

# Shalom!

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## Protest and Activism

**THE RECENT TEN-PART** Ken Burns documentary series, “The Vietnam War,” focused a fair amount of attention on the protests and activism against the war. By coincidence, the documentary aired on television just a few weeks after a white supremacist/neo-Nazi rally was held in Charlottesville, Virginia, protesting the removal of Confederate statues.

As was clearly shown in the Vietnam War documentary, the protests against the war often included violence—certainly toward property but also sometimes toward people. Similarly, in Charlottesville, the rally turned violent when a counter-protestor was killed by a car driven by a white supremacist, and some of those who were protesting the rally and its racism also acted violently. While the documentary was well-done and riveting television (especially for someone like me who came of age and solidified my conscientious objection to war and commitment to peacemaking during the Vietnam War), I was disappointed that more attention wasn’t given to all the peaceful protests and marches that also took place. And after Charlottesville, it was similarly disappointing that the peaceful protest of many clergy (who attended training on nonviolent resistance prior to participating) was almost lost in all the noise about the violence of “both sides.”

Protests like the ones against the Vietnam War many years ago and more recently raise questions about how Christians ought to protest and resist things that we believe to be unjust. What is appropriate and effec-

tive activism for Christians, especially those who are committed to nonviolence? What should be the balance between simply going about the work of the church (being Jesus in the world) and specifically resisting injustice and advocating for just policies and against systemic oppression, racism, violence, sexism, etc.? If we choose to participate in public protests because we believe the cause is just and in keeping with our Christian values, should we intentionally disassociate ourselves from those aspects of the protest we don’t fully support?

These are some of the questions this edition of *Shalom!* seeks to address. For me, the answers are not black-and-white: for example, there isn’t a clear-cut distinction between going about the work of being Jesus in the world and protesting and resisting things we believe are wrong. Doesn’t being Jesus in the world include working against those wrongs by protesting and engaging in other kinds of activism—perhaps even putting up with a little “messiness”? Jesus himself didn’t steer clear of messiness when he spoke out and acted against the injustices of his day, such as when he picked grain on the Sabbath to make a larger point.

In 2017, we celebrate the five hundredth anniversary of one of the great protests of all time (the Protestant Reformation). Is it possible that our contemporary protests could help to bring about a new movement of far-reaching and positive change in the church?

Harriet S. Bicksler, editor

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# Protest Without Partisanship

By John R. Yeatts

**OUR CHILDREN SAY** that in their growing up years, our family was always boycotting something. When we lived in Africa in the 1980s, we refused to buy Nestle products because of their marketing of infant formula in developing countries, despite its being expensive and less healthy for infants than mothers' milk. Later, we boycotted Snapple because it sponsored a radio talk show that promoted ideas that seemed to be un-Christian. More recently, we try to promote local and free-trade stores rather than Walmart or the "Dollar" stores, because we are willing to pay more for items produced by persons who receive fair compensation for their work. We have made these decisions to protest what we see as conflicting with the

principles Jesus taught.

Recently, our culture has witnessed a spate of protests and counter-protests on a variety of issues. These include the neo-Nazi/white supremacist protest and the anti-fascist response in Charlottesville, and the protest of Colin Kaepernick and his National Football League colleagues kneeling during the playing of the national anthem before games. President Trump and the team owners have threatened to suspend players who protest in this way.

What is appropriate and effective activism for Christians, especially those of us who are committed to nonviolence? What is the appropriate balance between simply going about the work of the church (being Jesus in the world) and specifically resisting or speaking out against immorality and advocating for just policies?

The Anabaptist tradition of our Brethren in Christ Church was born in protest. When infant baptism was seen as the sign of initiation into both the Christian Church and the political state, our forefathers refused to baptize their children before they could exercise personal faith. Moreover, the Brethren in Christ Church has always believed that we should protest when our country requires or pressures us to kill in war. We have been a people of protest against those who would usurp the authority of Jesus in our lives.

Yet, our tradition has also been reticent to engage in partisan politics. My father refused to vote in political elections, even when some of his brothers and sisters went to the polls for the first time to vote for the candidate with Brethren in Christ connections (Dwight Eisenhower) or when others voted against the Roman Catholic John Kennedy.

Although the Brethren in Christ originally did not participate in politics, members were at times permitted to vote in school board elections or on issues like prohibition. Moreover, the church wrote both a letter of protest to President Theodore Roosevelt for reviewing the troops on the Lord's Day and drafted another letter of support for the same

president's concern over laxity of state laws regulating marriage and divorce. *Evangelical Visitor* editor George Detwiler criticized the candidates in the 1904 presidential election for being weak on the prohibition of alcohol.

At present, we Brethren in Christ participate politically in many more ways than our forefathers, as shown by the data from the 2014 Global Anabaptist Profile. Yet, today it is difficult to know how to follow Jesus in protesting against unjust and immoral laws and rulers. There is no longer a draft, so our children are not required to protest military conscription, although my son, when he registered with the government at age 18, wrote across the form in large letters "Conscientious Objector to War," because there was no place on the form to declare that belief.

It is also hard to know what protests actually promote injustice and immorality. Years ago, some students at Messiah College boycotted Starbucks Coffee because of practices thought to be detrimental to our environment. At that point, my biologist daughter responded that Starbucks was one of the few companies that bought coffee from growers that did not destroy forests to grow their coffee.

So, how do we make informed decisions to protest against companies and governments that do not promote and practice the teachings of Jesus? When do we make statements personally or on social media? What are our rules for when we do or don't "weigh in"? What principles should we follow when we do protest?

We should protest when asked to do what Jesus tells us not to do, for example, to kill in war. Some other issues are not as clear-cut, like taking a stand against what seem to be unjust practices or boycotting certain products. We run the risk of being wrong or imprudent when we take a stand, but perhaps that risk is worth taking in the struggle against immorality and injustice.

While Christians have a moral and religious obligation to speak out against evil, we might be less quick to be associated with partisan politics. My father did not vote. Yet, he



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refused to make war products on his machine in a factory during World War II. Evangelicals decided to vote for a presidential candidate that violated nearly every moral value they hold dear—the sanctity of marriage, the avoidance of sexual behavior with persons who are not your spouse, the owning of gambling casinos. Although the candidate brazenly transgressed moral values, evangelicals voted for him for political reasons—conservative Supreme Court, capitalist economic policies, and so forth.

Our forefathers and mothers refused to participate in partisan politics by voting or holding office; yet they took a stand on moral and religious issues by writing letters to the government on alcohol, marriage, and the Sabbath. Today, we can go beyond partisan politics to protest on moral and religious issues of our day. For example, we can apply our biblical pacifist position to our age by taking a consistently pro-life stand on more conservative issues like abortion and what are generally considered more progressive or liberal issues like capital punishment, gun laws, and war. In this way, we move beyond the partisan politics that so divides our country

to follow Jesus' teachings regardless of which side of the political divide they land us on.

Some years ago, I supported the Biblical and Religious Studies Department at Messiah College in drafting a letter opposing our government's involvement in the first Gulf War, because of Jesus' statements like, "Love your enemies, and "Resist not the evil one" (Matt. 5:38-48). That letter brought an invitation to be interviewed on a local call-in radio show. The conservative talk show host was respectful and so were the callers. On another occasion I accompanied several others to Washington to defend the Peace Tax Fund proposal that would have allowed biblical pacifists to designate the portion of taxes budgeted to the military to be used for non-war purposes. Interestingly, our congressman declared that he would not vote against the proposal. Although I have been led to demonstrate and even protest in those two instances, I have not followed some of my brothers and sisters who refuse to pay the portion of taxes that support our military, because the apostle Paul exhorts us to pay our taxes (Rom. 13:7).

It is difficult to know when to protest im-

moral or un-Jesus-like actions, and there are various levels of protest. We can refuse to do what our government asks us to do, vote against those measures, or publically demonstrate our opposition.

Our Brethren in Christ forebears E.J. Swalm, William Charlton, and Earl M. Sider were jailed and persecuted for their unwillingness to kill in World War I. According to Christian tradition, Paul and the apostles, except for Judas and John, experienced suffering and martyrdom for following their crucified Lord. Protest has been part of the Christian faith from the beginning. Our Anabaptist forefathers were imprisoned and even killed by Catholics and Reformers for their protest against infant baptism, which was seen as both apostasy and political rebellion. How will we follow Jesus and the disciples by taking a stand against immorality or injustice today?

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## Learning to Respond to Racism

by John Walker

*"Fear engenders fear. It never gives birth to love" - Henri Nouwen.*

**THREE TIMES DURING** the five years I have served as a pastor in Waynesboro, Pennsylvania, we have been visited by the Ku Klux Klan. Each time, they distributed literature seeking to recruit white Christians.

The first time, I drove up to the church on a Sunday morning early in 2014 and found the front lawn littered with plastic baggies. A flyer inside each, entitled "Help Save Our Race" declared white people to be under assault. It talked of "Aryan Heritage," "Our Christian Religion," and "Our White Homelands." The flyer encouraged white people to join the Klan.

After the worship service that day, volunteers went through the neighborhood and

picked up all the flyers they could find. When we reported this to the local police, we discovered that ours wasn't the only neighborhood. Several places around town had received a visit.

Then, there was nothing for three years.

This summer, however, we were visited again. The tactics changed. Mostly, churches were targeted, with flyers left on car windshields. The first Sunday, they focused on African Americans and Jews, calling the Jews "Satanic" and the "Synagogue of Satan." Much scripture was quoted out of context. Under the Klan banner at the bottom were the words, "Wake up white America." When it happened a second Sunday, it began to rouse some to action.

Locally, a ministerial group, which had been mostly inactive, came to life. I received an email from Rev. Dr. Bruce Druckenmiller,

a Waynesboro pastor, encouraging me to join a local clergy response to the flyers distributed in our town by the KKK and "to the atmosphere of hate that is running rampant through our country." The response had two steps: an open letter to be placed in our town paper, *The Record Herald*, and a prayer vigil set for the following week.

The letter began by speaking of the August 12 incident in Charlottesville, Virginia. That had been an ugly display of racism and hate that ended with the death of a young peaceful protestor. The letter referred to the positive clergy response in Charlottesville and a biblical mandate for our own response. One of the lines that caught my interest and moved me to join was this: "... we, too, need to be fearless in speaking the truth when we hear lies, proclaiming peace amid violence and invoking the power of love to condemn

the voices of hate.” I immediately signed the letter.

I signed the letter because I felt it was the right thing to do as a follower of Jesus. I hoped it would send a clear message to Klan members that this sort of thing would not be tolerated here. I also hoped that it would send a positive message to the African American, Hispanic, and Jewish communities that as churches, collectively, and as Christians, individually, we do not feel or believe the way the distributors of these flyers do. We are different and you are our neighbors whom we love in Jesus’ name.

The letter was sent to 44 area churches; 20 pastors signed it. For reasons that I’m sure made sense to them, a little more than half of local clergy didn’t sign. I was disappointed.

The first part of this response was easy to embrace from the comfort of my office desk. Not as easy was taking action by joining the second part—actually doing something. Reverend Gwendolyn Bell, pastor of the St. Paul African Methodist Episcopal Church, felt called to hold a peaceful protest in the form of a prayer vigil. With a little more than a week to organize, a time was set for the following Thursday.

I’ll admit I was a little nervous about attending the prayer vigil, especially after a call from the Anti-Defamation League. They of-

fered their services and resources and warned of possible counter-protests from white supremacist groups that evening.

My nervousness was unwarranted. As I arrived at Trinity Church, I could see that the turnout was high. No protesters awaited us. Only friendly faces and lots of handshakes greeted me. I met several of the local clergy whom I’d never met before and there was an atmosphere of excitement and anticipation.

The event was less a vigil than a celebration of diversity of people and unity in Christ. We sang, we prayed for unity, for protection, for peace, and for the youth of our town and the nation. We praised God and celebrated our Savior. The approach was not an in-your-face aggressive stance, but a Jesus response that spoke of the need for solidarity in the face of a common threat. Surely, for my African American brothers and sisters and for the Jewish people of our town, the threat was more real, more direct than for me, but even the existence of this supremacist attitude here, given in the name of Jesus, threatens our witness to the real Christ who bids us all to come.

A three-fold plan was shared at the end of the evening: to form prayer teams to cover Waynesboro and surrounding communities in prayer against racism; to form Bible stud-

ies within churches on the subject of racism, and to partner with schools to discuss racism with children.

The majority of those signing the letter and attending the vigil were so-called “main-line” churches of the “liberal” variety. Not many of the “conservative” or “evangelical” churches crossed the invisible line to participate. Sadly, it seems we have difficulty leaving labels behind to take an important stand for Jesus and to send a clear message to people whom we are called to love as Christ loved. Only a handful of people from our own congregation attended, but it’s a start.

I find myself thinking, talking, and writing about racism lately. I can’t help this nagging feeling that I have been empowered to speak where others may not be so-enabled. Slowly, I am learning to respond to racism. A line from the vigil invitation speaks of the need: “The hate that has been spread by the KKK flyers . . . cannot have the final word. Love needs to prevail and we need to ask God’s help to respond in ways that reflect the teachings and life of Jesus.” To that I add my own “Amen”.

*John Walker is senior pastor of the Fairview Avenue Brethren in Christ Church, Waynesboro, PA.*

## Protesting the Protesters:

### *Dr. King and the Alabama Clergymen*

by Lois Saylor

**AMERICANS LIKE TO** protest. The country was founded in protest and the Constitution protects free speech, in part, to allow protests as one way to exchange ideas and change society. Five hundred years ago, Martin Luther spearheaded the Reformation when he protested the Catholic Church, thus creating our identity as Protestants. Anabaptists, moreover, were not just reformers, but radical reformers, and we, as American Anabaptists, come out of a protest movement. Today what people are protesting and how they are protesting are issues at the forefront of our cultural conversation. A look

back at Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s ideas of protest summarized in his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” can inform our discussions and actions today.

In April 1963, Dr. King was arrested and jailed in Birmingham, Alabama for demonstrations protesting racial segregation. While King was in jail, eight clergymen of Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish affiliations wrote a public letter making the case that Dr. King’s demonstrations were unwise and asking the “Negro community to withdraw support from these demonstrations.” With time on his hands in jail, Dr. King wrote a lengthy re-

sponse known as the “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” that called these moderate white clergymen to more fully understand why their reasoning was ill-informed and misplaced. The first lesson we can learn from this exchange is that we too should truly listen to what protesters are saying, why they are saying it, and what life experiences helped to mold their points of view.

One concern of the clergymen was that Dr. King’s organizers were “outsiders.” The clergymen preferred that Birmingham take care of itself without outside interference. Dr. King explained that he did have organi-

zational ties to the area and was invited to Birmingham, but the more crucial points for him were that “injustice is here” (in Birmingham), “the interrelatedness of all communities and states,” and that “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” He further suggested that the greater concern is not who is demonstrating (“outsiders”), but rather the conditions that brought about a need for demonstrations and the “city’s white power structure [that] left the Negro community with no alternative.” Today, do we sometimes get caught up in who is demonstrating and perhaps how, and lose sight of the why? Dr. King used nonviolent means to protest injustice. These also are two important criteria, justice and peace, as we evaluate what and how to protest.

The clergymen also thought the “demonstrations were unwise and untimely.” In response Dr. King noted that the protesters “have not made a single gain in civil rights without determined legal and nonviolent pressure.” Demonstrations were not “unwise.” They were necessary. He further denounced the idea of the protests as “untimely.” He writes, “For years now I have heard the word ‘Wait!’...This ‘Wait’ has almost always meant ‘Never.’” Then he uses a familiar phrase credited to William Gladstone, “justice too long delayed is justice denied.” How often do we become truly aware of an injustice only when protesters bring it to our attention? Do we then respond with a request for waiting as we work through what is a “new” issue to us, but to those directly affected is already past the boiling point?

In addition, the clergymen criticized the actions of Dr. King’s followers as “technically peaceful” but as actions that “incite to hatred and violence.” His response was firm. He asked, “Isn’t this like condemning a robbed man because his possession of money precipitated the evil act of robbery?” The push for civil rights cannot be stopped nor blamed if those who disagree out of bigotry are inflamed by the call to racial justice. Dr. King affirmed nonviolent protests and civil disobedience as rightful tools in the fight for justice. If violence was directed at the protesters, they did not respond with violence but rather stood in the shoes of peace.

He also called out the silence of good

people. He saw that the lack of movement “toward freedom is not the White Citizen’s Councilor or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to ‘order’ than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice.” He later added, “We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people.” The eight clergymen were not against racial justice or Dr. King’s goals, but in being against his methods they withheld the very justice they claimed to affirm. Dr. King pointed this out with vigor and honesty.

In the letter he lays out four basic steps in a nonviolent campaign: 1) collection of the facts to determine whether injustices exist; 2) negotiation; 3) self-purification; and 4) direct action (peaceful demonstrations). Self-purification (step 3) is particularly interesting and one that few people think about let alone employ. But it is a step the church should embrace whole-heartedly in an act of Spirit-directed self-reflection and confession before taking direct action. Dr. King’s entire letter is worth reading and studying in further depth as the church seeks justice and ways to speak into the public dialogue.

As the church, we must also try to look at ourselves in Dr. King’s mirror of truth. Are we sacrificing justice for order? Are we too silent? Are we happy enough with “negative peace?” Are we happy to just keep a lid on the tensions and not let the pot boil over? Is that even possible? Or do we not care enough because the pot is boiling over in someone else’s kitchen?

Currently others claim that we need to move beyond Dr. King and that his methods are outdated. Some endorse a move toward force and even violence. We need to honestly assess those movements and reject violence and hate even if the stated end goal is anti-bigotry. The case is being made to stamp out hate with violence. Dr. King’s methods are a model we should study, learn from, and use in today’s context. Seeking justice through nonviolence should never be deemed an outmoded “method of the 1960s” as one blogger proclaimed. Especially for the church. Especially for Anabaptists. Nonviolence history is far older, more deeply rooted, and more

profound than a quick glance can determine. We should study Dr. King’s writings before we either throw out or embrace his approach too easily. And as the church, we should look at the eight Alabama clergymen and examine ourselves. A little “self-purification” is a good thing.

*Lois Saylor is a member of the Harrisburg (PA) Brethren in Christ Church. She also serves on the Shalom! editorial committee and as an editor for the denomination’s Equipping for Ministry program.*

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## Resisting Evil

### A Mini-Review

Based on a true story, *Every Man Dies Alone*, by Hans Fallada, is a novel about an ordinary German couple, Otto and Anna Quangel, who resist Hitler and the Third Reich. Their act of resistance is carried out in Berlin where any kind of dissent was treasonous, and people were arrested, imprisoned, and executed for minor offenses.

When their only son is killed in the war, Otto and Anna are “radicalized” and begin their resistance. Otto writes postcards against the Hitler regime and drops them surreptitiously in random places throughout Berlin, hoping passersby who pick them up will be influenced by their message.

After his arrest, Otto learns that out of 285 postcards he wrote, only 18 were not turned in to the authorities. He is at first convinced that their act of resistance was a complete failure. Eventually, as he languishes in prison, he understands the value of his act of resistance and before he dies attains the kind of serenity that comes from knowing he did what he thought was right. “At least I stayed decent. I didn’t participate,” he says.

The meaning of the title comes from a conversation Otto had with a cellmate who says, “We all acted alone, we were caught alone, and every one of us will have to die alone. . . . but since we are fighting for justice against brutality, we are bound to prevail in the end.”

*Review by Harriet Bicksler, editor.*

# Peaceful Protesting

by Matt Reichard

**WHEN THE ANNOUNCEMENT** went out that a group of white supremacists were planning a rally in Charlottesville, Virginia under the name “Unite the Right” for August 2017, one of the first groups to form a counter-protest was the local clergy. They organized, despite theological differences, and put forth an effort to meet the hatred of the white supremacists with the peaceful message of Christ’s love for all people of all skin colors and backgrounds. The church, once again, led the way peacefully protesting the unfair and dehumanizing treatment of a minority group.

Christians have a long history of being among the leaders of peaceful protests in America. After missing the mark and supporting slavery for some time, the majority of the church finally woke up and led the way toward desegregation and equal rights for minorities. Most famously, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. led a movement fueled by clergy and people of faith that ultimately led to changes to the laws and American society. The nonviolent protests of people of faith directly led to righting injustices.

Today we are called to practice nonviolence in the same way. There is a misconception that there are only two camps in which to belong: aggressive and/or violent, or passive and/or peaceful. The third way is the way of peaceful nonviolent action. It is not passive, or sitting back and not getting involved; it is using nonviolent methods to activate and inspire change. The clergy in Charlottesville had this in mind when they chose to work together and stand for justice rather than stay home and ignore the injustices being addressed in their city.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us that the peacemakers are blessed; they are the children of God. This isn’t a call to sit back, ignore, and do nothing when there is chaos all around us. It is a call to make peace. You cannot be a peacemaker without doing something; making implies doing. You’re not a watchmaker if you don’t actually make a watch and you’re not a peacemaker if you don’t actually make peace.

Active peacemaking is easier than we sometimes think, especially when we are talking about the racial divide in America. While there is a time and a place for the church to publicly protest and rally around those who are oppressed in the culture, there also is a place for smaller peacemaking practices. Individual churches and individual believers have a responsibility to actively make peace.

One of the largest racial divides in America comes on Sunday mornings. The first step that any individual believer and any local church can take towards changing the racial divide is to stop being divided by race themselves. Black churches and white churches can do a lot to bring communities together if they choose to work together on outreach and service projects. This is an easy way to start to heal any potential rifts between races in the community. When we work and serve together, we learn to appreciate and celebrate the diversity we have instead of looking at it as something that divides us. We tear down walls and we build up bridges.

Individual believers can also do simple things to make peace in their own communities. There is no shortage of ways to serve people in need in most communities and believers should be involved in some way in that service. Families can also make friends with families of other races and ethnic backgrounds. A simple invitation to dinner to a family of a different ethnic background can open doors to understanding and acceptance of the diversity that surrounds us. We breakdown the stereotypes we have about groups when we get to know members of those groups as individuals. This is a step towards peacemaking; we learn to empathize with them and see their burdens as our burdens.

On a larger scale, the church should continue to lead the way in peacefully working to make a difference for those suffering or being oppressed. We should always be willing to stand up for those who need our support. Sometimes that will mean calling our representatives and senators. Sometimes it will mean showing up at a rally supporting equal-

ity for all citizens. It might mean marching in the streets with brothers and sisters of different backgrounds to show that we stand with them while others stand against them. Peacemaking is active and engaged—anything but passive.

There is a long history of protests helping to bring about change in our society. We know the work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in the area of civil rights. We have seen unity marches drive out white supremacist marches in recent months across America. We saw peaceful protests by suffragettes ultimately result in women being given the right to vote. One reason that peaceful protests work is because math works: the majority almost always wins in the end. And generally, people are more likely to be involved in peaceful protests than violent one.

Nonviolent peacemaking is an important role of the church. We are called by Jesus to serve the least of those amongst us, those who are often outcasts. The call is not only to individual believers, but to the church at large all over the world. Active peacemaking by the church will tip the scales toward justice, and followers of Christ must lead the way.

*Matt Reichard serves in Haiti and is a member of The Meetinghouse Carlisle (PA).*

# Marching for Peace: Did It Make a Difference?

By Harriet Bicksler with Karen Deyhle

**LOOKING BACK MORE** than 45 years to the days when she protested the Vietnam War as a college student, Karen Hostetler Deyhle has no regrets. She believes that what she did was right, and may have contributed in a small way to the eventual end of the war. Karen was a student at Messiah College from 1969-1973, years when the war was winding down, but still killing thousands of people—American servicemen and women, North and South Vietnamese soldiers, and Vietnamese civilians—for reasons that increasingly made no sense. Like many other college students in those days, Karen participated in demonstrations and marches against a war she believed was unjust, immoral, and unwinnable.

Karen's anti-war stance comes as no surprise. Her paternal grandfather, Eli Hostetler, who grew up Amish, refused to put on a uniform during World War I and served as a hospital orderly in a U.S. army boot camp. Her maternal grandfather's story is more well-known among the Brethren in Christ. As a young man in Ontario, Canada, former Bishop E. J. Swalm also refused to put on a uniform when he was ordered by the Canadian army to report for duty. For his refusal, he was arrested, jailed, and threatened with being shot. He expected to be jailed for the duration of the war but was released after four months. (You can read his full story in his book, *Nonresistance Under Test*.)

Years later, when Karen was protesting the Vietnam War, her Grandpa Swalm was one of her strongest supporters. At Messiah, only six weeks after classes started, she participated in the moratorium that was part of a nationwide initiative to skip classes and hold events to protest the war. A large bell was mounted on a central grassy area and student volunteers tolled the bell day and night. Karen soon became an active member of the Peace Society which sponsored trips to several peace marches, not only locally in Carlisle (where the Army War College is located) and Harrisburg, the state capital, but also in Washington, DC. When four college students were killed by the National Guard

during an anti-war protest at Kent State University in May 1970, Karen helped to organize a vigil on the Messiah campus. At a central location four fires were lit in memory of the four students who were killed. Members of the Peace Society kept the fires going for several days. Many students also wore black armbands in honor of the students who were killed. (This protest and others are documented in Paul Nisly's book, *Shared Faith. Bold Vision. Enduring Promise: The Maturing Years of Messiah College*, 2010).

One time, Karen remembers, she wanted to go to a peace march but knew she would miss an important chemistry assignment. She went to the professor and asked him whether he would excuse her from class because she felt she should join the march. The teacher asked her a key question, "Ten years from now, will it be more important that you went to the peace march or attended class?" Karen chose the peace march, and says that this same question has often helped her make decisions in the years since.

When the Peace Society organized a bus trip to Washington for a peace march, Karen helped make large banners and signs to carry at the march. She and her fellow students wanted to make the point that people who were against the war were not just hippies and pot-smokers; many of them were conscientiously opposed to war because of their Christian commitment. Karen and the other students also participated in training on how to respond to police if they were confronted and/or arrested, where to meet if they were separated, and how to prepare themselves emotionally. Karen made a point of not wearing contact lenses to the march because of the possibility of being tear-gassed. She notes that the huge marches in Washington generally weren't violent, even though she was always aware that the National Guard was ready behind the scenes to intervene if called.

Karen says that she was not fully aware of all the politics of the war, but she didn't trust the government to be honest; the war was started for the wrong reasons, wasn't

winnable, plus the Vietnamese people generally didn't want us there. At Messiah while there were a significant number of students who were actively against the war, it seemed that the majority did support the anti-war movement but were not active. On the campus, there was also a small minority who supported the war and one time mounted their own counter-protest.

At the time, Karen thought that the peace movement was making a difference, and even though she took her college studies seriously, she also felt that her peace activism was important. She believed then, and still believes, that Christians participating may have helped to make the protests more peaceful, and she appreciated being part of a college that was supportive. Periodically, peace speakers were invited to campus to speak in chapel, laying out the biblical foundations for peace and nonviolence. Martin Schrag, a faculty member in the Bible and Religion Department, sometimes spoke and was very influential in the anti-war movement at Messiah, helping many students understand and adopt the peace position.

During these years, Karen received letters from her Grandpa Swalm in which he always asked how things were going and would tell Karen and her boyfriend Dan (now her husband) that he was proud they were involved with the peace movement. Karen's parents were also supportive, and never asked her to "tone down" her protests, even though her dad was pastor at the Grantham Church on campus where people on "both sides" attended. At the 1970 Brethren in Christ General Conference in California, Karen and E. J. were part of an intergenerational evening program and talked about peace and what was happening at Messiah College in opposition to the war. E. J. said how glad he was to hear that there were still people who were conscientious objectors to war. As they parted at the end of their presentation, Karen flashed the peace sign to her aging grandfather from another generation of peacemakers. The audience erupted in laughter and applause.

Recently Karen and her husband watched the entire Ken Burns PBS television documentary on the Vietnam War. During the episode telling the story of the design and building of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC., she became very emotional. She said, “I find that I grieve for those soldiers in a way I have never felt for veterans of other wars. I don’t think it is just because they are closer to my age. I think it is because I felt then and believe still that, more than other wars, Vietnam was from beginning to end just so wrong and U.S. involvement was useless and wasteful in every way. It disgusts me the way presidents lied and their egos

were so much behind most of it. Those soldiers who died in vain feel so real to me, and seeing their names spreading across those granite walls just gripped my heart. I can see why it is such an emotional experience for relatives and former army buddies to visit the wall.”

She went on, “I don’t feel like one of the women they interviewed who had been an anti-war activist. She apologized for what she had said against soldiers and veterans during the war. I didn’t say or chant mean things (like ‘baby killers’), but I did believe the war was wrong and U.S. involvement was evil, and I believed that my involvement in the

marches and demonstrations was important.” And she still believes she made the right decision that day when she chose to go to a peace march rather than to the chemistry class.

*Karen Deyhle and her husband Dan live half of each year in Mechanicsburg, PA, and attend the Harrisburg Brethren in Christ Church. The other half of the year they serve in Goa, India. The editor interviewed Karen for this article.*

## Heaven’s Ambassadors

By Zach Spidel

**HOW ARE CHRISTIANS** in modern, pluralist, democratic states meant to relate to those states? Phrased in this way, the question sounds dry and academic. It is anything but. Phrased in this way, we might think the answer can simply be looked up with a quick reference to scripture (Romans 12 and Matthew 5 if you lean one way, Romans 13 and Matthew 22:21 if you lean another), but if scripture by itself could solve this question neatly, then we would not still be wrestling with it. And yet, here we are. At least, here I am, wrestling—as I have been for a long time—with this question, honestly leery of many of the answers on offer from various quarters of the church.

First, there are of course the many who believe the relationship of Christians in America to the American state is an entirely unproblematic one. A prominent evangelical church recently hosted Donald Trump in their mega-sized sanctuary and performed a newly written “hymn” entitled “Make America Great Again” in honor of the President (and, supposedly, of God). I believe few in our own church family find this vision of a Christian’s relationship to the state and its representatives convincing.

But there are milder versions of this syncretism, on both the left and the right—all of which seem equally dangerous to me—if

not more so, due to their greater subtlety. There are those who think that Christians participation in a liberal democratic state, if conducted without deceit or (local) violence is a good, perhaps even an obligatory part of being a disciple of Christ. I’m not so sure. The liberal democratic order is one which operates on the necessity of violence and the ubiquity of greed; it inherently relativizes all evaluative and moral claims except for the inviolability of the individual’s right to choose their own meaning, their own morals, their own destiny. For this reason, America finds itself with both unprecedented levels of wealth inequality and with deep and deepening confusion about gender and sexuality (these essential human realities having been stripped of any objective and external significance apart from what individuals internally grant them). These two facts of American life (one economic, one sexual) are different sides of the same coin. The West’s current condition is not an accident; it is the full flowering of the liberal democratic order’s inherent nature.

Does the degeneracy of the wider society mean, then, that Christians are to be quiet separatists, focused on heaven while enduring here on earth? I confess this option seems appealing to me in our current moment. The



Bruderhof (follow them on Twitter—yes, Twitter!) provides a compelling example of what such a community can look like and the value such a witness can have. I am truly grateful God has called the Bruderhof to the form of life he has. Yet I do not believe, ultimately, that this option can be a model for all Christ’s people in a society like ours—not, at least, to the extent that the Bruderhof live it.

Perhaps, then, we are meant to be activists, opposing the greed, violence, and individualism of the liberal democratic order? This, too, seems an attractive option. And there are also wonderful examples of this way to be found right now. Open up Twitter again and search for Shane Claiborne; you’ll quickly find many such examples in his feed—Christians organizing against the death penalty, Christians collecting hundreds of heroin needles off the street and presenting them to local leaders as a powerful inducement to get working on the opioid epidemic, Christians melting guns down and turning them into garden implements—lit-



erally enacting Isaiah 2:4. This is beautiful stuff and I thank God for these prophetic confrontations with fallen powers of our age. But there are too many who think that this sort of activism (or simply “liking” it on social media) is all there is to the socio-political component of Christian faith. Such activism is not and cannot become the whole, or even the center, of our engagement with the fallen powers of our age.

What, then, should provide that center? Perhaps it will seem facile to say, but I believe the center of our socio-political witness is meant to be the church herself. I believe this was Jesus’ intention and the early church’s practice. I believe this is the insight recovered by the first Anabaptists and carried forward by their descendants, including the first Brethren in Christ. It is a conviction that

needs to be rediscovered in each generation (as well as reinterpreted and reapplied). Christians aren’t meant to be earthly nationalists, nor are they to identify themselves as a part of the fallen powers of their age. But they also cannot simply secede from their age, or march as individuals into the midst of its conflicts armed only with their personal dissatisfaction and individual convictions. Rather, Christians are meant to build up the church as an alternative society, run according to an alternative political paradigm—that of Jesus! They are meant to build this alternative society within the wider society and in intimate relation with it—that relation being the relation of a foreign embassy to a host nation.

We are nationalists of heaven, living together under heaven’s laws and on what

counts as heaven’s land within the embassy. The embassy gates are open wide, and many come into our midst just as we often go out, all with an eye to achieving our homeland’s strategic goals of salvation and redemption—of God’s will done on earth as it is in heaven. Living together in this way, we will have plenty to learn from both the Bruderhof about how to build up the internal strength of the embassy, and from the activists about how to engage the wider world in its fallenness. But we won’t really be separatists or activists; we’ll be a community of ambassadors.

*Zach Spidel is the pastor of The Shepherd’s Table congregation in Dayton, OH.*

## Using Our Feet for Jesus

By Peggy Mumper

*“Christ has no body on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ’s compassion for the world is to look out; yours are the feet with which He is to go about doing good; and yours are the hands with which He is to bless us now.” - Teresa of Avila*

**WE ARE CALLED** to be the hands and feet of Jesus. We are called to seek justice for the oppressed. We are called to live peacefully with others. We are called to so many things that we may grow weary in well-doing. We need many people confronting the evil and injustice in the world with many tools and in many forums and in many ways. By approaching from multiple directions, we amplify the voices of the oppressed and marginalized.

Some Sundays I sit and worship. Other Sundays I could teach a toddler class or be part of a worship team or run a sound board. Which of these activities is most valid? Which could we do without? Which represents service to God and others? They are all forms of service—even sitting in the crowd where I can see a friend and pray for her son or note the prayer list in the bulletin or put

an offering in the plate. I can be a reminder that we do not live this life alone, suffer alone or carry our burdens alone.

So why attend the Women’s March on Washington on a chilly January day? What purpose did it serve? Was it useful if I walked with people who carried signs I didn’t agree with or thought were vulgar? Did the march create change? How did my individual presence then make any difference now to the growing list of intimidations, overt acts of hatred and violence, and the simmering pot of fear and rage that spill out daily? Why attend a march organized by secular organizations? (The simple and profound answer to this last question is, of course, because “the church” did not.)

I sat with these questions before the march and still do. Answers are both simple and complex. I went because my daughter asked me to go. I went because I am not called to live comfortably in a bubble with church people. Jesus did not take his disciples out among “believer only” crowds. In the crowds in Jesus’ day were people wounded by the religious elite, trampled by the government, overlooked by those in authority—the same type of crowd that gathered in Wash-

ington, D.C. on January 21, 2017, one day into a presidency that many feared would be filled with discord, rancor, and acts of aggression toward marginalized people.

In January, my daughter Beth suggested attending the march. I dread the cold and I get claustrophobic in crowds, but Beth made the two of us sweatshirts with Maya Angelou’s words on the back:

It’s the fire in my eyes,  
And the flash of my teeth,  
The swing in my waist,  
And the joy in my feet.

I’m a woman phenomenally.”

We also shopped for pink hats. The pink hat was a way of saying “I am in Washington today to march with others demanding justice.” One pink hat couldn’t accomplish that; hundreds of thousands of pink hats amplified that unity.

My husband attended with us and we drove from Harrisburg to Maryland to ride the Metro into the city. We were there early and the station was already becoming crowded with people. We saw elderly women, parents with children, and a business colleague. We heard young people and college students talking about driving through

the night from Ohio or Michigan or New York. The day was cold but filled with sunshine and we chatted and absorbed the incredible vibration of humanity poised to make history. The atmosphere was buoyant and electric with excitement.

Many signs advocated resistance, which conjured thoughts of those who worked in the shadows during World War II, which led to thoughts of Christ's followers going into hiding after the crucifixion. The world had turned against them and this man of peace abandoned them in his death. They had shouted hosannas to a king and now they were alone with all these revolutionary ideas he had taught them. How could they turn the other cheek? How could the meek, the poor in spirit, the peacemakers be blessed when death had won such a victory? How could they resist the overwhelming government and religious powers set up against marginalized people? How do I?

My husband and I show up for vigils and demonstrations and marches because we believe in the gospel message to love our neighbor. When the shootings in Orlando brought new and intense terror to the LGBTQ+ community we went to our neighbors to offer love and support. What does it cost me to stand with hurting people?

What does it cost me to join hands with gay couples and transgendered neighbors and say you should not be shot at or beaten or cursed or kept from living your lives? What does it cost me to walk a few blocks of city streets with my fellow citizens to give them courage and hope and strength in numbers? What does it cost me? Here's what I gained. One speaker reminded me to call my sister and her partner who might also be feeling more fear. I reached out to them that day because the LGBTQ+ community reminded me to do a kindness, just as my church, my friends, and my faith community do. How much we are alike. Breaking down barriers that keep us apart in the church is more work that we need to do.

Attending a protest is an important tool in the wide-ranging work of seeking justice and allowing for all voices to be heard in our society. A big show of numbers gets media attention and brings issues of prison reform or education improvements before a larger segment of society. Large numbers also lend support to those doing the hard work of advocacy on a daily basis.

After the Metro released the crowd of us into streets teeming with pink hats, signs, men, women, and children, we made our way up a few streets in a vain attempt to meet up

with some of my family. Cell phones were useless in a crowd that size. We settled into a place to stand for the next hours. We were too far away to hear the speakers and we kept waiting for the actual march to begin. We wanted to pour out into the streets and demonstrate that a huge group had gathered to show our concern about where our country might go in the coming months. We were frustrated that we couldn't move because we were shoulder to shoulder with so many people! Later we would learn that our numbers completely filled the march route. There was nowhere for us to march because we were the march. Every step on the route was filled with feet (and wheelchairs and walkers and strollers).

We stopped for dinner on our way home and a young woman in military dress spotted our hats and sweatshirts and guessed where we had been. "We aren't allowed to attend anything like that," she told us quietly. "But believe me, I would have been with you." I said we would be praying for her and she squeezed my hand.

*Peggy Mumperr attends the Harrisburg (PA) Brethren in Christ Church..*

## MCC Advocates for Legal Paths to Citizenship

*By Laura Thomas*

"A STATUS CAN mean everything," says Rachel Diaz, an immigration attorney in Florida who consults with individuals on behalf of Mennonite Central Committee's (MCC's) East Coast region. And this is true for Dmarcos, a young client. Dmarcos' last name is withheld at his request.

People like Dmarcos, brought as children to the U.S. without legal status and known as "Dreamers," face great obstacles to getting an education, obtaining legal employment and, eventually, beginning families of their own.

Diaz has been working with Dmarcos since he was 15, the youngest age he could apply for Deferred Action for Childhood

Arrivals (DACA) status. Young people with DACA status have received temporary but renewable permission to stay in the U.S. for two years and the opportunity to work legally.

MCC East Coast program director Andrew Bodden says, "For many Dreamers, this is the only way they can stay legally in the country, the only avenue for family income and support for education. Those with DACA status will avoid deportation to a country that most DACA recipients are not familiar with, because this country (the U.S.) is what they really know as home."

The process of applying for DACA status

can be complicated.

"Helping a client understand the process tends to be the most difficult, followed closely by getting the needed supporting documentation," says Diaz.

"We find that most of the young kids we help understand the value of having this legal status," she states. "They all take a deep breath of relief when they get it. Living in fear and threat of deportation is not a desired way of life for anyone."

The difficult application process became much more challenging when the federal government announced on September 5 that



the DACA program will be phased out starting in six months. The move shocked Dreamers like Dmarcos and puts nearly 700,000 youth and young adults at risk of deportation, loss of employment and separation from their families.

Yet even DACA recipients have no path to permanent legal status in the U.S. The Dream Act, a bill first introduced in Congress in 2001 and reintroduced this year in a similar form, would change that.

The White House recently released a set of policies it would like to see paired with this year's Dream Act. These policies include the hiring of 10,000 additional immigration agents, more stringent border security, tougher laws for those seeking asylum, reduced immigration, denial of federal grants to "sanctuary cities" and other measures. But Dreamers and advocates, including MCC, are pushing for "clean" passage, which will provide Dreamers with a direct path to potential citizenship.

Tammy Alexander, senior legislative associate at the MCC U.S. Washington Office, says, "Passage of the Dream Act should not be tied to border security or increased immigration enforcement measures. Protecting Dreamers must not come at the cost of additional anti-immigrant measures that serve



*Dmarcos was brought as a child to the U.S., without legal status. With help from MCC East Coast immigration attorney Rachel Diaz, he achieved Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status and is now attending university. Dmarcos' last name is not provided at his request. MCC photo/Andrew Bodden.*

only to terrorize communities and needlessly separate families."

Alexander emphasizes, "It is important to remember that DACA recipients are a mere

fraction of the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants currently in the U.S., 60 percent of whom have been here for more than 10 years. We must work hard to protect not only Dreamers but also the millions of mothers and fathers who are in danger of being torn from their homes and their loved ones."

Because of his DACA status and further help from Diaz as he tackled the complex process of applying for college scholarships, Dmarcos began studying architecture this fall. For now, his legal status and path to a hope-filled future continue, but under a cloud of uncertainty as the future of the DACA program remains at risk.

*This article is courtesy of Mennonite Central Committee's news service, and highlights one aspect of the Brethren in Christ partnership with MCC. Rachel Diaz, the attorney featured in the article, is Brethren in Christ and lives in the Miami (FL) area.*

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yourselves. Do what it says," (James 1:22).

One of the main ways we've guided the church in its internal work has been organizing opportunities to reflect and discuss. Over the summer, we hosted discussions using Drew Hart's *The Trouble I've Seen: Changing the Way the Church Views Racism* as a starting point. We broke into groups and had discussions around the question, "How has whiteness affected your life?" Some of us are white and some of us are not, but by asking this question we looked at the ways race has affected our lives personally and generationally. By guiding our church in these types of discussions, we hope to make ourselves aware of the sin of racism so that the church can be ready to act.

And we have acted. Our church has marched with others in demonstrations, and connected to other faith communities and

organizations doing justice work in the city. One of the themes that we've engaged with this year is mass incarceration. We felt called to this issue because we take Jesus at his word when he calls us to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and care for those in prison, but also because we see firsthand the way the policing system and mass incarceration affects our neighbors and our city. We organized an event with other organizations to discuss the school-to-prison pipeline, and how it affects us. Now, in the coming weeks, we'll be having a festival event to raise money for the Philadelphia Community Bail-Out Fund. We're using the event to make people aware of the unjust cash bail and racist incarceration system, and raising money to free black mothers and fathers who remain in jail without a conviction simply because they are poor.

Our hope is that this is a starting place for

our church. There have certainly been times when we've felt discouraged by the magnitude of the problem we face—a system of sin that was born out of colonial white supremacy, which built whole societies on genocide and enslavement, and continues to murderously afflict black and brown lives. As Paul says in Ephesians, our struggle is against the powers and authorities (Eph. 6:12), and it can be hard to see past them sometimes to the hope that we're promised. Even so, we keep faith in Jesus, who invites us to join him in the work he began, and promises to sustain us until that work is complete.

*Andrew Yang is a disability attorney in Philadelphia, PA, and a member of Circle of Hope. He is one of the leaders of the Circle Mobilizing Because Black Lives Matter compassion team.*

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## A Two-Pronged Approach: *Contemplation and Action*

By Andrew Yang

**IN 2015, MY** church, Circle of Hope, formed a compassion team called Circle Mobilizing Because Black Lives Matter. Racial justice has long been one of the principles of our church, but the idea was for the Circle Mobilizing team to explicitly embody this idea. As Circle Mobilizing, our goal has been to lead our church in actively resisting a society that does not value black lives. This has taken the form of both direct action (participating in protests and demonstrations) and internal organization (creating spaces where we can learn about the ways that racism shapes our society).

One of the difficult things we've dealt with as a team is the attitude that our work is somehow peripheral to the work of the church—that the church's true aim is evangelism and facilitating worship for the people who attend, and that everything else is adjacent to those things. "How's your spiritual life?" a friend once asked me, and when I talked about the work I was doing with the Circle Mobilizing team and talked about my apprehensions and joys in the work, he repeated his question, looking for a different kind of answer. He wanted to know about prayer, Bible study, and Sunday service.

I'm not surprised by this attitude. In my experience, churches are good at emphasizing the inward disciplines like prayer and study, and providing space for corporate worship and celebration, while relegating service to a supplementary role. In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas contrasted what he called the active life, laboring for others, with the contemplative life of cultivating an awareness of God. He concluded that the contemplative life was superior because it's more directly centered on God, and this attitude has persisted since.

With respect to Aquinas, we haven't found this attitude useful. In James' epistle, he points out that the active and contemplative life are bound together symbiotically. He points out the hypocrisy of faith which has no active expression: "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead," (James 2:26).

Our team, in leading the church to think about and fight for racial justice, has had to incorporate both the active and contemplative life and hold them together—both prayer and protest, both meditation and public engagement. In doing the work of racial justice, we believe in the gospel as Jesus

proclaims it: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor," (Luke 4:18). In believing in this good news, we express this belief with our lives as it overflows from us. As Jesus says, "the mouth speaks what the heart is full of" (Luke 6:45). In our personal lives, and our corporate life as a church, we have no choice but to live out God's concern for injustice and his good news of liberation if our hearts are filled with it.

With this in mind, Circle Mobilizing Because Black Lives Matter has a two-pronged approach, emphasizing both the contemplative and active lives. We want to make sure that our church is educated about the ways that the sins of racism and white supremacy are part of our society, and cultivate a closeness to God so we can identify sin when we see it within us and in the world. We also want to act against that sin, challenging and resisting it in public ways. As James says, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive

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