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Diaconalogue

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE LUTHERAN DEACONESS ASSOCIATION, INC., TO ENHANCE THE DIALOGUE AND EXCHANGE AMONG PEOPLE WITH DIACONAL HEARTS

Number 14 Fall, 1987

Foundations

RECONCILIATION

The theme for this issue is reconciliation, making peace with ourselves, our neighbor, our God. Christians are called to the *ministry* of reconciliation. And, we have been entrusted with the *message* of reconciliation. (2 Corinthians 5:16-21). The two articles in this issue provide you with tangible examples of people attempting to live out that calling through their work in criminal justice and human rights concerns. To use the words of St. Paul, they have "become the righteousness of God" to those they serve.

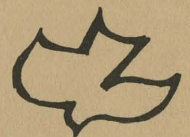
The source for our peace making comes in prayer according to the *Diaconal Resources* section on the back page. As we have sought to center each issue of *Diaconalogue* around a theme, the theological reading is central to our presentation of that theme. We would encourage you to read and reflect on it prayerfully.

Blessed are the peacemakers...
Blessings on your peacemaking!

Hershel Walker

A quiet man with a heart for hurting people

by Jean Roberts



*The Lutheran Deaconess Association presents the **Diakonia en Christo** award annually to a lay man or woman whose life demonstrates Christian service (diakonia) as they respond to the needs of "the least of these" in their midst. Hershel Walker was the 1987 recipient.*

If you should happen to be in north St. Louis at 6 a.m. on a Saturday morning, and be passing by Immanuel Lutheran Church, you would see a large bus waiting out front and a group of people — mostly women and children — gathering. Hershel Walker would be there, taking bus fares, checking the reservations, wishing the people a good trip. This is one of the many projects of this 75-year-old man who received the LDA's *Diakonia en Christo* Award this year.

The people boarding the bus are on their way to visit prisoners in one of Missouri's prisons. They will have a several-hour ride, a visit, and the trip home. For most, it would be impossible to get there by public transportation or car. Through these visits, they keep in touch with husbands, sons, fathers, keeping the family intact and the prisoner's spirits up. This service is one part of Immanuel's ministry to prisoners and one of the things closest to Hershel's heart — a concern for those caught in the criminal justice system.

Hershel's way is always to see the human being instead of the institution: the hurting human being caught in a system which oppresses. Over and over I have heard him say "the system is wrong." His story is almost a history of the social concerns of his lifetime: segregation, civil rights, nuclear war, Viet Nam, apartheid, sanctuary.

But Hershel is not loud, strident, argumentative. Rather, he quietly repeats that "the system is wrong," until he finally gets the attention of the people who can help make it right. "I think we've made a lot of progress, a lot of changes," he says. "There's no way you can change society without a struggle." For instance, *we* stopped the Viet Nam War; ordinary people had never stopped a war before.

But that is getting ahead of the story.

Hershel Walker was born in Arkansas and grew up to become a sharecropper. In 1930 he came to St. Louis and was fortunate enough to have a job, in a car wash. His first activist cause was the joblessness of young black men who could not find work because of many barriers put up by segregation. Blacks could not be bus drivers or public service workers in St. Louis. He says, wryly, "Men had it worse than women; women could get jobs, cleaning." He began working within the union movement, but it, too, was segregated. He picketed. "Picketing gets the attention of neutral people," he says, "who want to find out what's going on. It disturbs the authorities."

During the war there were more jobs for blacks, but they still were relegated to being porters, stevedores and janitors. By then, Hershel worked at Wagner Electric and succeeded in helping to get a separate section for blacks, making munitions, and after the war, to desegregate the plant.

(cont'd on page 2)

Hershel Walker (cont'd from page 1)

The peace movement caught his attention earlier than most people's. He picketed in protest against the Korean War. Peace activism got him more involved with whites, the college activists of the 60's, the Anti-Viet Nam War groups. He helped organize local participation in the 1963 National March on Washington, at which Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. made the famous "I Have a Dream" speech. Two busloads went from St. Louis, and the fare was fifteen dollars. Just this past year Hershel again traveled to Washington, for the 25th anniversary of that March.

For the past fifteen years Hershel has had as his home church Immanuel Lutheran at 3540 Marcus, in the heart of inner-city north St. Louis. As Hershel tells it, "The Baptist Church where I belonged talked about justice; the Lutherans work for it. I belong with the Lutherans." His Pastor, Theodore W. Schroeder, comments that he "has brought to Immanuel Congregation a passion for justice reminiscent of our founding pastor, Johann Friederich Buenger. Buenger pushed the congregation and the church at large to care for orphans and the sick, and to reach out to people of color. Hershel has pushed us to reach out to troubled, oppressed and rejected people in our own time."

Hershel sees the structure and methods of the criminal justice system as inhumane, and has brought into being the Prison Service Committee, a part of Immanuel's community service program, to confront that system. Besides the weekly bus service, there is a support group for family and friends of people in prison and "Project COPE" which helps carefully selected paroled prisoners find sponsoring churches which assist them in the crucial readjustment to living outside of prison.

Hershel's concerns became international when the American Friends Service Committee, several years ago, selected him as part of a delegation to visit the southern African nations bordering on South Africa, to learn from them what Americans might do about the situation there. Recently, Hershel has worked to bring the issue of apartheid to the attention of the black people of north St. Louis.

When tiny Immanuel (68 members, many of them children or aged) considered becoming a sanctuary for "illegal" Central American refugees, Hershel was one of the first to approve. "They aren't illegal, the government is," was his comment. His gentle, warm smile welcomed the first two refugees in January of 1984. Again, here were hurting people who needed his help.

Most recently, the "hurting people" in St. Louis are the homeless, street people. He has been instrumental in obtaining shelters for them.

It's wonderful to sit in a committee meeting with Hershel Walker. He listens quietly to all of the logical reasoning, the excuses, the obstacles, and then quietly says, "Yes, but it's a justice issue. People need to have something done." He speaks the gospel of non-violence and social justice fearlessly, but gently, not arguing or injuring the other person's dignity. He repeats it until he is heard.

The prison bus leaves about 6:30 a.m. every Saturday morning, and afterward Hershel Walker crosses the street and returns to his small apartment in the parsonage of Immanuel. Later in the day he may picket at the Old Court House or attend a committee meeting. He may drive the tractor mower and cut the grass in the large cemetery attached to Immanuel. Or, he may visit with his children or grandchildren. But, he'll probably be around to welcome the people when the bus returns Saturday evening.

Jean Roberts is a librarian and member of Immanuel Lutheran Church, St. Louis. She has a special gift of recognizing and affirming the ministry of others.

If you would like a nomination form to suggest someone for the 1988 *Diakonia en Christo* award, write to the Lutheran Deaconess Association, 1304 LaPorte Avenue, Valparaiso, IN 46383. We welcome your suggestions.

Litany of Reconciliation

- L: All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. The hatred which divides nation from nation, race to race, class from class.
C: Father, forgive.
L: The covetous desires of people and nations to possess what is not their own.
C: Father, forgive.
L: The greed which exploits the labors of men and women, and lays waste the earth.
C: Father, forgive.
L: Our envy of the welfare and happiness of others.
C: Father, forgive.
L: Our indifference to the plight of the homeless and the refugee,
C: Father, forgive.
L: The lust which uses for ignoble ends the bodies of men and women,
C: Father, forgive.
L: The pride which leads us to trust in ourselves, and not in God,
C: Father, forgive.
L: Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Prayer of Reconciliation

- L: Lord Christ, who by your cross and passion reconciled the world to God, and broke down the barriers of race and color which divide people and nations: make us and all your people instruments of reconciliation in the life of our world; in your Name we pray.
C: Amen.

The litany and prayer are used every Friday during Morning Prayer at the Chapel of the Resurrection, Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, Indiana, as a means of reconciliation and expressing connection to their involvement with the Community of the Cross of Nails (described elsewhere in this issue).

Diaconalogue

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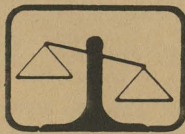
Articles from **Diaconalogue** may be reprinted with acknowledgement. Organizations doing so are required to send a copy of that publication to the Lutheran Deaconess Association.

From its beginning in 1919, the Lutheran Deaconess Association has been dedicated to a three-fold task: recruiting and educating women for the diaconate, supporting deaconesses in their ministries, and serving the church in its diaconal mission.

This newsletter is designed to affirm and encourage laity who do "diakonia" so that we can learn from, encourage, and support each other in our Christian service. In this way, we hope to serve the church in a new way.

We are always seeking resources for our publication. If you know of an individual whose life is an example of diaconal service or if you are interested in writing such an article, please write or call Diane Greve, Editor.

Relationships for Reconciliation



A Victim-Offender Reconciliation Program

by *Lois Reiner*

Every week I visit former clients in prison who have slipped through the alternatives to incarceration. Most of these people have given up because those outside "the walls" have given up on them. When they broke the law and were caught, that was it. There were no relationships on which to depend for finding alternatives to incarceration. So, I now visit them in state correction facilities. Unfortunately, when they started wearing prison blues, there was no longer an opportunity for reconciliation with those they had wronged.

Reconciliation is about relationships, — about making two people visible to one another who would otherwise not have understood the capacity each has for healing the other.

The theological aspects of reconciliation are discussed elsewhere in this issue. While it is improbable that we can separate the practical from the theological, I will only describe here what it looks like in action and how it fits into today's criminal justice system.

In a world where Old Testament "an eye for an eye" is a favorite concept of criminal justice, advocating reconciliation between victims and offenders is not always popular. Yet, here in Valparaiso, Indiana, Porter County PACT (Prisoner and Community Together) trains volunteers to help reconciliation happen through its Victim Offender Reconciliation Program (VORP).

Over the years, dozens of housewives, teachers, mechanics, tax accountants, retired farmers, and other trained volunteers, have seen to successful conclusion many cases the courts have referred to VORP. These volunteers make initial contacts with the victim and the offender in each case. They explain what is involved in the reconciliation process and schedule sessions which are mutually agreeable to both parties. These volunteers have seen hatred, fear and suspicion replaced by mutual respect as the two parties view one another as persons. They have seen reconciliation happen as each victim agrees with one more offender on what it will take to "make things right again."

Relationships are as varied and complex as the folks who are involved. Since the majority of our cases are referred by the county courts and the juvenile probation department, good relationships with local judges and probation officers are vital. Relationships between the volunteers and the reconciliation program director, who has a hand in getting every case assigned, are essential so that she can better understand which mediator goes best with which case. Her capacity for assigning "matches" with astuteness and compassion is a strengthening ingredient in the reconciliation process.

Since most of our cases deal with property offenses, volunteer mediators usually sit between young offenders and adult victims who have been left with personal property damaged or missing. Seldom is one of these victims not angry enough to want "the little hoodlum behind bars" from the very start. Seldom is an offender not ashamed for having goofed and been caught.

Not until the mediator has been able to get the two parties together in the same room can the chance for reconciliation occur. That possibility first depends on winning the confidence of each, on establishing what I like to call "the facilitating

relationship." Then, once introductions are made and the rules of the session explained, the mediator has only to sit back and let it happen — ideally.

Picture it. For the offender the victim now has a face and a name. She is angry, frustrated with a senseless interruption and violation in her life. and for the first time, the offender also has a name and a face for the victim. She sees that face, suddenly, not as a face of a hoodlum but, maybe, as the face of someone who could be the kid next door.

The kid is scared. He is whispering, "I'm sorry. Really sorry."

That "hoodlum" has turned into a human being for the victim and he is genuinely ashamed. And, the shock of discovering that a human being, not some property, was the victim has a strong effect.

"How can I make things right?" is the jist of what follows. It comes maybe minutes, maybe hours later.

Picture it. One human being can now acknowledge that another human being can perhaps make things right by paying off the damages at \$7.50 a week and/or by working in the yard, or by donating time for a favorite charity for a certain number of hours. Together, they sign a contract which the volunteer mediator has ready. They get to their feet and shake hands.

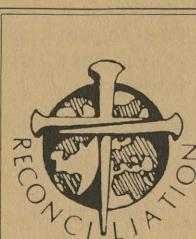
It is now that they remember the mediator. The mediator has a tremendous smile because reconciliation has just happened. Relationships just developed that will make a big difference in the life of everyone in the room.

These experiences cause me to want to convince every person who has ripped off, humiliated, victimized, or vandalized to be open to reconciliation with the offender. I would like to sell this program to every judge and prosecutor and probation officer who understands that incarceration can never be equated with rehabilitation. I want to sell it to communities that still view the "an eye for an eye" as a biblical command, rather than a limitation handed down to a long ago world unaccustomed to rule of law, where unending retaliation meant unending violence.

Through this reconciliation program, the difference between retaliation and reconciliation is clear to at least two more members of the community. They have discovered that anonymity, whether chosen or assigned, perpetuates distrust, callousness and pain. They have been encouraged to heal. They have become visible, vulnerable human beings and, they will have a hard time with hating, so easily, ever again.

Peace be with you!

Lois Reiner is a poet and a concerned Christian employed in the Victim Offender Reconciliation Program, Valparaiso, Indiana.



Community of the Cross of Nails

The Community of the Cross of Nails is an international Christian organization inspired by the ministry of reconciliation of Coventry Cathedral and by the disciplined Christian life followed by members of the Coventry Community.

If you would like further information please write to one of the following:

Mrs. Olga West,
Community of the Cross of Nails,
7 Priority Row,
Coventry CV2 5ES
England.

Dr. Van C. Kussrow,
Community of the Cross of Nails,
Camp Pinnacle,
Route 3, Box 150
Hendersonville
N. Carolina 28739, U.S.A.

The Spirituality of Peacemaking

by Henri Nouwen

(originally printed in the *The Lutheran*, February 5, 1986.)

A peacemaker prays. Prayer is the beginning and the end, the source and the fruit, the core and the content, the basis and the goal of all peacemaking. Peace is a divine gift, a gift we receive in prayer. In his farewell discourse, Jesus said to his apostles, "Peace I bequeath to you. My own peace I give to you, a peace which the world cannot give, this is my gift to you" (John 14:27) to make peace we first of all have to move away from the dwelling places of those who hate peace and enter the house of him who offers us his peace. This is what prayer is all about. The question indeed is: Where are you staying? Prayer is living in the house of the Lord.

We cannot dismiss the horrendous cruelties about which we read in the papers as "things we would never do." The wounds and needs that lie behind the wars that we condemn are the wounds and needs that we share with the whole human race. We are part of the evil we protest against.

Peace making is a work of love, and love casts out fear. Nothing is more important in peacemaking than that it flows from a deep and undeniable experience of love. Only those who know they are loved and rejoice in that love can be true peacemakers, because the intimate knowledge of being loved sets us free to look beyond the boundaries of death and to speak and act fearlessly for peace.

Prayer is the way to that experience of love. Prayer means entering into communion with the One who loved us before we could love. This "first love" (1 John 4:19) is revealed to us in prayer. The deeper we enter into the house of God, whose language is prayer, the less dependent we are on the blame or praise of those who surround us, and the freer we are to let our whole being be filled with that first love.

As long as we still wonder what other people say or think about us, as long as we try to act in ways that will elicit a positive response, we are still victimized and imprisoned by the dark world in which we live. In that world we have to let our surroundings tell us what we are worth. It is the world of successes and failures, of trophies and expulsions, of praise and blame, of stars and underdogs. In this world we are easily hurt and we act out of these hurts to find some satisfaction of our need to be considered of that world, we live in darkness, since we do not know our true selves. We cling to our false self in the hope that maybe more success, more praise, more satisfaction will give us the experience of being loved. That is the fertile ground of bitterness, greed, violence and war.

In prayer, however, we discover that the love we are looking for has already been given to us. Prayer is entering into with love and only love. In that first love lies our true self, a self not made up of the rejection and acceptance of those with whom we live, but solidly rooted in the One who called us into existence. In the house of God we were created. To that house we will return. Prayer is that act of returning.

Prayer is the basis of peacemaking precisely because in prayer we come to the realization that we do not belong to the world in which conflicts and wars take place, but to the One who offers us peace. We can only speak of peace in this world when our sense of who we are is not anchored in the world. We can only say, "We are for peace." Those who are fighting have no power over us. We can only witness for the prince of peace when our trust is in him alone. We can be *in* this world of warmakers in order to be *in* it as peacemakers is the way of the cross, which Jesus shows us. It is the long process of conversion in which we die from our old identity, rooted in the ups and downs of worldly praise of all we do, to think or say in the service of what peacemaking for us will mean.

Only by opening ourselves to the language and way of prayer can we cope with the interruptions, demands and ordinary tasks of life without becoming fragmented and resentful. Prayer — living in the presence of God — is the most radical peace action we can imagine.

Resources

**Mennoite Central Committee
Office of Criminal Justice
220 W. High Street
Elkhart, Indiana 46516**

Whole range of resources. Write for free list of particular interest is a series entitled "New Perspectives on Crime and Justice" "Occasional papers" published in booklet form. Titles available include; "A biblical vision of justice" by Herman Bianchi; "Crime, pain, and death," by Nils Christie; "Peoplehood and law" by Walker Klaassen; "Restore Justice, Retribution Justice" by Howard Zehn.

**PACT Institute of Justice
P.O. Box 177
Michigan City, IN 46360**

Write for free resource list. Focus is mainly on materials for VORPs. "Vorp Network News" is aimed at sharing thought

and information between VORPs. \$15/yr. Sample copy free.

**National Interreligious Task Force on Criminal Justice
Joint Strategy and Action Committee
475 Riverside Drive, Suite 560
New York, NY 10115**

"Punishment in the scripture and tradition of Judaism, Christianity and Islam" by the Rev. Virginia Mackey.

\$2.50 + \$1.00 postage. Also has resource list. Book is well researched and presented study of the concept of punishment in the three traditions. Eye-opening and fascinating.

**Jesus the Peacemaker
by Carol Frances Jegen, BVM**

Jesus the Peacemaker helps restore our appreciation of peacemaking as central to

Jesus' life and integral to an authentic Christian life. With the passion narrative as the focal point, the author presents a Christology of Jesus as peacemaker. She raises the question of reconciling warmaking with the gospel of Jesus and leads the reader to understand some of the distortions that led to this.

The themes of empowerment, prayerfulness, playfulness, and programing for peace are considered in the light of the challenge of peacemaking which confronted Jesus and still confronts us today.

97 pp, \$6.95

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