

The Witness

Volume 75 • Number 8/9 • September 1992



Harvesting rural America:

Alternative farms

Mountain harvests

Genetically-engineered food

Abortion

WHAT A DISAPPOINTMENT to read your viewpoint as expressed in the conversation with Carter Heyward about abortion rights. The change in the editorial policy of *The Witness* is not only personally disturbing but causes me deep concern as a member of the Executive Board of the Episcopal Women's Caucus. The EWC has long supported a woman's right to make such a decision for herself; indeed we see the issue as a first amendment example and wonder what has happened to the magazine we counted on to champion the cause of freedom wherever and whenever it is threatened.

More than 15 years ago the Caucus adopted a statement of support for a woman's right to obtain an abortion without the interference of national or state legislatures. We are a contributing member of the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights and proud of it. The statement, reaffirmed in 1990, declares that "all should be free to exercise their own consciences...and that where widely differing views are held, the particular belief of one religious body should not be forced on those who believe otherwise."

That is the heart of the matter and a point of view that you appeared unable to comprehend.

Carter Heyward certainly tried to reach you, but you seemed intent on looking at this complex and global subject through simplistic and narrow eyes. To generalize out of the thinking of a few friends and acquaintances cannot be the rationale for an editorial policy affecting the hundreds of thousands of women driven to a decision to choose abortion because of the conditions of the pregnancy and of their lives.

Marge Christie
Member, Executive Board
Episcopal Women's Caucus
Franklin Lakes, NJ

I AM WRITING TO COMMEND your great courage in your conversation with Carter Heyward about abortion. You never stated

directly whether you feel *Roe vs. Wade* should be reversed so that abortion is illegal. If this is your view, I do not agree, but I do agree with almost everything you said in the dialogue.

Above all, I thank you for clearly stating that "our society makes it very difficult for people to be whole people and parents. And that the corporate work environment in this country, more so than most industrialized nations, does not make room for mothers." Heyward's confusion over this observation reflects how little attention is given to this crucial point in most discussions of women's issues. You are absolutely right that an earlier generation of feminists made it possible for strong assertive educated women to make a mark in the world — if they were childless. Unfortunately society still barely allows men to be good parents and pursue an absorbing career, let alone women.

I agree with you that abortion is often undertaken too lightly, and if it could be made a little more difficult to obtain without unfairly discriminating against poor and young women, I would be glad. Like you, I would rather that no one ever resorted to abortion, and I agree that it is a horrifying reflection on the society.

However my state court has recently imposed several restrictions on abortion. I was deeply disturbed by two of the Pennsylvania restrictions. The waiting period is a serious burden for women too poor to take more time off from work or to pay for an extra night's stay in a large town far from home. Even more serious is the requirement for parental consent. If there is any reason justifying an abortion, it is to protect young girls from being cast out or receiving damaging treatment by their parents.

I am four years younger than Carter Heyward and eight years older than you, so *Roe vs. Wade* happened when I was in college. Certainly before that I can remember knowing that one could very possibly lose everything in life if one were so foolish as to be found pregnant. Many people still spoke of contraceptives as if they were equivalent to abortion. In most parts of the country today, I think we are seeing the opposite extreme. Some pro-life people are bending over backwards to be lenient about sexual irresponsibility so that no one will be frightened into an

abortion. I do not think it will ever work to be lenient about the cause (both sexes' irresponsibility) but punish people (that is, women only) for the consequence.

Anne Ramirez
Springfield, PA

TO HAVE THE *WITNESS* abandon the strong [stand] for reproductive freedom that has characterized this journal for at least two decades is tragic. For this to happen at a time when pro-choice people are struggling to maintain that freedom against efforts by a President, courts, legislatures and mobs to destroy it leaves many of us feeling deserted and betrayed. To have such a stance appear in the same issue with excellent articles on other subjects seems as incongruous and absurd as would be the appearance of an article defending capital punishment or the war in the Persian Gulf.

I realize that the article on *Abortion Rights* was a dialogue that contained Carter Heyward's able defense of the pro-choice position. But this hardly compensates for the loss of editorial support. You need only to consult your files to note the thorough treatment of the theological and ethical aspects of abortion.

You ask "Where is God in this mix?" This is indeed a question all of us must face in many of life's ambiguities. It is not adequately answered by any facile implication that God wills the continuance of every pregnancy or the birth of every child.

While fully respecting your right to express your editorial opinions freely I hope that members of the Board of Directors will make their own positions clear, publicly and unequivocally.

George W. Barrett
Santa Barbara, CA

CHEERS FOR *THE WITNESS* (June/July '92) challenge to all sorts of "givens," including the *Wall Street Journal* stereotype that Episcopalians prefer our own stuffy propriety to exploring, with care and integrity, honest differences of heart and mind. It is doing precisely what Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann says, on page 14 of the same issue, a Church ought to be doing: continuing to be one of the last places on earth that



“honors the ambiguity and complexities of human life.” The conversation with Carter Heyward, and the decision to hold *The Witness*’ 75th anniversary at Trinity School of Theology seem to expressly preserve the edge of conscience and calling that is the gift of our Episcopal version of the Body of Christ — “that odd community with all its pathology, that keeps raising human questions” (Brueggemann again). I wanted you to know that your explanation of the Trinity Decision made my heart leap. On all levels: the decision itself, the words in which you clothe it, and the honest insight it reveals. God bless you. You give me hope for the world after what my generation has done to it.

Joanna B. Gillespie
Core Faculty, Bangor Theological
Seminary at Hanover, NH

SINCE YOUR RECENT CHANGE of staff, format and direction, I have been trying to evaluate fairly whether I wished to continue my subscription. The June/July 1992 issue’s Abortion Rights “conversation” resolved my question. Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann’s arrogant, “I know what is best for everyone” attitude, her refusal to consider that another woman should be allowed to make a decision for herself if it differed from Ms. Wylie-Kellermann’s, is totally unacceptable to me. There are *many* of us who are as intelligent as she and as capable of making a rational decision about abortion, as well as many other subjects. Neither God nor any human agency appointed her to force her view of right and wrong on anyone else, or to claim that she knows more than anyone who disagrees with her. She has every right to try to influence others to agree with her way of thinking, but NO right to demand that all be forced by law to do so.

Incidentally, I am 77 years old and will continue for the rest of my life to fight for the right of my daughters, grand-daughters, and great-grand-daughters to make their own intelligent decisions on this and all other subjects.

Jane O. Johnson
Denver, CO

WHEN I WAS 21, and married to a poor Polish musician, I quite accidentally got preg-

nant. We both knew we were probably going to be very poor all our lives, and Roger was adamant about getting the baby aborted. So we sold everything we possibly could to accumulate \$300 and made arrangements. The night we were going out the door to taxi over to this guy a friend had found, I told Roger I left something in the apartment, and when he went back inside I ran down the stairs, jumped into the cab and took off for my parents’ home. The baby was ever so luckily (for me and him) adopted by a family member. Each time I look at him I shudder to think of the sink he might have been washed down that night.

You feel this Life inside you... It doesn’t matter if you are three months or six or eight. It’s just there. You can’t play games with that. And you know, if you dump it, there will be a huge black hole inside which nothing can ever fill again. I think it’s probably crummy to give away your kid — but I’d rather do that than kill one.

Roger moved out, of course, and I worked all through my pregnancy right up to the day I delivered. I was so poor I didn’t even have milk to drink. I was sad. I was scared. But it was worth it.

I’m pro-choice, and always will be. One childhood friend lost a sister to a botched abortion; one dear friend I carried myself in my arms down the stairs at 3 a.m. while she was hemorrhaging to death from another. I believe a woman has a right to decide for herself what she can handle. But I also believe abortion is thoroughly abominable, and that a society which forgets that has lost its soul. The most hideous aspect of the whole issue, however, is the ferocity displayed by both sides, which totally precludes compassion or understanding. You are right in your assertions that people with differences must gather in toleration. Closed minds create bullies and no bully ever found themselves on God’s side in anything.

Name Withheld
Wisconsin

BRAVO! I WAS EXHILARATED by Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann’s unwillingness to be “boxed in,” insistence on open thoughtful dialogue about hard topics, and earned wisdom in this issue!!

Norvene Vest
Altadena, CA

YOU HAVE ANSWERED MY QUESTION of several months ago regarding your position on abortion. Carter Heyward in her dialogue with you in that article stated clearly what used to be the viewpoint of the *Witness*. Your argument by comparison seemed a bit woolly and didn’t really meet Carter Heyward’s adequately.

I am more disappointed than I can say that you have moved the *Witness* in the pro life direction; in so doing you have joined forces with the Roman Catholic crazies and the off the wall born agains.

It is too bad as you have done some really good things since you have been editor/publisher.

As a former staff person on the magazine I know you are out of sync with the policy of the past.

E. Lawrence Carter
Sierra Madre, CA

THE COMMENTS AND JUDGMENT expressed in the letter of E. Lawrence Carter in the April issue (“if...you are pro life, *The Witness* is in deep trouble” and “many of your readers are pro choice and would cancel their subscriptions were this to be a fact that the editor was found to be pro life”) is indicative of a major problem in the church today (indeed in the entire country as well).

Are our beliefs so shallow that we cannot afford to be exposed to a differing view? Are we so absolutely certain of our own rightness that we cannot admit that another view may have some value?

Dorothy W. Spaulding
McLean, VA

I’VE JUST FINISHED READING the conversation between you and Carter Heyward on abortion. As we Quakers say, you really “spoke to my condition.” I admire your magazine very much for including this piece. *Please, please* can you tell me more about the Common Ground movement? It is what I’ve been seeking.

Keep up the good (but difficult) work.

Donna Foley
Yardley, PA

[In Missouri, contacts for Common Ground are Loretta Wagner (314) 391-1688; and Jean

Cavender (314) 367-0300.]

IT IS POSSIBLE TO TAKE [an alternative] point of view; one that would accept the reality of life at conception, and that abortion destroys that life, but that would also accept that this choice — even though it is a sin — is, in some instances, a better one than bringing the pregnancy to term. The problem is that the definition of “sin” is far too limited. Each of us, knowingly or unknowingly, willingly or unwillingly; makes daily choices that can be defined as sin; indeed choices that may well result in the deaths of children.

We go out to dinner, and in so doing spend the equivalent of a week’s pay for a worker in a Mexican auto plant, yet resent the fact that immigrant labor comes North for better paying work. We vote policies to punitively limit welfare grants, as a way to balance the budget of a nation whose tax policies have fattened the pockets of the rich. We use sex to sell everything from perfume to automobiles, and then condemn the children who respond to these suggestive messages. We fill our airwaves and television screens with trash and wonder why our nation has a growing population of illiterates. We buy food that is layered in packaging that will burden us to the seventh generation, and salve our consciences with a trip to the recycling center.

There is no way to live a sinless life. If each of us concentrated fully on our own complicity in systems and policies that are death-dealing rather than life-giving, and do all that we can to “live simply, so that others may simply live,” we would not have the energy, or the need, to focus so singularly on the personal, and agonizing, choices of others.

Mary S. Webber
St. Louis, MO

JUST A NOTE TO THANK YOU for having the courage to publish your conversation re: abortion with Carter Heyward. I hope it will get the favorable response it deserves.

Harold Henderson
LaPorte, IN

Trinity Forum

I LOVE THE NEW LIFE that is present in *The Witness*. I love the inclusion of more Biblical theology and a grounding of progres-

sive stands in Scripture and tradition.

What has gotten me to write, however, is your willingness to meet with Trinity on October 24. The thought of Trinity School for Ministry makes me nervous. I know that there is much inspiration of the Holy Spirit in a meeting of *The Witness* and Trinity. Maybe the Episcopal Church really can lead Christianity in finding ways for opposite sides to talk to each other. We are united in Christ and in baptism and in the love of God. The church is not a debate team. Maybe God can help us see through our blindness when we sit down together.

David Hoover
Irvin, CA

PLEASE ACCEPT A SALUTE for planning an invasion of Trinity School for Ministry — for learning and reconciliation. I plan to be present if possible.

Bennett J. Sims
Hendersonville, NC

I HAVE JUST FINISHED reading Scott Peck’s *The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace* where he points out the fact that we find integrity in integration. That in a given community we must ask what is missing. The idea to have the magazine’s 75th anniversary at Trinity, Ambridge is WONDERFUL...an attempt at including, to put in what is missing. I congratulate and uphold the kind of loving and living such a risky venture shows. Now THAT is living up to your name!

Betsy Willis
Vilas, NC

WHILE NEARLY EVERY ISSUE of *Witness* brings something to delight me, nothing encourages me more than your announcement in the June/July issue of the 75th anniversary forum on evangelism to be held at Trinity School for Ministry.

I am not able to attend the forum myself, but want to commend you for initiating a dialogue with one of the several components of our Episcopal Church and I commend Trinity for offering hospitality. The move from contention to conversation is never easy, but this hard work is, I believe, the task God has set for us all now and for some years to

come. In this tangible act *The Witness* fully realizes its name and ministry. Thanks for exemplifying the marvelous witness that comes of meeting and engaging difference face to face.

Sam A. Portaro
Episcopal Chaplain, Brent House
Chicago, IL

Suicide Risks

ALTHOUGH IT’S DISTURBING that suicide is the second leading cause of death among teenagers (“Assessing Suicide Risks,” Andrew Weaver; June/July 1992), even more disturbing are the facts and figures surrounding *gay teen suicide* and the government cover-up of them.

According to a 1989 study first commissioned and then squelched by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), gay youth are *two to three times* more likely to attempt suicide than heterosexual youth. Indeed, up to *30 percent* of teenagers who do commit suicide are lesbian or gay.

Sean L. Avery
East Boston, MA

Survival

I NEED TO TELL YOU how delighted I am to have opened my first issue as a new subscriber and found an article by an incest survivor about her healing journey [Kim Kelleigh, June, 1992]. As an incest survivor myself, it is immensely satisfying and encouraging to read about others in contemporary publications, especially a Christian one, to help me know that I am not alone.

Please continue to have the courage to shine the light in this ugly corner of the world. Please use my full name and city — I am breaking silence!

Ray Riess
Oakland, CA

Clowning

I HAVE TAKEN SEVERAL WORKSHOPS in clown ministry, but somehow I am a bit fearful, as I recall the words that “people might look at you and *think* you are a fool, so don’t open your mouth and *confirm* the fact.” Perhaps I should consider miming! Anyway I

wanted to tell you I loved the article and it gave me some courage.

**Sister Marie Arteal
Huntington, IN**

Ordination

THE MAY, 1992, ISSUE of *The Witness* brings fresh insights and questions to the Church about the ordination process. We have read it with particular interest since the Commission on Ministry of the Diocese of Michigan which we chair is in a process of self examination.

We take strong exception to one article, "Barriers to Ordination" by Julie Wortman. The use of the word "hoops" implies a gamey process of entry, set up by sadistic persons for their own reasons and satisfaction. In truth, all professions have entry requirements, both for education and experiential learning. Further, it should be noted that almost all the requirements to be met by our applicants are canonical, concrete and objective, and every attempt is made to act consistently and fairly with all applicants.

The variations in the process often come in working with applicants around discernment and their sense of "call" to ordained ministry. Our responsibility is to act in part of the Church's role, to assist the Bishop in "Preparing an evaluation of the applicant's qualifications to pursue a course of preparation for Holy Orders." (Canon III:4) This is a duty we take seriously, not a "hoop," and we try at all times and in every way to be pastoral in our work with applicants around this and other issues.

Granted, in the experience of applicants throughout the Church there are exceptions, and many have been tragic ones, to this practice and philosophy. But Wortman's article implies that these are more the rule than the exception.

**Ruth Clausen
Letetia Brown
Detroit, MI**

[Ed. Note: The word "hoop" was not used in Julie Wortman's article but in the accompanying graphics.]

ALTHOUGH THE PRESBYTERIAN Church differs from the Episcopal, I'm constantly amazed how the real issues that *The*

Witness addresses are ours as well as yours. I moderate the Committee on Preparation for Ministry here in Denver, and the issues you addressed in the May 1992 issue about ordination hit close to home.

Even though the Presbyterian Church has ordained women as Elders for 50 plus years, and as Ministers of Word and Sacrament for over 25 years, there are still roadblocks to face. Time after time I have to sit down with women candidates to explain that, even with our church history, calls for women are often very difficult to obtain. The "Barriers to Ordination" article and graphics were wonderful.

Also, at a time when our church is struggling with what ordination means, the "Ordained by Community" article is one I'm going to share with my friends. I really do appreciate your magazine.

**James L. Browne
Denver, CO**

Criticism

THIS WILL BE MY LAST RENEWAL unless the quality of articles improves. In the past you have had a good magazine, one that warranted my reading. Unfortunately that is no longer true. I am renewing with the assumption that you are still in transition and will improve during the coming year.

**John H. Heck
Paradise Valley, AZ**

THE WORK OF THE MAGAZINE seems to be losing a sharp prophetic edge (so much needed in this country!) to some sort of fuzzy spiritual perspective that to me seems very middle-of-the-road and unclear. Also, there is more of a focus on the Episcopal Church; I am not Episcopalian, but never felt excluded by your magazine until now. In the past, I have been strengthened and challenged by *The Witness* as I have worked in solidarity with the people of El Salvador. I am willing to listen to you for one more year in the hope that the firm ground you once had will be regained.

**Linda Crockett
Comunidad 22 de Abril
El Salvador**

Praise

THE MAGAZINE IS GETTING BETTER all the time, and it's beautiful.

**Grant M. Gallup
Managua, Nicaragua, C.A.**

AS A PRESBYTERIAN ELDER — who grew up Episcopalian — I particularly appreciate your coverage of lesbian/gay issues, as tumultuous in both my church homes. Keep up the good work.

**Leonard B. Murphy
San Antonio, TX**

I LOVE IT! Many thanks and keep up the good work.

**Sallie Shippen
Astoria, OR**



Corrections

Reader Marjorie Schier asked us to review the events leading to the death of Ben Linder, who was mentioned in the June book review. Linder was shot by the Contra while working on a small hydro-electric dam in Nicaragua and then shot fatally at very close range. We confused his death with that of a Swiss international worker whose life was taken when a Contra land mine blew up a truck.

In June, we incorrectly identified Janet Scarfe, president of the Movement for the Ordination of Women in Australia, and we misspelled the last name of Gwen Heard, who is supervising the Detroit Summer '92. Our apologies.

In May, we should have indicated that Wesley Frensdorff served as interim bishop of the Navajoland Area Mission.

THE WITNESS

Since 1917

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Cover by Jim West, a Detroit photographer

It is the policy of *The Witness* to use inclusive language whenever possible.



credit: Sister Helen David

We Drink With Cupped Hands

by Red Hawk

On our knees drinking with cupped hands
from our creek
is a kind of praying
for my daughters and me.
In time of drouth
there is nothing holier
than the water in the bowl of our hands
poured over our upraised faces
or sipped on bent knee,
giving thanks.
Religion is such a simple thing:
either it is cupping hands in deep gratitude
and filling them with creek water,
swallowing God whole,
or it is nothing at all.

Red Hawk is the author of two books of poetry, *Journey of the Medicine Man*, August House, Little Rock, AZ, 1983, from which the above is reprinted; and *The Sioux Dog Dance*, Cleveland University Press, 1992. He has just completed a year as writer-in-residence at Princeton University. Born Robert Moore of Anglo parents, Red Hawk received his new name from his spiritual teacher, Osho. He lives in Little Rock.

Collard Green Fields Forever

by Gloria House

Have you ever seen
a crop of collards?
It is a vision of green magnificence.
Walking along an ordinary road in
Tuskegee one day,
I meandered upon a field
where some industrious hand
had sown the virile plant
as far as the eye could see.
Though the rows were disciplined,
the vigorous jade leaves emanated
an overwhelming energy.
Here was a natural power
sustaining the faded and leaning
houses encircling it.
Spellbound on the field's periphery,
I remembered the Middle Passage,
and pictures of slave quarters at mealtime
whirled.

Collards and cornbread,
communion meal of
daily resurrection.

I ate the survival leaf as I stood at
the field's edge,
soaking its cure through pores and spirit.

from *Rain Rituals*, Broadside Press, Detroit, 1990.

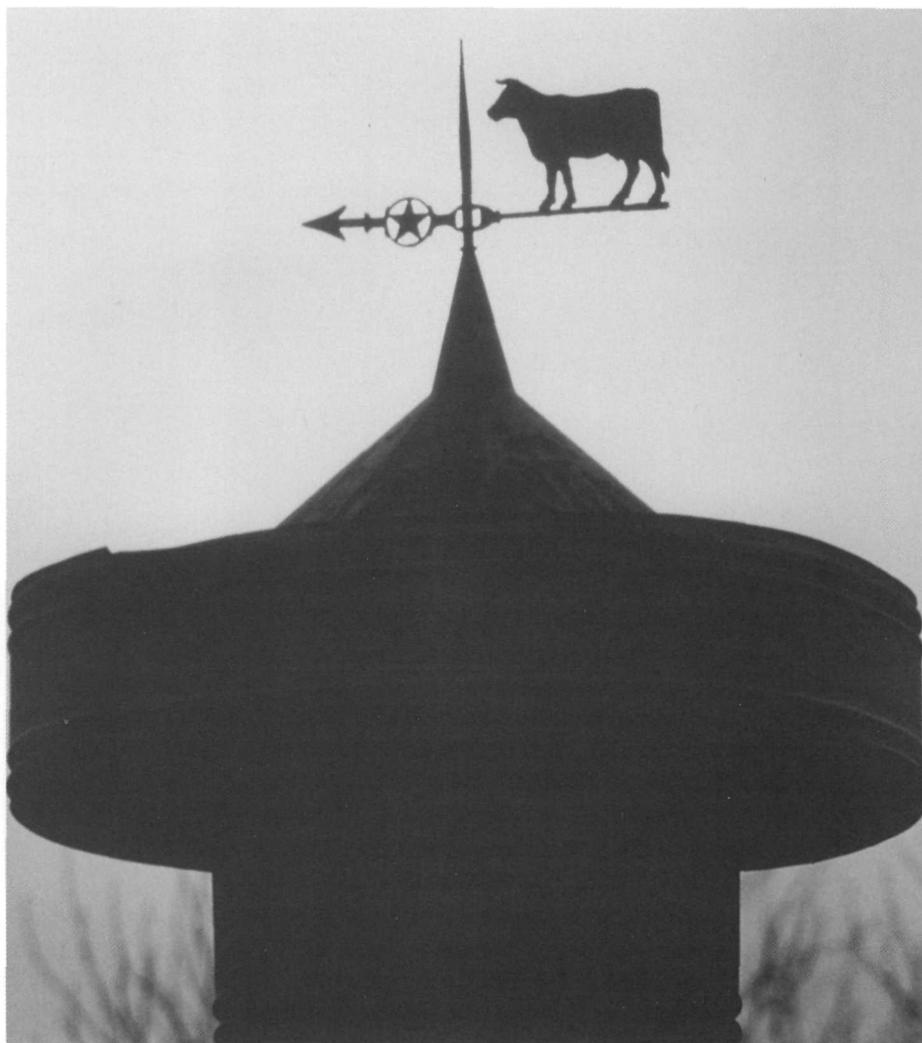
Poetry

When I was ten years of age I looked at the land and the rivers, the sky above, and the animals around me and could not fail to realize that they were made by some great power. I was so anxious to understand this power that I questioned the trees and the bushes. It seemed as though the flowers were staring at me, and I wanted to ask them "Who made you?" I looked at the moss-covered stones; some of them seemed to have the features of a man, but they could not answer me. Then I had a dream, and in my dream one of these small round stones appeared to me and told me that the maker of all was Wakan tanka, and that in order to honor him I must honor his works in nature.

—Tatanka-ohitika (Brave Buffalo) was born in the 1840s and became a Sioux medicine man on the Standing Rock Reservation (*Touch the Earth*, Pocket Books, NY, 1971).

My great aunt lives in the Michigan farmhouse she was born in 90 years ago. In her treks into the fields surrounding it, she has discovered small relics of others who were once at home there — an arrowhead sharpened out of stone, a map carved into a pocket-sized rock. She handles them with reverence.

I wonder whether, a few hundred years from now, as much will be left of her own lifestyle. Whether her bond with the land that sustained her family for three generations will be an affinity felt by Americans anywhere, or whether it will be



© 1990, R. Norman Matheny *Christian Science Monitor*

Listening to the land

by Marianne Arbogast

extinguished as remorselessly as the vanished harmonies of the older native culture.

Her stories reveal, in bits and pieces, a lifestyle marked by community, attuned to the rhythms of nature.

"In the generation before my time, the country was mostly woods," she says. "People had to get sugar and flour from Greenville [about 15 miles away]. A day

would come in the spring when everyone would hitch up their sleighs and horses to go to Greenville. It was a communal affair. On the way back, the person who lived closest to town would load everyone's supplies on his sleigh, and people would take theirs off as they went along. That way, the person who went the farthest carried the lightest load. It was a way of saving the horses and helping one

editor's note

Marianne Arbogast is an assistant editor of *The Witness*.

another.”

Children worked alongside their parents, absorbing the knowledge they would need to work the land. My great aunt fondly recalls staying home from school to help her father take down an old barn.

She knows the history of each tree and field and fence on the farm, each road and pond in its environs. She used to know every family, but that is changing as fewer members of each successive generation remain in the area.

When my great aunt was born, nearly 40 percent of the U.S. population lived on farms. Today it is less than two percent. With government support, corporations with easy access to credit invest in costly, high-tech equipment, then push the land to its limit with chemical fertilizers and pesticides. As corporations and large-scale operations edge small farmers out of the picture, some have suffered devastating personal loss.

But more and more voices warn that the losses are more than personal. Corporate control of agriculture raises concerns about environmental stewardship, about the migrant workers who may be increasingly necessary to harvest this land they do not own (see p. 20), about humane treatment of animals, about food safety (see p. 26), about the well-being of towns and entire regions whose economies have depended on the farmers.

The Church, of course, should not be without voice in this crisis and, just as naturally, has a confession to articulate.

Critics blame the Church for promul-

gating an exploitive relationship with nature, accepting modern technology without question as a means of establish-

God

I am the wind that breathes upon the sea,
I am the wave on the ocean,
I am the murmur of leaves rustling,
I am the rays of the sun,
I am the beam of the moon and the stars,
I am the power of the trees growing,
I am the bud breaking into blossom,
I am the movement of the salmon swimming,
I am the courage of the wild board fighting,
I am the speed of the stag running,
I am the strength of the ox pulling the plough,
I am the size of the mighty oak tree,
And I am the thoughts of all people
Who praise my beauty and grace.

—from *The Black Book of Camarthan*,
published in *Celtic Fire*, Doubleday, 1991)

ing “dominion” over the earth. Christians are also charged with promoting a spiritual worldview that ignores the material world or sacrifices it easily in an apocalypse.

When the Reagan administration began an unprecedented transfer of federal lands and mineral rights to private corporations, James Watt, then U.S. Secretary of the Interior, was asked about the need to conserve resources for future generations. Watt said, “I do not know how many future generations we can count on before the Lord returns.”

Any number of theologians are trying now to set right the balance, to remind us of the messengers to the vineyard.

And Christians are in the heart of the movement that is trying to preserve the societal benefits of small-scale farming.

Mona Brock, whose story appears on p. 34, works with a program established seven years ago by the Oklahoma Conference of Churches to assist struggling farmers by intervening personally and by providing them with the expertise and referrals they need.

Others have formed intentional farm communities like those described by Ariel Miller in “Signs of Regeneration” (p. 12). Fueled by ideals of environmental justice and a cooperative communal lifestyle, they have sought to create from scratch structures to support their vision. The challenges are enormous, but some com-

munities have recovered values which may prove an antidote to the sickness of our rural economy.

Land trusts, as advocated in the Episcopal Church’s Economic Justice Plan, are being created specifically to protect land from exploitation and to ensure access to its resources. (See p. 22.)

A Biblical approach, according to Walter Brueggemann, requires that “land be handled always as a gift not to be presumed upon” and that “land be managed as an arena for justice and freedom.”

God’s people “do not own the land but belongs to the land,” he says. “In that way, we are warned about presuming upon it, upon controlling it in scientific and rational ways, so that its own claim, indeed its own voice, is not heard or is disregarded.”

If we allow our nation’s farmland to slip under the control of a wealthy few, will anyone live close enough to hear its voice? Our deafness may cost more than we can bear to lose.

Animal abuse

The Humane Farming Organization (HFO) links animal rights, food safety, and family-scale farming. Their current campaign targets BGH (Bovine Growth Hormone), a drug to boost milk production in cattle. Its use, they say, leads to more infections in cows, thus more antibiotics in milk. While benefiting pharmaceutical companies and commercial farms, it could drive a third of the nation’s dairy farmers out of business. Consumers are asked to write FDA Commissioner David Kessler, requesting that the FDA reject BGH, or, at minimum, require explicit labeling of products from BGH-treated cattle. Kessler’s address is FDA, 5600 Fishers Lane, Rockville, MD 20857.

The earth's harvest is the source of artist Nancy Basket's livelihood. Coiling baskets from long-leaf pine needles and creating wall art from kudzu plants which she gathers and transforms into colorful paper, Basket nurtures her own sense of connectedness to the land.

"It helps me stay rooted in the earth, and maintain a balance of what is real and what is necessary," Basket says. She speaks of "hearing the plants talk," their voices countering the falsehoods of a consumer society. "My medicine is to work with plants."

Basket was raised near the Yacoma, Washington reservation by a mother of German descent. She knew that her father, who left when she was in the third grade, was Cherokee and that her parents had met in school. But no one would tell her the stories she wanted to know.

She questioned her father's mother, but "my mother told me not to ask any more because Grandma was ashamed." In fact, she says her Cherokee grandmother, who moved to Washington from Oklahoma, cried when Basket was born, because she was so dark.

As a child, Basket says she felt different, special. "I was always in the woods, off by myself," she says. "I used to gather weeds, weave them, learn their names..."

Eleven years ago a friend taught her how to make a coiled basket.

"I knew at that moment that it was something I would do the rest of my life," she says.

Then, after the birth of her fourth child, an uncle sent Basket a packet of genealogical information that rooted her in history.

Basket learned that her great-great-grandmother had been the basketmaker for her tribe in the Southeast in the mid-

Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann is editor/publisher of *The Witness*.



Iroquois ceremonial corn-husk masks made by Nancy Basket.

Weaving the talking leaves

by Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann

1800s. She chose then to take this ancestor's surname.

Her discovery of her family history prompted her to delve further into the traditions of her tribe. She moved her family to South Carolina and visited the North Carolina Cherokee Reservation, land that was ancestral to her father's family for 100,000 years.

"The first time I was there, I got cold chills. It was as though I had been there before. There was a great sense of peace."

But, she added, the tourist items for sale broke her heart. "The tomahawks and feathers all came from Taiwan."

Basket immersed herself in the stories of her people, and found in them a profound spirituality.

"I started piecing things together. Because I had no tribe, it was up to me to find the road back. We can do that with artwork, through the stories of the tribes, through reading the talking leaves that we have left. We can do that by filtering

out what the European men wrote about us and by getting together with some of the very few medicine people we have left. We can also pray, we can ask Grandfather to help us remember.

“Creating baskets, I feel the old ones guiding my fingers. Although several generations separate my grandmother from myself, I feel her spirit within me.

“When we hear the old legends and follow them, we are said to be on the Red Road,” Basket explained. “That means I am on the path of the peaceful warrior. I will stand up for what I believe in, but I am not going to fight. We believe there are five tribes of two-leggeds — the red, the yellow, the white, the black and the brown. All tribes need to learn about each other to live in harmony.”

Basket told the Cherokee legends to her children. And when her son wished for pictures, she started weaving symbols into her art. She has become a storyteller, offering programs to schoolchildren which combine Native American history with art instruction. She also teaches stories to Parks and Recreation and Forest Service workers, who pass them along to visitors. And she has taken her skills back to native peoples.

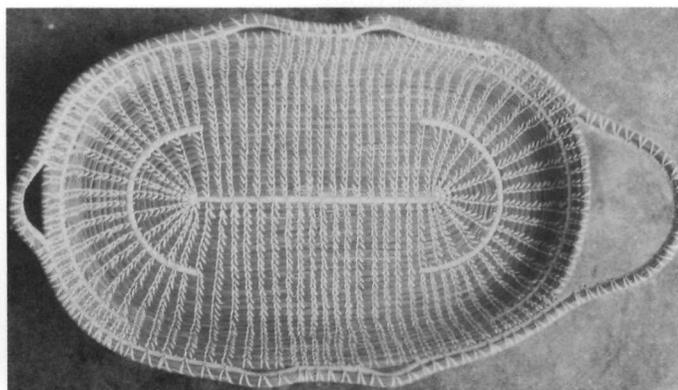
Basket’s family — which includes her four children whose father is Korean and her husband, who is of German and Lebanese descent, and his two children — weave Native American beliefs through their home-life.

“There is a grove of seven trees — it’s where we go for family council, to learn and where we have our medicine wheel. We have 12 stones in a circle. We seal the circle with tobacco and corn meal, and smoke the pipe for direction from Grandfather. We talk with each other until we come to a decision, then we remove the eastern rock and the ceremony



Nancy Basket

Creating baskets, I feel the old ones guiding my fingers. Although several generations separate my grandmother from myself, I feel her spirit within me. -Nancy Basket



A Cherokee cradle-board made of pine needles.

is over. The circle is available to all our other relations again.”

Basket’s youngest daughter is learning basket-weaving. Her older daughter was challenged by African American members of her high school’s basketball team to explain her racial heritage. She answered, “My mother’s from the red and white tribes and my father’s from the yellow, so I guess I’m orange.” One player smiled back at her, “Girl, we’re going to call you rainbow.”

Asked whether, she experiences rejection from full-blooded Native Americans, Basket says that happens sometimes, but that many native peoples have almost assimilated into the dominant culture through intermarriage and need to feel included somewhere.

“What does it mean to be really Native American? I think it means being able to live out the teachings, to walk your talk.”

When Basket learned that the Cherokees who were driven into Oklahoma during the Trail of Tears lost their knowledge of basket-weaving because the necessary pine trees do not grow in that region, she contacted Chief Wilma Mankiller, who heads the Oklahoma tribe. Basket is making plans to visit them with pine needles and patterns, “so they can remember the old skills again.”

She has worked in a similar way with the Catawba tribe in Rock Hill, South Carolina. “This is the kind of heritage that we need — this is what is real.”

Basket sees purpose in her own mixed heritage.

“Sometimes I feel like a shadow person, caught between cultures,” she says. “But I came into this body this way for a reason. It is so necessary for there to be communication between the tribes again. I don’t believe there are any accidents. All things are connected.”



Members of Sandhill Farm, Rutledge, Missouri.

Signs of regeneration: Community farms

by Ariel Miller

Like monastic reform movements throughout the middle ages, alternative farm communities have been founded as antidotes to abuses which their members saw in the surrounding society, particularly during the social foment of the 1960s.

Those which have survived offer living lessons of ways Americans could

Ariel Miller is assistant editor of *Interchange*, the newspaper of the Diocese of Southern Ohio.

learn to live simply, ecologically, and well. Their hard-won experience offers both challenge and hope, particularly since Americans seem stuck on the notion that they can have a decent life-style or a clean environment, but not both.

“Intentional communities are experimental labs for alternative energy and technology, alternative economic styles, alternative social arrangements,” notes Kathie Nicosia, who has over 20 years’ experience in the movement and now lives at East Wind Community in southern Missouri.

With per capita incomes as low as \$3,000 to \$4,500 — thousands of dollars below the official poverty line — people in land-based “intentional communities” report a growing sense of spiritual and material bounty. The new businesses they have started, the inches of humus building up in their fields, stand out in high relief against a backdrop of foreclosed farms, dying towns, and eroded land.

Some of the advantages held by community farmers are nearly ironic, according to Laird Schaub, whose *Directory of Intentional Communities* has sold 12,000

copies in the last 18 months and is now in its third printing.

For starters, community farms can't get loans easily which thwarts their growth but helps prevent over-extension and foreclosures, Schaub said. They are also more likely to be labor-intensive, substituting bodies for expensive machinery. When they do buy equipment, they can often survive with smaller less-sophisticated machines shared throughout the community.

Since small community farms can't hope to compete with larger farms, members often struggle to find ways to create a "value-added" product. For instance, they will turn soy beans into tempeh and market the tempeh. Very few have been able to achieve the "romantic notion" of self-sufficiency, of living entirely off the land. Most of the land-based communities that have survived have needed small businesses like mail-order sales or carpentry in order to break even. Twin Oaks, for example, earns most of its income making hammocks for the retail chain Pier 1.

The forms of community that are being tried are as variegated as a field of wildflowers. There are secular egalitarian societies and Christian feminist communities; tribes of eclectic contemplatives; a sanctuary for gay men; groups with children, others without.

Tough realities have forced compromises in many utopian programs. Admirers of B.F. Skinner founded Twin Oaks in Virginia in the late 1960s to embody the principles of Walden II, then quietly jettisoned most of the ideology when its tenets proved unliveable. The Farm in Tennessee, founded by California's Steve Gaskin and a caravan of followers in

1970, foreswore drug-use on the trek east and adopted strict sexual ethics as soon as children were conceived.

The work is hard, from the struggle to un-learn competition to the back-breaking toil of organic farming. "This life is

I'm at a farm where people decide what to do as a group of equals. Learning how to do that well is hard.

— Laird Schaub,
Sandhill Farm, Missouri

not for everyone," acknowledges Schaub, who lives on the Sandhill Farm in Rutledge, Missouri. "Probably the biggest challenge is social dynamics. I'm at a farm where people decide what to do as a group of equals. Learning how to do that well is hard. It's exciting, but one of the hardest things to feel comfortable with is giving up control — in this society, we think when one becomes an adult it's your turn to control.

"But there has never been the interest that there is today," Schaub adds. "The benefits are enormous. We get security in community. If I'm sick, there are six other adults. The community is pledged to my health care. If you can share power the opportunities are very wide. The potential for impact goes far beyond our members, the products of community are relevant for everyone."

Koinonia, in Americus, Georgia was founded in 1942 by

scripture scholar Clarence Jordan, author of the *Cotton Patch* translations of the New Testament, to be "a demonstration plot for the Kingdom of God." Behavior like paying black and white

farmworkers equal wages brought armed attack by the Ku Klux Klan and a county-wide economic boycott. Koinonia's mail-order business, selling foods like peach cake and pecans, was born of the need to win outside support in order to survive the siege.

Today 17 adult Koinonia partners and 10 children make up a core community based on the principles of the Book of Acts. On becoming a partner one sells all one's outside assets; the proceeds don't have to go to Koinonia, but if kept apart they must go into interest-free loans. Each partner gets a salary from the common pot based on his/her needs as determined in consultation. On average, that's \$4,000-\$4,500 a person.

"Compared to the Third World, we're absolutely wealthy," says Gail Steiner, who has been a partner since 1975 and was elected this year as Coordinator of Activities (Koinonia's closest approximation to a C.E.O.). "I'm always having to think about this because my kids seem to think we're poor. Yet the garden overflows, all of our needs are very well met — we even go to Dairy Queen and movies."

In fact the material comforts and complexity of life at Koinonia have risen steadily over its 50 years.

"Clarence had a saying: you let us know what you need and we'll help you figure out how to do without it. I'm not sure that applies today," muses Steiner. "In the beginning the commu-

nity did laundry in washpots and cooked over fires. Now — though we just had to borrow \$70,000 to pay the bills — we have millions of dollars of assets in ma-

Intentional communities are experimental labs for alternative energy and technology, alternative economic styles, alternative social arrangements.

— Kathe Nicosia,
East Wind Community, MO

chinery and land and buildings. How do we keep our vision intact?"

Koinonia spearheaded low-income housing for the region, catalyzing the creation of Habitat for Humanity, and opened Sumpter County's first integrated day care center. Its next ministries in the county may include efforts on crime, child abuse, or sexual abuse. Koinonia's folks are also struggling to transform row crop farming to organic, in a muggy climate that is one of the most hospitable in the world to weeds and bugs.

The Farm, Summertown, Tennessee: One of the famed utopian adventures emerging from the 1960s, the Farm was settled by a band of 200 who followed meditation teacher Steve Gaskin in 1970. Pooling everything they had, they bought land in rural Tennessee and settled there as a modern tribe, struggling to forge bonds and standards of mutual accountability.

"It was clear as we headed east in our

caravan that there was going to be an explosion of babies, and no plans had been made," recalls Ina May Gaskin. "We soon established that if a couple were sleeping together, you were engaged. If there was a birth, you were married. There would be no lack of commitment to the new life being created."

In the migration drugs were left behind and artificial birth control eschewed. A tribal morality emerged by consensus. Those who abused their families—physically or emotionally—were shunned or even expelled if they could not reform.

The Farm went on to become one of the nation's flourishing centers for the revival of home birth and the ancient art of midwifery. Members opened their homes to pregnant women who came to the Farm for the delivery of their children. Expanding to a population of over 1400 people by the early 1980s, the community almost foundered under the weight of its free services to outsiders, the pre-

cariousness of farming, and a crisis as many members rebelled against the charismatic leader role that they had projected on Gaskin.

Now its 220 members support themselves in a variety of paid professions, from midwifery to law. Decisions are made by committees. The Farm's businesses continue to serve its goals of social and physical healing, for example publishing books on nutrition and marketing clothes produced by a Guatemalan weavers' cooperative.

To the mission of teaching midwifery and home birth is now added a ministry to the dying: bringing them back into community and "sovereignty" instead of isolating them in a high-tech institution.

To Ina May Gaskin, a midwife herself, the enduring contribution of the Farm is to model restored human community.

"Now we're elders with grey hair," she says whimsically, describing the



The peanut harvest at Koinonia in Americus, Georgia.

founding members as they welcome back grown children returning for the annual reunion. Some bring their own children back to grow up in a community where it is safe for the young to be outside alone at night. "This is a culture of healthy confidence," says Ina May Gaskin. "We have a feeling of hope, a feeling that you can truly change things."

Sandhill Farm, Rutlege, Missouri:

Four friends committed to living in community pooled their assets in 1974 to buy this 160-acre farm. Working at first in off-farm jobs to raise money, they used it to create a hardy little communal economy. All income earned by members is shared, as are most possessions. The budget, with less than \$3,000 per capita, includes stipends for family vacation trips. Together with several other communes, Sandhill members also put money into a self-insurance fund.

For almost two decades neighboring farmers have been struggling to survive falling crop prices and rising input costs, with no control over either. Sandhill's members, with a lot of labor, convert \$9-bushels of soy beans into \$90 worth of tempeh.

Sandhill's organic techniques are far more labor-intensive than most Missouri farms can currently manage, where single families rely on expensive machines and chemicals to farm bigger acreage. But members of other communities - Twin Oaks in Virginia and East Wind in southern Missouri - travel to Sandhill to help at harvest time. When

their own work load eases, Sandhill members pitch in with the hammock-making business.

"To live as we do successfully calls for a big investment in social skills," Laird Schaub points out. "Learning to get along is a fundamental building block to world peace. If we can't live in small groups, how can we possibly do it internationally?"



Lisa Freundlich and son Isaac who was born at the Midwifery Center at the Farm in Summerville, Tenn.

Grailville, Loveland, Ohio:

The Grail, an international Christian women's movement founded in 1921, established Grailville on a 300-acre farm in southern Ohio in 1944 as a center for formation, preparing young women to use their gifts in service to God and the world. From

the beginning, the founders saw the disciplines of farming and worship linked, with feasts and Scripture grounded in the cycle of planting and harvest. "The focus at the beginning was on individuals and families: many young women came to Grailville to prepare for marriage and life on the land," notes Grail member Audrey



Garden workers at Grailville, Loveland, Ohio.

Sorrento. "Now our focus is the global ecology and the spiritual — the large community, the whole ecosystem."

From 1944 to 1968, Grail members farmed the land themselves until the workload proved too great for the resident community. The farm was leased to a farmer who chemicalized it. Grail members focused their energies on running a conference center and developing an educational program that draws theologians and students from all over the world.

By 1988, however, eco-justice had become so central to that mission that Grail members felt it urgent to restore the land through organic farming. The farmer could not take on the massive extra labor required. As suburban sprawl crept nearer, Grail members faced, and resolutely renounced, the temptation to sell the land and use the proceeds for the teaching ministry. Instead, a handful of resident Grail members, interns, and a new farm family have taken on the gargantuan task of rehabilitating the land and farming it sustainably.

Already this mission is central to the educational programs at Grailville, from resident semesters to outreach to the surrounding community. Though it could be years before (and if) the farm becomes self-sufficient, it is already a learning lab for sustainable agriculture. Many students are drawn to the Grail because of the unusual opportunities to combine theology, worship, arts and ecology.

The Directory of Intentional Communities lists over 400 alternative communities in the United States and abroad. Cross-reference charts group them by size, location, and purpose. This is the first time information on so many has been compiled in an easily-accessible manner. Copies are available for \$18 (postage included) by writing to Twin Oaks, Rt. 4 Box 169 W, Louisa, Virginia 23093. **tw**

When I left the Virginia mountains last August, the harvesting of my garden was entrusted to the hands of friends and neighbors for the time was not yet ripe to gather up the fruits of my labor. I had enjoyed a few early tomatoes, onion and greens, all of which I had plucked with care, for I knew that my time with my garden was limited. Many days I sat on the hill, feasted my eyes on the lush vegetation, and wondered whatever in the world was so important that I needed to leave home.

I knew that I was a daughter of the mountains, but I didn't realize how mountain I was until I arrived in New York where I would study for a divinity degree at General Theological Seminary. The contours and rhythms of mountain life and language have shaped my world view and my theology. The web of relationships among kin and neighbors, the daily struggle to survive in the coalfields, the many ways of knowing and talking about God, the stories and story-telling, the shaped-note singing at the community church, and meditating while walking the dogs in the field were the roots of my life, my community, and my spirituality.

To me there is something whole and holy about all this and about mountain people, who have a wisdom as deep and as old as the coal seams. It is a wisdom which grows from pain and suffering and human loss. It is a wisdom which acknowledges the beauty and goodness of creation and human life. One day while drinking coffee with a friend, he leaned against his kitchen window, pointed at the mountain, and said, "See that mountain? That's my art. It just doesn't have a frame around it. But it is as precious as a painting hanging in the Metropolitan Museum. They have guards with guns to protect those paintings. But we can't even protect the land. Now why should some strip miner be allowed to come in and destroy God's art?"

I believe my friend was talking about plundering. To plunder a region and a people is to extract whatever can be taken in the most efficient manner possible with the least expense incurred. Historically, that is what the coal industry has done.

On the other hand, to harvest is to recognize value and to be selective, for not all things come to fruition at the same time. Harvesting means there must be a sorting out and selecting that which has value. In order to continue to harvest over a period of time, one must put something back to restore the base, out of which will come new life.

The pillaging and plundering of the land has been accompa-

Linda Johnson is a student at General Theological Seminary and former staffperson at Grace House in St. Paul, Virginia. Photographer **Jim West** lives in Detroit, Mich.



Massanutten Mountain, Virginia

credit: Jim West

A mountain harvest

by Linda Johnson

nied by a continuing denigration of much of mountain life by the dominant culture. At the same time, there has been a harvesting of selective parts of the culture and people — traditional mountain music, dance, crafts, and story-telling have gone through cycles of being in and out of vogue.

But over the years, much more has been taken from the mountains than has been returned. When I left home, numerous people expressed their concern to me about whether I would return. I believe that behind this concern was fear — the fear that I would forget where I came from, that I would get lured away,

The contours and rhythms of mountain life and language have shaped my world view and my theology.

— Linda Johnson

that I would no longer see value in the people of the land.

I also suspect that tied to this fear was another set of concerns which has to do with self-identity and self-esteem. From the writings of the romantic novelists of the 1800s to today's television shows, mountain people have been portrayed as being out of step, backward, naive, stupid, or quaint. I think many mountain people have internalized this image, Others have resisted this it. Still others have left the creeks and hollows, their web of relationships of kin and neighbors, and their language and accents.

My fear of going to seminary was whether I could survive in the Church system and in the city. Although there is a lot of talk about diversity within the Church, I have yet to experience it with any degree of intensity within the Episcopal seminary community.

In the course of numerous conversations, I have told people that it is my intention and desire to return to the mountains. Sometimes people looked at me blankly. Occasionally someone inquires, "Why would you ever want to go back there?"

After all this expensive training, after all this time away from home, after living in New York City, why go back to the mountains? I think it is a question of identity and belonging. I know where my home is and I want to go home. I know that I have been part of the cultural harvesting of the region and I want to give something back to help restore the base.

When I drive off the mountain in the early morning hours, crest the ridge and begin the descent, I can look down in to the valley floor which is covered with a thick fog. And in the evening, when I climb the mountain, there's a point where I pull over. The setting sun spins shades of red, blue and lavender into the clouds; this is the place where the hawks circle on invisible wind drafts. It is the mountains which renew me and give me strength. I now know that God made the mountains so that we would have something to rest our eyes against. We all need rest for the journey. We need rest for healing and restoration. We need rest to prepare for the harvest.

I believe that my seminary learnings can be worked into the soil of the community and this may add a new richness which can be used at some point, perhaps for new growth. I can give something back to that part of creation where I was brought into being. When I leave New York I will leave a part of myself with others who accepted me and loved me because, not in spite, of who I am. And I'll surely take part of them with me to the mountains.

The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. This is true of New York and Appalachia. Last year I entrusted my garden to other folks. This year I planted a garden in my mind. Next year's garden awaits me. 

Listening to the ancestors

Why have I struggled to stay home? Home in the West Virginia hills? Why have I struggled with unemployment, underemployment, eaten welfare cheese and hung over the edge by my bloody fingernails to stay home?

The last years as I over and over again have stood at the Crossroads — leave, stay, leave, the choice has kept making itself. I crossed over the borderline into a type of craziness that edges on martyrdom, to stay rooted, planted here. Home, where I can focus my energy, my being on work that will help move my people from being such cannonfodder — to end the vicious cycles of poverty and outmigration, to help us have more control over our destinies.

I am a hillbilly, I literally was raised as a ridge runner (Hickory Ridge), a holler inmate whose family made forays to southern milltowns for work but always came home again.

Grandpa Riley was a coal miner, a union organizer who took part in the Matewan Massacre. Grandma Zora hid under mattresses in tent cities to dodge scab bullets during the mine wars in bloody Mingo. She raised eight children to be sometimes hungry and to go without health care and basic education and to become fodder for an industrial machine (as they fought wars, worked in the steelmills, cotton mills, chemical plants, as waitresses, and most developing illness and broken bodies.)

And there is the dirt farmer side of my genes. Stoic hill people who made a living from the earth and worked from sunup to sundown. Their children escaped the hillside farms to be locked up in city factories. Or else they, too, went to war, to save someone else's standard of living.

Today their brutal legacy is in my blood. I struggle to stay home, to do meaningful work that will somehow, someway help bring justice to these hills whose wealth and people have been robbed over and over again by elite scavengers who have not cared that their greed has stunted so many lives.

During the last years of economic disaster in West Virginia, I have become in touch with the spirits of these ancestors. The genes have a wildness in them. A wildness they developed from having survived and struggled in the West Virginia hills. A wildness I've uncovered in myself that has helped me face down bill collectors, fair weather friends and the fears of becoming a homeless bag lady.

I've kept growing, ripening, honing my skills, resisting the living death of denying my blood, my roots. But as this year enters the autumn, I find that perhaps it is time to move on. There seems to be nothing here for me (certainly no welfare check or health insurance for an unemployed single woman). So now, the Hillbilly Highway beckons.

You all are going to miss me if I go.

Linda Meade wrote this just before she died. It was published in *Mountain Women's Journal* (Jan. 1992), 5719 Forrest Drive, Acworth, GA 30101.

“Exodusters” was a name borne with pride by the ex-slaves who migrated from Kentucky in 1877 to found Nicodemus, Kansas — the first free all black settlement after the Civil War. The early pioneers, who were among 15,000 participating in the exodus from the south to the desert, came seeking freedom and opportunity. And they came to stay.

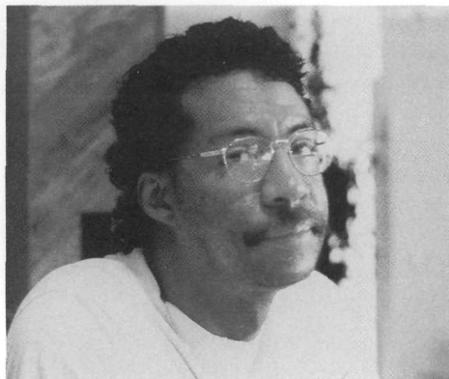
Alanzo Gillan Alexander is a third generation farmer in this tiny Western Kansas town. The only remaining full-time black farmers around Nicodemus, he and his father, work the original homestead land.

Alexander doesn't have to stay. He has a college degree in accounting. A gifted speaker and musician, he has other opportunities. He never intended to come back to the farm.

In 1979, after graduating from college, he was offered a management position for a large clothing chain and came home to think it over.

It was June. It was harvest. And the Alexander land is homestead land.

“At first, I stayed out of a sense of obligation,” says Alexander quietly. “My parents were getting older. There was no



Gil Alexander

Charlotte Hinger is a novelist in Hoxie, Kansas. She is the author of *Come Spring* (Simon and Schuster) which relates the lifestory of an aristocratic Eastern woman relocated to a Kansas homestead.

one else to take over. And it is homestead land,” he adds wistfully, with a soft smile.

Every Kansan knows the magic in the words “homestead land.” For a black family, the words have a double poignancy. The “Exodusters” were shocked at the bleakness of the promised land. The first winter was brutal. Fuel was buffalo chips and sunflower stalks. No one owned a horse, so it was a 30-mile walk for a sack of flour. Kansas was not their gentle Kentucky and freedom wasn't what it was cracked up to be.

Many of those who could afford to, left — the same as their white counterparts. Those who could not, learned to farm in a strange land and prospered. Despite the great hardships, the Exodusters rejoiced in owing their own land — free and clear, once it was “proved up.” Two years later, Nicodemus had 700 people and two newspapers.

Alexander's walls are decorated with pictures of his ancestors. The ones who stuck it out.

“Then I stayed because I really was in a position to appreciate what we had here. I was aware of what would be lost, if I left.”

Alexander is deeply aware of his heri-

You might as well schedule two days a month at the local ASCS office, and then learn you have to destroy 1.3 acres of wheat you just planted to be in conformity with the program. — Gil Alexander

tage. His maternal great-grandfather, Samuel Garland, was a Buffalo Soldier. Garland's home was also in Graham County. Alexander wears Garland's old uniform when he performs his one-man



An early homesteading family in Western Kansas.

Nicodemus: The

by Charlotte Hinger

show dramatizing the life of the proud men of the 9th and 10th Cavalry. He and his cousin, Angela Bates, give presentations for schools and civic groups.

And then he stayed because his parents got caught up in the farm crisis. Waylaid by grief, his father was devastated when the Alexander family had to file a Chapter 11.

Alexander learned to deal with the stress and the fury and the constant knot in his chest. He prayed his way out of his depression.

“I couldn't just abandon them. My folks needed me more than ever then.” Sometimes he thinks about all the people he would be letting down if he ever takes off. He's 35 and the thoughts came more



credit: The Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas

promised land

often after the Alexander family's financial problems.

"At their age, my parents should be

Ten years ago, the U.S. Civil Rights Commission warned that unless serious steps were taken to reverse the trend, there will be no more African-American farmers by the year 2000. So far, not much has changed.

African-Americans and other minorities are losing their land at a rate three times that of white farmers. Once one-seventh of all U.S. farmers, black farmers today represent just one percent.

"As bad as things are for everyone, they are significantly worse for black,

traveling, taking trips. Now there's no money."

Now being a Western Kansas farmer means fighting a fog of whimsical, crazy-making, ever-changing government regulations.

"You might as well schedule two days a month at the local ASCS office, and then learn you have to destroy 1.3 acres of wheat you just planted to be in conformity with the program. The paperwork involved in farming is mind-boggling."

Farming has become income projections and cost analysis and balance sheets. Alexander's accounting degree serves him well. He doesn't blame the bankers, but it's a frustrating situation for everyone.

"Something will have to change radically, for any of us to make it. We're just taking it a year at a time. The first time we can't make the payment, that's it. It's over."

In addition to his tie to the land, there is Nicodemus itself. A ghost town now, except for retirees living in the government housing projects, it comes to life every year during the Emancipation Day celebration. They come from all over—the former residents of this tiny town. They come from Denver and Los Angeles to reminisce and to sing once again in the choir at the Nicodemus Baptist

Church. Native American, and Hispanic farmers," said Katherine Ozer, director of the National Family Farm Coalition.

In 1990, a Minority Farmers Rights Act was set before Congress, with support from a wide range of farm advocates, social justice organizations, and Churches, including the Washington Office of the Episcopal Church. Much of it was deleted, but Congress did authorize up to \$10 million to fund a Minority Outreach and Education Program, and commissioned U.S.D.A. studies on minority farm issues.

Church.

Alexander believes that we will see black families moving out of the cities into small towns. His nephew, Lateef Dowdell, moved to Nicodemus from Los Angeles three years ago. He lives with the Alexanders and attends high school in Hill City. His mother flies in for visits.

Each time, Alexander looks for her, too, to stay. She wants to, but there's no work for her in Nicodemus.

"The city has become too dangerous," says Alexander. "Too many shootings. Too many problems. She wanted Lateef to grow up here in Nicodemus."

Lateef attends the same high school where all the family was graduated. It's nearly all white.

Alexander thinks Nicodemus should be shared, but he worries about new urban immigrants exploiting the town.

"Nicodemus needs to be cared for, treasured and nurtured. I don't want people to just see dollar signs and the money they can make off of the history."

Alexander doesn't look like a farmer in his great-grandfather's Buffalo Soldier uniform. He certainly doesn't look like a farmer in his bermuda shorts and T-shirts and gold chains.

But he most definitely *is* a Western Kansas farmer. You can tell them by the way they stay and stay and stay. **TW**

No studies have been issued, but this year, for the first time, the outreach program has been included in the congressional budget.

To mark the tenth anniversary of the Civil Rights Commission report, a Minority Farmers Caravan is being organized by the Federation of Southern Cooperatives in Atlanta, Georgia. Farmers will travel north from Atlanta to be in Washington, D.C. September 23-25, the weekend of the Congressional Black Caucus.

—Marianne Arbogast



credit: Robert McGovern

The tools of harvest: Imported labor in Nebraska

by Julie A. Wortman

No one will ever know what Miguel Valdez was trying to say when Gothenburg Police Sgt. Earl Imler shot him dead on Nebraska's Highway 30 in the early morning hours of April 11 last

spring. But the thought that knowing might have saved the 23-year-old Hispanic man's life has forced Dawson county residents to realize that Los Angeles is not so far away from the peaceful Platte River valley.

"It was a tragedy, but it was an eye-opener for everybody," says Jenny Gutierrez, a longtime Hispanic resident of nearby Lexington. "This is a big cultural shock in Nebraska."

Until Iowa Beef Packers (IBP) opened its new meat-packing facility in Lexington a year-and-a-half ago, Gutierrez was only one of a handful of Hispanic residents living amongst the descendants of the European immigrants who originally laid claim to Indian land.

IBP's slaughterhouse brought 2,000 new jobs to a town with a population of less than 7,000 and a county with an overall population of 20,000 — a seem-

Julie A. Wortman is an assistant editor of *The Witness*. **Robert McGovern** is an instructor at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia, Penn.

ing economic bonanza well worth the tax incentives the town had offered the company if it would build here.

But only a small number of local residents sought IBP employment.

"If you don't have to work there you wouldn't," observes Lee Pederson, the local Episcopal priest. The work is bloody, repetitive and physically exhausting, but with starting wages at over \$7 an hour, unskilled laborers from Texas and Mexico — like Valdez — have been only too eager to get themselves on the \$30-million payroll.

"Some are on their last tank of gas when they arrive in town," Pederson says. Haven House was opened by the Dawson County Ministerial Association in response to the influx of homeless, often penniless, prosperity-seeking families. The facility's beds were filled 5,000 times last year alone.

Permanent solutions to the sudden demand for additional housing, classrooms and health care, not to mention the strain on the county's infrastructure, have come more slowly. And the effort to provide answers has been compounded by the fact that most of the newcomers know no English.

IBP made no provision for offering its employees English classes — you don't need to know English to work on the packing-plant line — but the local community college did, free of charge. "I taught 45 or 50 [Hispanic workers] English during construction of IBP's plant," Gutierrez said. Currently, about 100 are enrolled, although the professional educator estimates that at least 500 more should be.

"The classes are an hour-and-a-half long, four days a week," Gutierrez explains. "Many are tired when they get home from work and would rather spend time with their families than go to class."

Throughout, the assumption had been that the recently arrived "outsiders" were

continued on page 22

Island migrants win Florida suit

by Nan Cobbey

Pulled muscles and broken ribs put an early end to Allan Jackson's cane cutting days. Sent home like a broken tool, the St. Ann, Jamaica, native can no longer send his children to school.

"... things is very hard for I cannot work," he writes lawyer Greg Schell, director of Florida Rural Legal Services and an Episcopal layperson who has fought for farmworkers since earning his law degree from Harvard in 1979. "And I have my wife and three children to take care of. I do not have any money."

"This is dangerous work ... more deaths than in any other industry, even higher than construction work," says Schell, who hears or reads of stories like Jackson's everyday. Farmworkers suffer a disability rate five times that in any other industry, according to Schell. Pesticide exposure affects 300,000 a year. Life expectancy is 49. The use of machetes and fire to harvest cane make the sugar industry especially dangerous: an average of 10 deaths occur each year among the estimated 7,000 migrant workers in Florida. Most survive the frequent eye injuries, slash wounds, burns and vehicle accidents, but many are maimed.

With no salary, no insurance, no Social Security and, sometimes, no way even to get home, foreign cane workers and their families face a nightmare.

Workers' Compensation could help end the ordeal if money were paid in for workers. But Schell claims that while

Nan Cobbey is features editor for *Episcopal Life*.

almost all contractors claim that they pay workers' compensation, most pocket the money. And the Internal Revenue Service offers little help.

"It is pointless to sue contractors to get them to pay insurance," according to the Internal Revenue Service's Fort Myers representative, Bob Rust. "The guy's got all his assets under 'A' Corporation and he hires all his workers under 'B' Corporation which has no assets."

It would also help if employers insured and maintained their equipment and vehicles. They defy the law because noncompliance fines cost far less than insurance, Schell charges.

Farmworkers suffer a disability rate five times that in any other industry. Pesticide exposure affects 300,000 a year. Life expectancy is 49. The use of machetes and fire make the sugar industry especially dangerous.

For injured sugar workers charity is usually the only recourse.

But in June there was a victory to celebrate. A Palm Beach County Circuit Court judge ruled that U.S. Sugar Corp. and the Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative of Florida will have to pay back wages to 15,000 workers they systematically cheated of their full pay. More than \$50 million may be involved. The three-year-old class-action lawsuit included the 15,000 harvest cane cutters who worked between the 1983-84 season and 1990-91.

the ones who should do the changing. But that view was abruptly held up for scrutiny when the police killed Valdez last spring.

Over and over, local newspapers reviewed the key facts as they reported each stage of the grand jury investigation that followed:

The officers had encountered Valdez earlier in the evening and suspected he had been drinking. A second encounter led to a car chase. Valdez' car was stopped outside Gothenburg's town limits, at a point two miles west of neighboring Cozad. Valdez spoke only Spanish; Imler and his partner, Officer Pat Glen, spoke only English. When Valdez emerged from his car he was holding a knife and appeared to be under the influence of alcohol. He was yelling something and approached the officers in a threatening manner. The officers kept ordering him to put down his weapon. Police training ruled out firing a warning shot or shooting to disable Valdez when it appeared the young man was not going to comply.

Quotes from members of the Nebraska Mexican-American Commission indicated they were worried that Valdez' death might be part of an emerging statewide trend towards the use of excessive

force against minority groups. Local Mexican Americans voiced their conviction that Valdez' status as an undocumented worker from Mexico may have affected how the police officers treated him. Others condemned the fact that, despite their protests, the 16-member Dawson County grand jury investigating the shooting included no Hispanic or Latino members (grand jurors are selected at random from citizens who have a driver's license or are registered to vote).

And then came the final verdict: that in shooting Valdez, Imler had acted within the law.

There were no riots in response to the decision, only the uncomfortable feeling that racism might have been involved here. The clearest indication of institutionalized bias came in a set of observations and recommendations attached to the main verdict.

"Primary responsibilities for obtaining communication skills sufficient to function within our community rests with

individual residents," the Grand Jury stated, adding that law enforcement agencies should "continue to develop language skills for communicating with non-English speaking persons."

Don Martin, a founding member of the board of the Kansas-based Harvest America, Inc., a 10-year-old organization that focuses on building community

among Hispanics so that they can claim a voice in community decision-making, called that view "morally and ethically short of the mark.

"This is not a temporary thing," Martin added. "Language will al-

ways be a factor. It's okay for an industry to be dependent on Hispanics, but [the grand jury] is saying we'll serve you only as long as you're like us."

Despite the grand jury's inference that Valdez should have known English, a stance that upholds the mono-culturalism that has been part of this region's history since Indians were driven from the land, there has been a sudden upsurge of interest in learning Spanish.

Last July, Gutierrez spent an intensive week teaching Spanish six hours a day to 26 Platte River valley community leaders. Fifty more individuals are learning the language in a regular community-college course.

Most promising of all, she says, is a recent state ruling that all Nebraska schools must give their curricula a multi-cultural focus.

"Even if the grand jury decision was [legally] right, we've got to change the rules," Pederson observes with conviction. "The big next step is to make us one community."

"Primary responsibilities for obtaining communication skills sufficient to function within our community rests with individual residents," the Grand Jury stated.

An invitation to readers

With some hesitation, we are inviting readers to send a *brief* description of that within the Church that enrages them. Those items that are succinct, even witty, will be considered for inclusion in a roundup in the November issue if we receive them by September 20th. As a testimony to your own sanity, you may also want to say why you maintain your connection to the Church. Mark the envelope: attention Julie A. Wortman.

We are soliciting short pieces of fiction for an issue next winter.

Children's art, poetry and stories are especially welcome.

Writers' guidelines are available upon request.

We always appreciate postcards or telephone calls alerting us to news items or story ideas.

Photographs. Please send us your favorite photographs. When an article calls for a generic picture (for instance, of an elderly person with a child, an embrace, a flock of birds in flying pattern, we would prefer to publish a photo taken by a *Witness* reader than an image from a syndicated photo catalogue.

TW

A little less filling

Remember those people who insisted that the CIA was transmitting messages to them through the fillings in their teeth? Well, the latest from a dentist in Bethesda, MD is that hearing aids may soon be replaced by a little antenna loop and amplifier placed inside a tooth. A miniature microphone concealed in a shirt pocket can emit FM radio signals which the antenna picks up. A crystal on the inside edge of the tooth converts the radio waves to acoustic vibrations which one's inner ear understands as sound. This advancement, which it's suggested is at least a year from marketability, raises a question: just who else *can* transmit to those teeth?

—data from **George Nobbe**,
Omni Magazine, 8/92

NAVSTAR Protesters Jailed

Two peace activists have been jailed in Los Angeles after damaging components of Rockwell's NAVSTAR satellites. The satellites were in assembly at the corporation's Salt Beach, California facility. Peter Lumsdaine and Keith Kjoler scaled a fence May 10 and wielded axes against the satellites, part of the system that guided U.S. missiles during the Gulf War. NAVSTAR is now being used for counter-insurgency surveillance in Third World nations and is considered integral to U.S. nuclear first-strike capability. Lumsdaine and Kjoler have been charged with destruction of property being manufactured for the U.S. government and face prison terms of up to 10 years.

Anti-Gay Legislation

Public libraries in Springfield, Oregon have been ordered to remove from their shelves any books that offer a positive or neutral perspective on homosexuality. The measure is part of an amendment to the City Charter which prohibits the city from

passing any law "that recognizes any categorical provisions such as 'sexual orientation,' 'sexual preference' or similar phrases." Adopted May 19 by public referendum, it also bans gay pride events on public property and allows city agencies to deny services to any group supportive of gay rights.

The Guardian, 6/17/92

Peace Tax Fund Bill

Legislators are being sought to cosponsor the U.S. Peace Tax Fund Bill, for which a committee hearing was finally held May 21. Among those who testified was William Davidson, retired Bishop of Western Kansas and former chair of Episcopal Peace Fellowship. The bill (H.R. 1870) would allow conscientious objectors to pay the military portion of their taxes into a trust fund for non-military purposes. Now that it's had a hearing, the bill is "ready to be put on as a rider to an appropriations bill," said Mary Miller of E.P.F., though that is unlikely to occur this session.

Family Roots of Racism

"Research has shown that the most prejudiced children have grown up in highly authoritarian homes, where obedience is the most important value. Such authoritarianism has been correlated with 'anti-intracception,' a refusal to look inside oneself and a lack of insight into one's own behavior and feelings. Children from such homes tend to develop a very hierarchical worldview; one where their value is based on being 'better than' someone else. Such children find it very difficult to accept any fault or flaw in themselves, and when such limitations appear, they are quick to project the blame or cause upon others."

Mary Webber, *Parenting for Peace and Justice*, 6/92

If One Person Had Said...

"I had no idea when I joined what kind of training I'd have to go through in the military.... Bayonet training was one of the earlier things that really disturbed me. Here are 300 women in my company: we're all in battle dress fatigues, with our M16s and bayonets... The drill sergeant stands up on a platform with a megaphone, instructing us how to jab, how to thrust, how to use the bayonet in the correct position...He says, 'What's the spirit of the bayonet?' We're all forced to yell, 'To kill, to kill, to kill with no mercy.' He yells, 'What makes the grass grow?' 'Blood, blood makes the grass grow...'

"If I was 17 and had to do the whole thing again, I would have appreciated it if just one person had said, 'You know, you want to go to college, you want to be in politics, you want to do all these great things, Aimee, but why would you dedicate eight years of your life to an institution whose sole purpose is to kill people?'"

Aimee Allison, Gulf War resister now appealing denial of her appeal for a CO discharge, *The Plough*, 6/92



Return to D.C.

To remind the nation that the AIDS epidemic has not gone away and that the need for action is more urgent than ever, the organizers of The NAMES Project are taking the entire AIDS Memorial Quilt back to Washington, D.C., this October 9-11. With more than 20,000 panels, it is now about 10 times the size it was when first displayed there in 1987.

Shards of hope

by Blaise Tobia and Virginia Maksymowicz

When Sandra Menefee Taylor makes artworks about the farm crisis and the industrialization of food production, she does not do so merely from an observer's point of view. She grew up

marked the day-by-day growth of the crop; she took part in the harvest, and enjoyed its fruits.

A generation later, she was there again. This time, it was as her brother lost their father's land to the bank — another victim

with racial overtones, Taylor points out, "people would be upset and we would all be aware of a racial and social prejudice — but if it involves class, it still seems okay to keep up the ignorance of 'urban equals good' and 'rural equals bad.'"

Taylor lives in the city now, residing in St. Paul. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the Minneapolis College of Art and Design in 1976 and returned there as a visiting artist in 1989. She is a member of WARM, a cooperative gallery in St. Paul, and has exhibited her work around the country. She makes her art out of a variety of materials, using whatever seems appropriate for the message she wants to convey. *Unbound Pages in Hope of Being Lost* collages copies of commodities charts, newspaper headlines (one of them refers to Du Pont's selling of genetically engineered mice; this artwork predates the genetically engineered tomato) and silhouetted, traced hands seemingly aflame. *Commodity Charts* combines impersonal graphs from the Chicago Board of Trade with images from real life: family photos, letters, drawings and notebook scraps. As the chart lines spiral downward and prices plummet, painted flames seem to lick around the periphery. Even the frames themselves hold meaning: counting lines are scratched into the wood in a childlike scrawl (keeping track, perhaps, of the number of small farms that have fallen?).

Taylor has quoted Wendell Berry as stating: "The good farmer, like an artist, performs within a pattern; he must do one thing while remembering many others." Sandra Menefee Taylor wants to make sure that those of us who live in cities — where we become mired in asphalt and concrete — will remember those who are grounded in the earth. **TW**



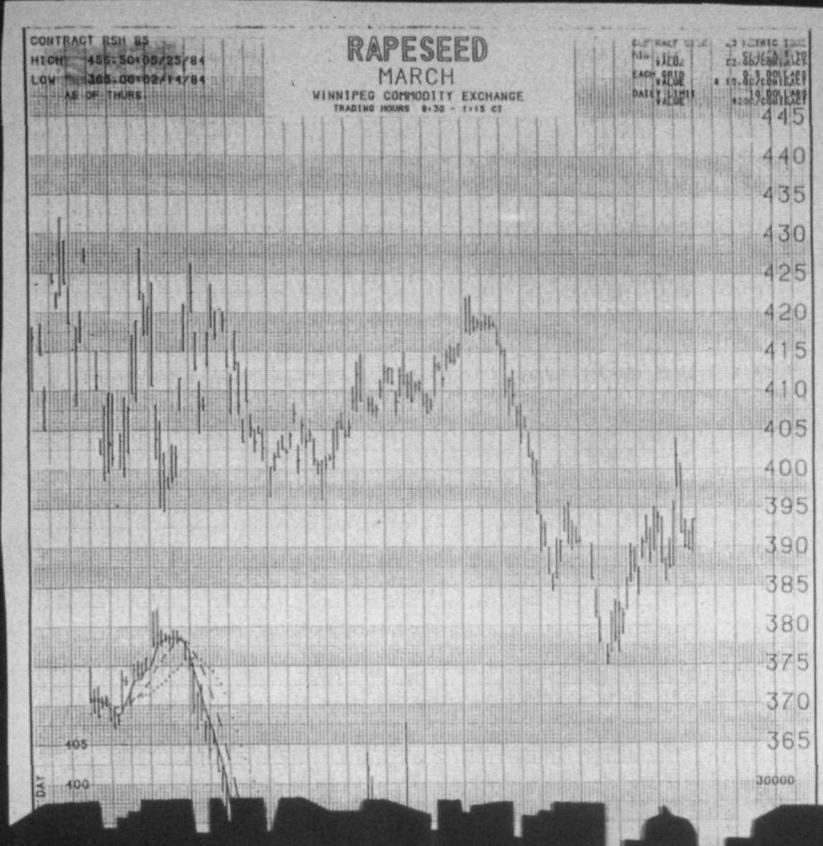
Detail from *Unbound Pages in Hope of Being Lost* by Sandra Menefee Taylor

of modern economic pressures to expand and to accumulate debt.

As an artist, Taylor has come to see a connection between her profession and that of the farmer: both typically live out their lives on the margins of society, receiving little financial reward and little respect. She is especially angry at the way country dwellers are depicted in the media and popular culture. As evidence, she quotes a description of a piece of furniture from an issue of *Metropolitan Home*, describing a dresser as quite sophisticated and no "country bumpkin." If the magazine had printed a similar slur

in rural Minnesota — a member, she says, of "the landbased working class." She was there when her father tilled the land and when the seed was planted; she

Blaise Tobia and Virginia Maksymowicz edit the Art & Society section of *The Witness*.



Commodity Chart by Sandra Menefee Taylor.

Forbidden fruit: Genetically-engineered food

by Jan Nunley

The human story began in a garden, so the tale goes — a garden of wild abundance and diversity, filled with trees “pleasant to the sight and good for food.” Only one tree was forbidden to the keepers of the garden, a tree “good for food, and . . . a delight to the eyes”: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And when the first humans ate of it, their eyes were opened and they became self-aware — but the ground was also cursed for them, bringing forth thorns and thistles where there had once been goodness for the taking.

Sometime next fall, another kind of fruit — the herald of another kind of revolution — will appear on supermarket shelves across the country. It’s a tomato called the “Flavr Savr®”, a tasty, vine-ripened product developed by Calgene Inc. of Davis, California. The Flavr Savr has been genetically altered to reverse the enzyme that makes fruits and vegetables spoil, suppressing the rotting process so it can be transported over long distances and stored for longer periods without losing its marketability.

Jan Nunley is a newscaster for National Public Radio’s environmental program “Living on Earth,” heard in over 200 cities in the U.S. and worldwide on the Armed Forces Radio Network. She’s also a frequent contributor to Episcopal Church publications. Artist **Tana Moore** works for the Lawrence Institute of Technology in Southfield, Mich.

Thanks to a ruling by the Food and Drug Administration this spring, the Flavr Savr — and other products of recombinant DNA testing on more than 50 plant species — can be marketed without regulation or special labelling.



credit: Tana Moore

The new policy is the result of collaboration between the FDA and the Council on Competitiveness, Vice President Dan Quayle’s regulatory watchdog agency. Quayle commented that the ruling would unleash the economic power of the biotechnology industry, which grossed \$4 billion last year and has the potential to rocket to \$50 billion in profits by the end of the decade.

Plant geneticists at leading universities reassured the public that the new technology represents a “wonderful breakthrough” with no safety problems;

industry analysts called it the greatest thing for profits since frozen foods; while consumer activists like Jeremy Rifkin filed protests with the FDA and threatened to join with a group of Florida farmers to file lawsuits halting the sale of any gene-altered food unless the FDA goes through a formal rule-making process on the products.

Most of the controversy has centered on how much the consuming public needs to know about what is in food. The Food and Drug Administration, by law, requires labeling of any food if additives or genetic alterations produce a change in nutritional content, in toxin levels, or in the presence of allergens. The last two are of particular concern to consumer advocates. Genes for toxins have already been inserted into some species of plants to enable them to repel insect predators. What happens if those same genes prove toxic to humans over time? Allergens are a more immediate concern. While the FDA has promised to require labeling if known allergen-producers, such as peanut protein, are added to the genetic makeup of a food, other proteins might be exempted, such as bananas. Persons allergic to those proteins might be in for a

rude shock (or worse), biting into one food and developing an allergic reaction appropriate to another one.

As genetic manipulation crosses, not only species, but the lines between the plant and animal kingdoms, ancient dietary and purity laws may be unwittingly transgressed. Leviticus 19:19 forbids breeding animals “with a different kind,” or sowing a field with two different kinds of seed; other sections of the Hebrew Holiness Code prohibit the consumption of certain animals, such as shellfish and pigs, and insects. How would a rabbinical

council react to corn containing firefly genes, or potatoes fine-tuned with the genes of silk moths? What would a devout Muslim do with food altered by pig genes? How would a vegetarian respond to lettuce protected against freezing with flounder genes? All of these experimental uses are currently under investigation for possible commercial production.

For advocates of biotechnology, the advantages and benefits of genetically altered food are many. It is the culmination of thousands of years of plant breeding technology, says Richard Godown, president of the Industrial Biotechnology Association.

"It has been a relentless pursuit of mankind to try and feed himself [sic], to try and produce an abundance of food, and we've done so through selection," Godown explains. "Then as we got more technically skilled, through applying the hand of man [sic] — we do cross-breeding, producing the hybrids that result in the abundance of fruits and grains and vegetables we have now. Biotechnology is exactly that, with considerably more precision."

Through the manipulation of genetic material, Godown assures, foods will be made tastier, crops more abundant — and all without the need for the pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers that have generated concern about the effects of agricultural runoff on water quality, and about the cost of all that extra technology to the cash-strapped farmer of the Two-Thirds World.

"We'll make it herbicide-resistant and disease-resistant, faster-growing; we'll increase the nutritional content; make it grow in arid soil, and have all of those attributes incorporated in the seed," promises Godown. "You'll take it to the Third World farmer and they won't need any advanced knowledge in order to be able to use it, nor will they need any technical machinery. What the guy needs is a sharp

stick and a muddy piece of ground." Godown calls biotech "the only hope and the best hope" for solving the problem of world hunger.

That one genetic super-strain crop could be devastated by pests and blights yet unknown (such as Ireland's Lumper potato blight of 1845-7 and the Southern corn leaf blight of 1970) doesn't shake Godown's confidence in biotech. "If any problems should arise naturally in the field," he says, "you'd be much better able to react to it and replace it with a species which is immune to the blight, thanks to modern technology." And of course, "if there were a blight and you were the company holding the seeds which solved the problem, you'd be rich. Everybody would want your product."

Godown also downplays the prospect of so-called "outcropping", the possibility that a genetically-altered crop could cross-pollinate and transfer its resistant characteristics to nearby weed relatives, making the weed impervious to all but the most toxic herbicides: "The Department of Agriculture has maps of the close relatives of these crops, so they know where those concerns would arise." The solution? "Dig big furrows around your field," advises Godown, adding, "It's not a big deal."

Critics say that's short-sighted. Geneticist Wes Jackson, of the Land Institute in Kansas, recalls that the last "harmless, non-toxic, non-corrosive, non-polluting" substances to come out of the chemist's lab, were chlorofluorocarbons, or CFC's: the villain in the ozone-depletion threat. "Now we're in the era of

biotechnology, and we're trying to assess it in the same way that we tried to assess the chemicals. What are the assumptions that the biotechnologists are making that an ozone-hole equivalent is not in the cards?"

Jackson doubts that "human cleverness" can ultimately outstrip rapidly mutating pests and predators with "designer gene pools." The resulting genetic truncation of the major crop lines presents a

How would a rabbinical council react to corn containing firefly genes, or potatoes with the genes of silk moths? How would a vegetarian respond to lettuce protected against freezing with flounder genes?

danger to the biodiversity that stands between the human population and overwhelming disruption, even disappearance, of essential crops such as wheat and rice. Genetic cloning, in particular, narrows the chromosomal focus.

"What we're doing," says Jackson, is creating an

ever more brittle, fragile, more dependent-on-the-experts approach to the world." The result is not good news for the farmer, North or South. The fact that large petrochemical and pharmaceutical concerns (such as Royal Dutch/Shell and Upjohn) have swallowed up thousands of independent seed companies and are marketing seeds along with their own pesticides and fertilizers lends credence to the argument that genetically-altered seeds will increase farmers' dependence on products from the multinationals, which will reap the profits. "It's just building another conduit for the extractive economy to exploit what is already a somewhat miserable condition in the countryside," says Jackson.

Environmental theologian and farmer Richard Cartwright Austin agrees. Biotech, he says, is "simply looking in

the wrong direction. The reason why we have difficulty feeding people is not that the plants that God created are inadequate. The reasons have much more to do with inequitable distribution, with population, and particularly with the thoughtless abuse of natural systems that lead to crises in production. Focusing efforts on genetic manipulation of food plants in order to increase yield . . . [is] not going at the root problem of hunger or malnutrition, and it is accentuating the very tendency that has produced some of our problems: to fix isolated aspects of a plant rather than looking at the natural system within which

it's imbedded.

Both Jackson and Austin see disturbing traces of an old human trait in the assurances of industry that biotech food is a foolproof answer to the world's agricultural needs; it's that old tendency exhibited in Eden. Jackson calls it "hubris," which "even the Greeks understood . . . to be the introduction of a human pattern into the world that disrupted a larger pattern not of our making, but that we're dependent upon."

"People need to demand adequate information so they can make consumer choices, and simply not purchase suspect

goods," Austin says. "Not that they're inherently evil, but that until the fundamental evils that underlie their development are corrected — we're better off without them."

For further information on biotechnology, contact : Biotechnology Working Groups, c/o Rural Vermont, 15 Barre St., Montpelier, Vt.. 05601, (802) 223-7222; Council for Responsible Genetics, 19 Garden St., Cambridge, MA 02138, (617) 868-0870; Foundation on Economic Trends, 1130 17th St., Washington, D.C. 20036, (202) 835-1570.

Land trusts: To be a guest

*"Land will not be sold absolutely, for the land belongs to me, you are only strangers and guests of mine."
(Leviticus 25:24)*

"No one owns the land really and truly," says Bruce Miller, director of the Wisconsin Farmland Conservancy. The five-year-old Conservancy is pioneering a new rural form of the community land trust, a means of land stewardship recommended in the Episcopal Church's economic Justice Proposal.

"Community land trusts have worked quite well in New England, preserving farmland from development and for environmental protection, and in urban areas for affordable housing," Miller says. "We're discovering it can also work as an economic development tool to have affordable farms."

Since 1985, the Conservancy has purchased five farms. Their primary financing has come through the Institute for Community Economics in Springfield, Massachusetts, which has received loans from the Diocese of Connecticut as well as several Massachusetts congregations. The Conservancy has leased the farms to

low-income or low-equity beginning farmers. They have also developed three local Community Land Trust Committees. Each local trust will hold the title to the farms in its region and assist farmers with financial planning. Farmers will have lifetime leases on the land, but can own the farmstead — the buildings and the land surrounding them.

The Conservancy is currently launching the "Next Generation" project, an effort to help retiring farmers transfer their land to new farmers, rather than seeing it annexed to commercial farms.

"Within the next 10 years, 50 percent of the farms in Wisconsin will need to be transferred to the next generation," Miller said. "One of the critical problems is seeing large farms become larger. The impact on small rural communities is absolutely devastating. It's not just farms — it's classrooms, it's parishes, it's Main Street businesses closing."

By giving some of their land to the Conservancy, retiring farmers can offset taxes on the sale of their land. The Conservancy will then purchase the remainder.

The Conservancy is also working to educate the broader community on issues of environmentally sound, sustainable farming, and the rural economy. Churches can play a role by using farmland they receive through wills to put new farmers on the land, Miller said.

Though the development of a workable farm land trust model is still in the experimental stage, the community land trust concept was initiated by Robert Swann, a World War II conscientious objector who studied Gandhi and Indian land reform movements. Swann later worked with civil rights leaders in the 1960s to address the problem of black farmers being forced off the land in the South. With Slater King, a relative and co-worker of Martin Luther King, Jr., he travelled to Israel in 1967 to investigate the Jewish National Fund, which was buying land and leasing it to individuals and communities forming *kibbutzes*. They returned to set up New Communities, the first community land trust project, in rural Georgia. Although it eventually fell prey to the drought and fluctuating land values that struck down family farms in the 1980s, New Communities served as a stimulus for further exploration and development of community land trusts. There are currently more than 100 such trusts in the U.S.

—Marianne Arbogast

Economic Justice and a Theology of Alternative Communities by William Woods is available from Applied Information, 900 Second National Bank Building, 830 Main St., Cincinnati, OH 45202.

As *The Witness* enters its second year in Detroit, we would like to recognize five outgoing ECPC Board members and extend a welcome to three new ones. John Burt of Marquette, Mich., Bill Rankin of Belvedere, Calif., Chris Bugbee of Princeton, N.J., and Alice Callaghan and Carmen Guerrero of Los Angeles, Calif., served on the Board during a critical and sometimes difficult time in the life of *The Witness*. We are grateful for their dedication.

New Board members are Marie Aris-Paul of New York, N.Y., Mary Alice Bird of Rockland, Maine, and long-time ECPC treasurer Bob Eckersley of Scranton, Penn.

Aris-Paul, a native of Guatemala, is director of the *Instituto Pastoral Hispano* at General Theological Seminary. An advocate of a dialogic approach to education, Aris-Paul oversees formation of Spanish-speaking ministry candidates.

Bird is director of development at the Farnsworth Art Museum. She brings a professional background in education and fundraising. "I know an organization like this cannot survive without strong financial support in addition to subscriptions," Bird said. "I'm pleased to use my professional experience to help keep alive a voice so important for the spirit of our age and for the Church."

Eckersley's involvement with the ECPC dates back to 1965. For many years he has handled ECPC finances in addition to managing his Scranton-based accounting firm. Now semi-retired, he will continue his long-standing relationship with the ECPC by serving on the Board. "*The Witness* follows all those things I hold dear," Eckersley said, naming the struggles against militarism, racism, sexism and economic injustice.



Treading in the footsteps of those who produced *The Witness* in Pennsylvania, the current *Witness* staff recently captured 13 awards for excellence in writing, photography, art and design.

A publication committed to good design and fine photography. The images are filled with information and emotional impact.

— the Associated Church Press

In the Associated Church Press competition, which is ecumenical and international, *The Witness* was given two first place awards for photography, citing the work of Jim West, Liz Rogers and David Turnley. The December issue, *Birthing in the face of a dragon*, was awarded a second place in graphics.

In the Episcopal Communicators' competition, *The Witness* took 10 awards from the 15 categories entered.

The Witness took first place awards in:

- General excellence: October, November, December.
- Editorial writing: "Confessing Sin / Confessing faith" by Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann, September, 1991.
- Feature writing: "Rain Your Spirit in My Heart" by Ruth Seymour, October, 1991.
- News Story: "Inauguration is Kairos moment in Haiti" by Nan Cobbey, March, 1991.
- Interview: "Resisting civil religion"

intv. with Dorothee Solle by J.W-K., September, 1991.

- Theological reflection: "Loving our enemies" by Walter Wink, November, 1991.
 - Devotional/inspirational: "Standing up to Death" by John Meyer, October, 1991.
- The Witness* took second place in:
- Original graphic: "Confessing sin" by Sister Helen David, September, 1991.
 - Layout: "Loving our enemies"— art by Sr. Helen David — November, 1991.
 - Photography: "Smoke and Mirrors" by Jim West, October, 1991.

A tremendously interesting and challenging publication — graphically, editorially, theologically. Clear, accessible writing. Sophisticated ideas and faith challenges presented in a down-to-earth way. Very inviting style. Tremendous use of art inside and on covers. Color inside is well-used. Good mixture of people-oriented articles and theology. Beautiful issues — the kind you keep to refer to over and over.

—the Episcopal Communicators

Anticipating the Rt. Rev. Jane Dixon

Adding a second woman to the Episcopal Church's 275-member House of Bishops may not be enough to feminize that historically all-male bastion of church leadership, but for advocates of women's ordination Jane Holmes Dixon's May 30th election as Suffragan Bishop of Washington is a welcome and long-awaited sign that further progress in that direction is finally being made.

"I think Jane is going to throw the House of Bishops on its ear," observed House of Deputies President Pamela Chinnis, who characterizes Mississippi-born and Vanderbilt University-educated Dixon as a warm and outgoing "southern belle," with a "typically feminine" approach to most things—a style quite different from the reserved manner of native Philadelphian Barbara Harris, who was consecrated Suffragan Bishop of Massachusetts in 1989.

"But that doesn't mean Jane isn't tough," Chinnis cautioned. "She's also a pragmatic politician. I can see her charming people right and left — and then they won't know what hit them."

Sally Bucklee, president of the Episcopal Women's Caucus and a parishioner at St. Philip's Church in Laurel, Md., where Dixon, 55, had been rector since 1986, pushed hard for Dixon's election because of her "passion for creating a just society.

"Jane is one of the few people I know who live out Micah 6 — that call to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God," Bucklee said. "She'll find concrete ways to solve problems that an all-male [diocesan leadership] wouldn't see."

Bucklee cites a community program for low-income and homeless Laurel residents that began with Dixon's decision to hire a part-time social worker to work with walk-ins looking for handouts from

St. Philip's. Now known as Laurel Advocacy and Referral Services, the program is independent, ecumenical and committed to fighting the root causes of local poverty and homelessness as much as to effective direct service.



Jane Dixon, elected suffragan of Washington.

credit: Diane Wayman, ENS

I think Jane is going to throw the House of Bishops on its ear. — Pamela Chinnis, House of Deputies President

Dixon is waiting until her election is properly ratified before she grants any formal interview with the media, although she easily fulfills popular expectations of what background a bishop should have. Married with three grown children, she holds a divinity degree from Virginia Theological Seminary and has served on

a variety of diocesan bodies, including Washington's standing committee, of which she was president.

More controversial is the fact that she is on record as favoring the ordination of qualified lesbian women and gay men as deacons and priests, a position four of the six nominees for suffragan unequivocally endorsed.

This same issue, specifically diocesan Bishop Ronald Haines' decision to ordain lesbian Elizabeth Carl in 1991, resulted in some dioceses' symbolic protest when the Washington Diocese asked permission to hold the election of a suffragan bishop in the first place.

"[They] said 'no' because they didn't trust who we'd elect," said Carlin Rankin, a member of Washington's standing committee who has known Dixon as a friend for 25 years. Other dioceses granted permission for the election, Rankin said, but indicated they would look closely at the suffragan bishop-elect's stand on this issue.

"Jane doesn't stand for one particular thing, but she has always been a fighter against racism and sexism," Rankin said.

Is there a church nearby?

"The appalling silence of decent people in positions of leadership and the demonization of gay people by right-wing officials and 'traditional values' groups is largely responsible for [escalating violence against gay men and lesbian women]," said Richard

Shimpfky, bishop of the 18,000-member Diocese of El Camino Real (Calif.), preparatory to leading a contingent of clergy and lay Episcopalians in San Jose's gay pride parade on June 14.

Violence against gays and lesbians has risen as much as 31 percent in 1991, Shimpfky noted.

Diocesan communicator Kenneth Plate reports that media coverage of Shimpfky's participation in the parade attracted large numbers of gays and lesbians to a parade booth staffed by El Camino Real's local chapter of Integrity, the Episcopal Church's organization of gay and lesbian church members. The most common question? "Is there a church near where I live?"

"Are you women going to stand for this?"

Eighteen years of experience with women priests hasn't changed the fact that resistance to women's ordination and to their ordained leadership is still very much a part of Episcopal Church life — yes, even in Suffragan Bishop-elect Jane Dixon's Diocese of Washington, as Marian Cover found out the Sunday following Dixon's election last May 30.

Cover, president of the diocese's Episcopal Church Women and a member of the episcopal election nominating committee, was attending services at her home congregation of St. Luke's that morning when rector J. Shelton Pollen announced that the new suffragan bishop would not be welcome in their D.C. parish as long as he was in charge. Pollen and six other diocesan clergy had informed Washington's Bishop Ronald Haines of their objection to women bishops as soon as they learned of Dixon's election.

A disbelieving Cover rose from her pew in protest.

"Do you mean that there are no women bishops in this Church?" she demanded, referring to Barbara Harris' consecration as Suffragan Bishop of Massachusetts in 1989.

"I was outraged that he would have the audacity to say that [St. Luke's wouldn't welcome Dixon]," Cover said afterward. "I turned around and asked, 'Are you women going to stand for this?'"

Thirty-six of Cover's parish sisters answered by joining her in walking out of the sanctuary. They then regathered in the parish hall and developed a petition

aimed at forcing Pollen to rescind his action. More than 200 parishioners, both men and women, have signed it.

"We knew it would be natural for people to disagree," explained Pollen, who identified himself as an Anglo-Catholic traditionalist who did not agree with the election. "At some point it will be resolved — it's something the clergy have to do themselves — and I'll be speaking to the bishop."

"I think [Pollen] expects this to blow over, but we're not going to let it die," a determined Cover said.

Of the 99 U.S. dioceses, only the five most strongly associated with the Episcopal Synod of America — Fond du Lac, Eau Claire, Fort Worth, Quincy and San Joaquin — categorically reject women priests and bishops. Four other dioceses — Georgia, Western Kansas, Albany and Springfield — haven't ordained any women priests, although each has begun accepting applicants.

But despite the fact that the vast majority of U.S. dioceses ordain women to the priesthood, women lead fewer than 400 of the Church's approximately 7,350 congregations and comprise only 11 percent of its clergy. Penelope Jamieson of New Zealand is the only one of the Anglican Communion's three women bishops who heads a diocese. Barbara Harris and Jane Dixon were elected to be suffragan bishops — that is, bishops who are subordinate assistants to the diocesan bishop, with no right of succession.

The position of suffragan was first created in the U.S. Church when Edward Demby of Arkansas and Henry Delany of North Carolina were elected specifically for "colored work," as authorized by the 1916 General Convention. They were not allowed to vote in the House of Bishops.

In 1969 John Burgess of Massachusetts became the first African American elected to head a U.S. diocese. He had first been consecrated suffragan bishop of Massachusetts in 1962. Orris Walker of Long Island and Herbert Thompson of Southern Ohio, both consecrated in 1988, were the first black bishops to be elected diocesan bishops without having been

elected suffragan bishops first. Out of a total of 33 black bishops that have served in the Episcopal Church, 24 are still living, 18 now active and six retired. Walker and Thompson remain the only two who head U.S. dioceses, while four head Episcopal dioceses outside the U.S.

Women in Episcopal Elections: Caucus calls for information

The Episcopal Women's Caucus is collecting information on episcopal elections that have involved women nominees. Persons with information on any of those elections — who ran, voting statistics, etc. — are encouraged to send it to: EWC, P.O. Box 5172, Laurel, Md., 20726.

Cousin Bobby

Filmmaker Jonathan Demme ("Silence of the Lambs") has made a one-hour documentary about his activist cousin Robert Castle, an Episcopal priest serving St. Mary's Church in New York City. Castle is author of "Prayers from a Burned-Out City" and gained notoriety in 1969 when he was arrested for trying to celebrate an Episcopal Peace Fellowship-sponsored Eucharist at the Pentagon.

One scene in Demme's film shows Castle leading St. Mary's Harlem congregation to a nearby Broadway intersection where they set up an altar for a worship service protesting the lack of a traffic light where 1200 school children cross daily.

The film was shown at the Cannes Film Festival last May and was then released in the U.S.



— Prepared by Julie A. Wortman

AFTER FOURTEEN MONTHS

By

ALICE REX

C.L.I.D. Workers at the Delta Cooperative Farm

THE Delta Cooperative Farm is in the second month of its second year. Visitors who come to learn more about us are amazed at the work that has already been accomplished, but there is still so much to be done that we have not yet stopped to catch our breath. I wish that the people who wonder whether sharecroppers would work under a system other than sharecropping could see how our men have labored this spring.

To work out an adequate income through cooperative farming, for families which have previously been destitute, is a very difficult and challenging task. The work must be so organized that no time will be lost during the frequent periods of heavy rain, with their resultant sticky soil. The plowing of the land, and the planting of the cotton, was delayed because of the rains. Then there came the dry days and dry nights, when men who had been working hard all day continued to stay in the field until past midnight, or even until the morning shift was ready to come out. The tractor plowed by moonlight, and later was equipped with powerful head and rear lights. Just ahead, in the path of its lights, the John Deere plowed along. That was in the early spring, when it was still cold at night.

The cooperative garden is still not large enough. Shortage of man-power on the farm made it impractical, this year, to attempt a larger garden. Each family is therefore urged to have a garden of its own, and behind many of our little houses rows of cabbage, lettuce, tomatoes, and beans, are lifting their green heads. To folk who have so long known what hunger is the slogan of the cooperative garden sounds unbelievable: "The more you eat the greater your income!" The

OUR Church and our Sunday Schools are trying to develop a religion which will be as adequate and as far-reaching as our new economic set-up. To minister to those who have been most neglected, and often most seriously exploited by those who call themselves Christians, is a task which requires a good deal of grace and perseverance. Their religion has largely been an otherworldly agent for their release from the hard realities of life, and a reminder of pious rules which were supposed to govern the personal habits of a religious person. "Religious" people are those who do not work on Sunday, who do not dance, or play cards at any time, who do not watch ball games on Sunday, or worship the Lord in the same building where a square dance or a social may have been held earlier in the week. Both the colored and white members share in these sentiments, and the "city" religion of some of the rest of us tends to confuse them.



AGAIN HAPPILY AT WORK

THE health of our people has generally improved. We have fewer serious infections, and so far no active cases of malaria. Our nurse, and a visiting doctor, who came from San Diego to help us, have had a remarkable record of success with their patients. We managed to live through a good deal of influenza this winter, and pneumonia cases were carefully nursed through the crisis. One little five year old boy was cared for during two anxious weeks at the clinic. His general health was poor, due to malnutrition, and he had a serious heart and kidney complication. This family is the one most recently taken on to the farm and when Mr. Franklin found them in Arkansas they had not had anything to eat, except beans, for four days. The mother of this family was in a terrible condition when she came. Thin, and emaciated, she presented the typical picture of the most destitute of sharecroppers. Due to an enforced rest of three weeks in bed, and good care and food, she already shows the effects of her treatment.

Celebrating
— 75 —
years

Excerpted from *The Witness*, June 24, 1937.
The article describes a cooperative farm worked by members of the Church League for Industrial Democracy (C.L. I.D.)

cannot satisfy the orders which are given for garden stuffs. We are working hard to build a farm, and we are building strong bodies to do the job.

The dairy now has seven cows, and it is a joy to see the dairyman make his rounds each morning and to see the children walk away from the store loaded down with bottles of milk. All the products of the producers' cooperative are handled through the consumers' cooperative store, so those who purchase the commodities are the largest sharers in the dividends.

Scott Nearing's path to the good life

by Suzanne Schmidt

Scott Nearing: An Intellectual Biography by John A. Saltmarsh. Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1991.

Many of you have heard of Helen and Scott Nearing and their homesteading in New England from 1932 until Scott's death in 1983 at age 100. Their book, *Living the Good Life: How to Live Sanely and Simply in a Troubled World* (1954), was the guide to the "back-to-the-land" movement of the early 1970s.

If you are like me, however, you were probably not aware that in the 1930s Scott Nearing was a powerful voice against the privilege of affluence. John Saltmarsh has given us a precious opportunity to learn more about this persistent radical whose struggles for freedom, economic justice and peace have been nearly forgotten. *Scott Nearing: An Intellectual Biography*, is thorough and well-documented. In its pages, we discover a man whose faith, courage, intellect and committed life should be a model and prophetic challenge to us.

Born in 1883 into the privileges and luxuries of a wealthy, coal company family in Pennsylvania, Nearing labored at a wide variety of odd jobs before studying at the prestigious Wharton School of Finance and Economy of the University of Pennsylvania. He went on to teach economics there. He wrote and spoke out strongly in opposition to child labor and the maldistribution of wealth. His radi-

calism brought him into such conflict with the leaders of the community (business, university, church) that the university trustees fired him in 1915. Saltmarsh gives a thorough presentation of the academic-freedom issues, the public controversy, and Nearing's courageous and principled stand. Subsequently welcomed into



Scott Nearing at the Forest Farm, Maine.

credit: Richard Garrett, courtesy of Helen Nearing.

the University of Toledo, Nearing soon got into serious controversy over his opposition to U.S. involvement in World War I. Again he was fired.

Nearing boldly continued speaking and writing. He was indicted and tried under the Espionage and Sedition Acts for writing *The Great Madness: A Victory for American Plutocracy*. This pamphlet advocated "economic justice and world brotherhood, and peace among all men"(sic) and attacked the American plutocracy for using "its position of privilege and economic power to live off the labor of others and to control the channels of public opinion as well as the machin-

ery of politics" (pp. 158-159). While Nearing was found not guilty, the American Socialist Society received a guilty verdict for publishing the pamphlet.

Saltmarsh focuses on Nearing's intellectual struggles during his first 50 years. He tells of Nearing's involvements with various labor and socialist and communist organizations, his family relationships, and his deepening commitment to nonviolence (influenced by Tolstoy and Thoreau) and to economic justice. The bibliography includes a complete (and very enticing) listing of the prolific works of Scott Nearing — 50 books, 70 pamphlets and debates, and hundreds of articles. A few photographs add much character. The book ends with a summary of Helen and Scott Nearing's *Living the Good Life*.

"Homesteading marked a further break with American culture, an estrangement made complete when the United States dropped the atomic bomb on August 6, 1945, Nearing's sixty-second birthday. He rushed off a letter of protest to President Truman:

'Your government is no longer mine. From this day onward our paths diverge: you to continue your suicide course, blasting and cursing the world. I turn my hand to the task of helping to build a human society based on cooperation, social justice and human welfare.'" (p. 261)

book review

We are still on the suicide course, ever more in need of radical understanding and radical change. Saltmarsh's biography gives us a golden opportunity to learn from and be inspired to action by the witness and wisdom of Scott Nearing.

Suzanne Schmidt lives and works at Noonday Catholic Worker Farm in Winchendon Springs, Massachusetts, and is involved with the Plowshares/Atlantic Life Community and the War Tax Refusers of the Colrain campaign.

A few weeks ago, Mona Brock answered her telephone at the Oklahoma Conference of Churches' (OCC) Farm Crisis Hotline. The voice on the other end was hysterical.

"My husband just shot at me!" the woman screamed into the phone.

After determining that the caller was safe — she had run into her bedroom and locked the door — Brock calmed her enough to find out what had happened.

The woman lived with her husband on the farm he had worked all his life. He had been born in the kitchen that was now their living room. They were on the brink of losing everything in a foreclosure.

"The intense pressure and desperation backed him into a corner," Brock said. "He wanted to pay but was not getting money for his wheat and cattle above the cost of production."

He had aimed three missed shots at his own temple before firing twice in his wife's direction. As the bullets hit a paint bucket and a tire, she ran for cover.

Brock got directions to the farm — a two-hour drive from her Oklahoma City

"My neighbors were killing themselves," she says.

"Three around me whom I'd known forever had taken their lives."



Mona Brock

Fighting for family farms

by Marianne Arbogast

psychologist who works with Oklahoma farmers. Wallace was reporting on a visit he had made in the western part of the state, but offered immediately to meet her at her destination.

When they arrived at the farmhouse, all was quiet.

"I knocked, and the lady came to the door," Brock said. "[Her husband] was sitting on a divan. He motioned us to sit down, and we put our arms around him."

They called the farmer's pastor, who drove him to a clinic where he was admitted for treatment. Brock then turned the case over to the financial management and legal aid staff who work alongside her at Ag-Link, OCC's farm crisis program. They were able to work out a plan enabling the farmer to keep his property.

"Praise the Lord, he's on the farm today," Brock said.

Brock's compassion and commitment are born of bitter experience. An Oklahoma farmer's daughter, she married a farmer's son and enjoyed 36 prosperous

years on the land. With him, she raised their two sons while pursuing a career in education.

She and her husband took out a loan in 1980, the year the farm crisis hit bottom.

"The rules were changed," she said. "The president, the Congress, and the USDA stepped in, and the whole philosophy changed." Land was abruptly devalued, costing farmers the security they had on their loans. Foreclosures multiplied across the nation.

"It caused a state of panic," Brock recalls. "Third, fourth, sometimes fifth-generation farmers had their land sold at auctions, and sheriffs evicting them.

"My neighbors were killing themselves," she says. "Three around me whom I'd known forever had taken their lives."

Brock's husband travelled with other farmers to Washington, D.C. to plead their cause. At a dinner she hosted after one such trip, two of her neighbors — Ted Riddle and Orla Ratliff — decided they needed to do more. They went to

*Witnesses,
the quick and the dead*

office — and told the woman she was on her way. Before leaving, she scribbled a note to her two sons, telling them where to find her bills and insurance papers.

"I told them to remember John 3:16," she said. "I told them, I hope to see you tonight, but I might see you in heaven."

As she was walking out the door, she got a call from Glen Wallace, a clinical

Marianne Arbogast is an assistant editor of *The Witness*.

their pastor, who approached Methodist Bishop John Wesley Hart with their concerns. He presented their idea to OCC, which agreed to sponsor a program to respond to the crisis.

Before the project could get underway, the Brocks lost their own farm. They moved out with a pick-up, some furniture, and 68 dollars to their name. They moved to the city of Madill, but Brock was soon commuting to Oklahoma City to help Ag-Link take shape. In October, 1985, the program began with seed money from Willie Nelson's first Farm-Aid concert.

In 1986, Brock's 57-year-old husband suffered a fatal heart attack. "The stress and the loss and the shock" of losing the farm "were greater than he could handle," she said.

Brock became the coordinator of Ag-Link's Farm Crisis Hotline. Other services include crisis intervention, financial management analysis, legal aid, and a mediation program to arbitrate between farmers and lenders. All are free of charge.

Brock's hotline receives an average of 50 calls per day. She keeps farmers' hours, arriving before 7 a.m. so farmers can call before going out to their fields, keeping the line open during the noon dinner

hour, and employing an after-5 p.m. answering service to alert her of night calls.

"Many times, I've had farmers tell me they were going to take their lives, or kill their lender," she says. She takes these threats seriously: Ag-Link has documented close to 300 suicides of farmers or family members due to the farm crisis.

She disputes the notion that the situation has improved. "It depends on which side of the fence you're looking from," she says. While the "middlemen" — often large corporations — reap huge profits, small farmers are sinking below the poverty line, unable to buy food for their own families. Government-mandated prices — artificially low to promote exports — benefit corporations but drive small farmers off the land. Price supports do not cover production costs. Brock cites statistics which predict that 500,000 farms will be lost between 1990 and 1995. "That's 20 million people migrating outward from rural areas.

"Each farmer has lived through an era that has changed life forever," she says. Farmers know they can no longer neglect to maintain a vigilant watch on political developments. "We must bring back a government of the people, by the people, and for the people."

Though she fights tirelessly to save small farms, Brock, a Southern Baptist, places her ultimate trust in God. "Faith in God is the only eternal, concrete, solid thing we have," she says. "If you lose your livelihood, your land, your way of life — oftentimes I've told farmers, we're not going to take it with us. And our lenders, the people taking it from us, are not going to take it with them either."

Brock still lives in Madill, but is making plans to return to a rural life. She struggles to explain her love for the land:

"I saw my husband many times stop the tractor or the plough and walk behind it, reach down and pick up a double handful of soil, and let it trickle down between his fingers. It's the most beautiful sight I've ever seen. It's a closeness to God. It's creation, birth, revitalization, life anew."

Many readers have commented on Wesley Frensdorff's essay on the role of clergy (May 1992). A book about Frensdorff's ministry is available, *Reshaping Ministry: Essays in memory of Wesley Frensdorff*, Jethro Publications, Arvada, Colorado, 1990. *Reshaping Ministry* includes three other essays written or coauthored by Frensdorff, in addition to essays written about his work and vision.

Welcome to The Witness!

Each month we mail complimentary copies of *The Witness* to people we believe might be interested in subscribing. We've sent issues this month to people with a particular interest in land and stewardship.

For 75 years *The Witness* has published articles addressing theological concerns as well as critiquing social issues from a faith perspective.

The magazine is owned by the Episcopal Church Publishing Company but is an independent journal with an ecumenical readership.

If you are interested in subscribing, please send a check for \$20 to *The Witness*, 1249 Washington Boulevard, Suite 3115, Detroit, MI 48226-1868. (You can use the postage-free envelope enclosed with this issue.) You are welcome to add the name of anyone you think would enjoy a four-month trial subscription, too!

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75th
anniversary
forum
on evangelism

ENCOUNTERING OUR SHADOWS:
The Witness goes to Trinity School for Ministry

Witness subscribers and Trinity students will have a chance to wrestle with issues of feminist theology; Native American spirituality and mission work; the need for a multi-cultural Church; questions of sexuality and the authority of Scripture. Registrations are limited, please contact Marietta Jaeger (313-962-2650) if you hope to attend.

October 24, 1992

Participants in a discussion titled *Toward the living Christ: common ground/ divergent paths* will be Virginia Mollenkott, feminist theologian and *Witness* writer; Chester Talton, suffragan bishop of Los Angeles and former board member of the Episcopal Church Publishing Company; Mary Hays, professor of pastoral theology at Trinity and William Frey, dean of Trinity and former Bishop of Colorado.

Verna Dozier to preach!

October issue:
Culture as resistance



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