropics. It said that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the U.N. team of scientists that advise governments, estimate that average global temperatures in the tropics could climb by up to three degrees Celsius by 2100. According to U.N. scientists, current climate models predict a global warming of about 1.4 to 5.8 degrees Celsius between 1990 and 2100.

“The UNEP report said a second group of the IPCC found that key cash crops such as coffee and tea in some of the major growing regions will also be vulnerable over the coming decades to global warming. ‘They fear that desperate farmers will be forced into higher, cooler, mountainous areas intensifying pressure on sensitive forests and threatening wildlife and the quality and quantity of water supplies,’ it said.”

Mexican activists freed after lawyer’s murder

Two peasant ecologists who had been imprisoned on drugs and weapons charges, which they claimed were false, were pardoned by Mexican President Vicente Fox after the lawyer who had defended them was murdered.

“The pardon of Rodolfo Montiel and Teodoro Cabrera came after the Oct. 19 killing of human rights lawyer Digna Ochoa,” the *Los Angeles Times* reported (www.latimes.com, 11/9/01). “The unsolved slaying of Ochoa in her Mexico City office has raised a firestorm of criticism and editorials urging that the Fox administration find her killers and bring them

to justice. Some see her case as a test of his promise to reduce human rights violations and the impunity of the past. The imprisonment of the two men in May 1999 and their conviction in August 2000 made them a cause célèbre among environmentalists. Fox had publicly expressed interest in the case and in February had ordered a review by his interior secretary. But a federal court upheld the verdicts in July.

“In an interview Thursday, Foreign Secretary Jorge Castaneda said more actions to defend human rights will be taken in coming weeks.

“The case was emblematic because of the number of issues it raised — environmental, rural violence, the role of the military in past rights abuses,” he said.

“Montiel had organized villagers in the Sierra Madre mountains to oppose commercial logging by Boise Cascade and other companies. Boise Cascade has since left the area. Protesting the deforestation of their region, the peasants wrote letters to the government. When that got no response, they blocked steep mountain roads to prevent logging trucks from reaching sawmills on the Pacific Coast near Zihuatanejo.

“The men were arrested by the army. Prosecutors said the men were taken into custody after they and others fled a house, ignored orders to stop and opened fire on soldiers. Montiel was accused of having a .45-caliber pistol; both men were charged with growing marijuana.

“Both men confessed, but defense attorneys at the legal aid group Miguel Agustín Pro Human Rights Center in Mexico City said the men did so under torture. Ochoa helped in their defense until August 2000, when she went into exile after being kidnapped and threatened with death. She returned to Mexico in April.”

SIPAZ (Servicio Internacional Para la Paz) recently reported that death threats have been made against six more prominent human rights defenders. They ask that letters be written to the Mexican government expressing shock and dismay at learning of the threats against Miguel Sarre, Sergio Aguayo, Edgar Cortez, Juan Antonio Vega, Fernando Ruiz and Abel Barrera, asking that

measures be implemented for their safety, and urging effective investigation and prosecution of human rights violators. Write: Lic. Vicente Fox Quezada; Presidente de Mexico; Palacio Nacional. Patio de Honor; 1er. Piso, Col Centro, C.P. 06067; Fax 5277.23.76; Phone 55.15.82.56; email: <sprivada@presidencia.gob.mx>.

Women peacemakers

A new video available from the International Fellowship of Reconciliation’s Women Peacemakers Program covers an African consultation of women from different sides of the conflicts in Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe. The video portrays some of the consultation’s highlights, including a discussion of domestic violence and the difficulties of reconciliation. The video, which comes with a viewers’ guide, will interest conflict resolution trainers, peace researchers, African studies and women’s studies classes, and anyone interested in conflict and gender issues. Cost is \$25 U.S. (add \$5 if requesting airmail shipment). Write IFOR, Spoorstraat 38, 1815 BK Alkmaar, The Netherlands/Pays-Bas. Email <office@ifor.org>.

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