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Anabaptist Peace Digest

The Newsletter of the Anabaptist Peace Center – Washington, DC

Wake Up Call

As Presidential Primaries Approach, Mennonites More Politically Divided

A new report presented at Mennonite Church USA's July convention in San José revealed a disturbing and growing trend in the church. Conrad Kanagy presented a summary of some of the results of his study of MCUSA membership. Published by Herald Press under the title "Roadsigns and Guideposts", the study

showed that just like larger society, Mennonites are becoming more politically polarized. In a previous study conducted in 1972, 37 percent of respondents claimed no political identity at all. In the latest study, only 11 percent said they do not claim any political party identity. The number of members identifying

themselves as either Republican or Democrat has risen as well from 54 percent in 1972 to 72 percent in 2006.

With the increase in the assimilation of Mennonites into general society, the yawning political chasm is threatening to create serious division within the church as well. Already in other denominations, *see "wake up", p. 2*

Conference to Explore Political Division in the Church

2008 will be an important year politically as the U.S. elects a new President. With the elections come even more intense political bickering than usual. Unfortunately, in the past, some of this bickering has found its way into the Church. An upcoming conference sponsored by the Anabaptist Peace Center – Washington, DC will explore how the church can overcome political divisions and enable people with different

political positions to worship next to one another on Sunday morning.

One of the major and alarming trends within Anabaptism is its growing political identification. In the past, members of Anabaptist denominations did not define themselves politically along partisan lines. By now accepting the labels "republican" or "democrat", there is the potential for more politically based divisions

defined not by faith but by the political world around the Church. The conference seeks to provide both theological help as well as practical tools for people in conflicted situations, especially pastors in divided churches. It also strives to help people from both sides of the liberal-conservative divide find ways to positively interact and to affirm one another rather than perpetuate the rancor that runs amok in larger society.

MC Canada Addresses Militarism, War Taxes

Delegates at the Mennonite Church Canada assembly addressed a growing problem that at first glance may seem oxymoronic, Canadian militarism. Long held up as an advocate for alternative security models that reach beyond traditional reliance on the military, Canada has increasingly followed the lead of its neighbors to the south. In recent years it has greatly increased its military deployments overseas for missions other than peacekeeping, which it has routinely participated in.

Additionally, the Canadian military budget has increased faster than ever before over the past few years.

Delegates expressed broad support for the statement, which reaffirms the Confession of Faith's assertion that peace and not violence is the will of God. The statement lamented the increasing reliance of the Church and society on violence to provide a sense of security.

Some felt that the statement was not strong enough in denouncing

violence. Others were concerned that any witness for peace must be done in a constructive manner, especially in areas that are near military installations.

Delegates also affirmed the General Board's role in advocating for a bill that would create tax payment options for Conscientious Objectors, similar to the U.S. Peace Tax Fund. MC Canada is working closely with Conscience Canada, the lead proponent, to convince MPs of the importance of this legislation.

“...Canada has increasingly followed the lead of its neighbors to the south” (in militarism).

Return to the Earth: Restoring Relationships

The atrocities committed upon Native Americans have been well documented but remain unacknowledged for the most part in the U.S. Society has not yet claimed its own responsibility in a meaningful way for nearly wiping out an entire people. But new efforts are aiming to help restore at least a measure of dignity to a much maligned people.

Return to the Earth is a project headed by Lawrence Hart, Cheyenne Peace Chief, head of the Cheyenne Cultural

Center, and APCWDC board member. Its goal is to repatriate the remains of thousands of Native Americans that were taken for scientific research at a number of institutions across the country by the US Army after they had been killed. The organization, which is also supported by Mennonite Central Committee, recently completed construction of a visitors center in Oklahoma.

To find out how you can help support this important ministry, go to <http://www.rfpusa.org/returntotheearth/index.html>

Wake Up

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social issues that have been hot political potatoes - such as immigration, the war in Iraq, and homosexuality - have become dividing lines that no one is willing to cross. Discussion on these issues has grown increasingly shrill and common ground has been difficult to find. Without a return to defining ourselves by our faith rather than our politics, MCUSA faces a similar struggle in the not so distant future.

On My Shelf

Blessed are the Pacifists: The Beatitudes and Just War Theory by Thomas Trzyna. Published by Herald Press, Scottsdale, PA, 2006

Thomas Trzyna compares and contrasts pacifism and just war theory and tries to make sense of just what Jesus wanted us to do in cases of war. The analysis here is not deeply theological or academic. Many of the conclusions for the book come from Trzyna's own honest and no nonsense examination of what it means to be Christian and live how Jesus taught us to.

One overarching theme jumps out at you as you

read. Trzyna argues that pacifism and Just War theory operate in different temporal planes. Just War theory, and war in general, seeks immediate results. Pacifism is a more long-term approach that addresses the root causes of conflict.

Trzyna's examination is not completely flawless, however. He argues that living out the beatitudes and following pacifism means that civilization is not worth saving. Indeed it

is precisely because Jesus calls us to act as agents of reconciliation in the world that we engage civilization using his model (pacifism) as our guide.

Ultimately, Trzyna comes to the conclusion that to truly follow Christ, to be Christian, means to be pacifist

See more of this review online at apcwdc.mennonite.net

“ . . . because Jesus calls us to act as agents of reconciliation in the world we engage civilization. . . ”

Annual Conference Fosters Ongoing Dialogue

The Annual Conference of the Church of the Brethren provided the forum for continuing discussions with the Brethren Revival Fellowship. BRF is a group committed to creating a revival in the Church of the Brethren to reclaim the authority of the Bible and return to traditional Brethren beliefs and practices. During this year's meeting in Cleveland, representatives of both BRF and Church of the

Brethren held a dialogue at one of the main sessions that was moderated by On Earth Peace as part of their Ministry of Reconciliation. In addition, BRF met with Voices for an Open Spirit in an open forum attended by 150 people.

The forum modeled what it means to be in loving dialogue. Most importantly, both groups share in common their love for the Church of the Brethren and understand

that each is acting out of that love in the positions that they take on particular issues. BRF and VOS may find themselves on opposite sides of certain issues. But they can consider themselves of one mind when it comes to their commitment to building the Church and following Christ.

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Calendar

Upcoming Peace Events from Around the Church

October 13 - Eastern District and Franconia Conference (MCUSA) Peace Gathering at Blooming Glen (PA) Mennonite Church.

November 3 – Peaceful Family Playshop. Presented by On Earth Peace at the Oakton Church of the Brethren, Vienna, VA

November 4 – Peace Sunday, Mennonite Church USA.

November 10-20 – Border Learning Tour. Sponsored by MCUSA PJSN, MCC West Coast, and MCC Great Lakes.

November 16-18 - Youth Peace Retreat, sponsored by On Earth Peace

April 11-12 – Building Bridges: Uniting the Church for Peacemaking. Conference on dealing with political divisions in churches.

April 12 – Hymn Sing for Peace, Washington, DC, Sponsored by Anabaptist Peace Center – Washington, DC

About Our Organization...

The Anabaptist Peace Center – Washington, DC engages in education, action, and cooperation to help the Church and society put into practice Jesus'

call to peace and justice. It works with Mennonite and Brethren churches to help them reclaim peace and justice as the central defining

characteristic of what it means to be Christian in an Anabaptist context. APCWDC also seeks to work with other denominations to strengthen their peace witness as well.

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