The Witness

Volume 77 • Number 12 • December 1994

Family Values

Why I stay in my denomination

THE OCTOBER ISSUE both moved and inspired me. I believe even moreso that the tensions faced by the church are labor pains to greater wholeness and life, but we must continue to struggle, to find common ground, to have faith and walk humbly with our God.

This most recent General Convention evoked every emotion in me. The time of the prophets is now! We who love the Episcopal Church must continue to challenge, pray, support each other and know that the Holy Spirit guides us.

Patrick Francis Schwing
Cincinnati, OH

I HAVE READ "I WAS ONE OF YOU" and cannot remember being so moved by such a clear and succinct piece. Having been a deputy once, sat in the gallery on a few occasions and been a diocesan staff officer, I could feel (tangibly) everything she said. I hope it had a positive effect. Too bad it wasn't read to the House of Bishops.

Nan Peete
New York, NY

I JUST FINISHED READING Julie Wortman's articles regarding Convention. I have been a deputy since 1982 so have watched the ebb and flow over that time. I had a slightly more positive feel about 1994 than she expressed.

However, I write to correct an error which I have seen several times in your publication and since it has been nine months since the election of a bishop in Fond du Lac, it's time to correct the error. Bishop Russell Jacobs has worked with, accepts the eucharist from and will ordain women in the Diocese of Fond du Lac and he was very open about that *prior* to his election.

Constance Ott
Diocese of Milwaukee

Alternative ways of doing church

I am fascinated by your placement of articles in the August/September, 1994 issue. First comes the exciting article about the new forms of ministry that are taking place in Northern Michigan and then the report on the closing of the *Instituto Pastoral Hispano.*

You were either very insightful or the Holy Spirit was at work — or maybe both!

As I read the mega-message it is that while both were working with a new and exciting educational paradigm their goal was to continue with the existing paradigm for doing ministry. BUZZ — TILT— WHOOPS! The mega-message from Northern Michigan is that they do both education for ministry and ministry itself in a new way. BINGO!

If only we could learn once and for all that these are systemic issues that are all interrelated and you can't tinker with one without affecting the other.

Tom Tull
San Francisco, CA

[Ed. Note: Our impression is that the *Instituto* had the vision for new ministry but, without benefit of a diocese and bishop of its own, couldn't work the miracles being pursued in Northern Michigan. See the continuing commentary about the *Instituto* on pages 29-32 in this issue.]

SADLY, I WRITE TO INFORM that *The Witness* may have done some harm to the *Instituto Pastoral Hispano* with the article that appeared in your August/September 1994 issue *Por que no somos la Iglesia? Closing the Instituto Pastoral Hispano.*

Even after I had insisted that the *IPH* was not closing, in conversations with the editor, *The Witness*, on both the Table of Contents page and in the headlines of the article, proclaimed the closing of the *IPH*. As we began our Fall semester at the General Seminary, several of our contributors said that we had not heard from them because they had read in *The Witness* that the *IPH* was closed. Our students had to deal with questions coming from staff members at the General Seminary and others asking why they were still there since *The Witness* said the *IPH* was closed.

The *IPH* is involved in a very serious planning process: we have a serious financial crisis, but we are still offering classes and plan to have another graduation in January. We need the support of our friends and those who care about Hispanic ministry during this time. Neither the *IPH* nor the larger Christian community are well served by premature death notices!

Henry Atkins
President, *Instituto Pastoral Hispano*
New York, N.Y.

[Much harm has been done to the *Instituto*, but I wouldn't lay this at the door of *The Witness*. While you did make it clear in our August interview that you would try to continue some *IPH* classes this Fall, the language which surrounded the dismissal of the *IPH* staff was that the school was closing. In fact, you told me, "It was my understanding that Maria called Doug and told him there was not enough money to continue paying the bills and he said that it was policy to *close down*." — J.W-K.]

Haiti

I VERY MUCH APPRECIATED your brief editorial in the November issue of The Witness entitled, *Haiti — What then must we do?*

While opposed to U.S. military intervention/occupation of Haiti before the events of September unfolded, I remain so to this day and I continue to push for the immediate removal of U.S. forces.

Still, I am not without some doubts about the necessity to relieve the terror being inflicted on the starving people of Haiti.

I am still persuaded, however, that our intervention is absolutely NOT based on the welfare of the masses of the people, but on the protection of the profits of those who stand to gain from a return to "business as usual" after the departure of the American troops.

Best wishes for the continuing success of *The Witness* and its ongoing devotion to peace and justice.

Rudy Simons
Southfield, MI

Notice

Our printers are changing their technology. In the November issue there was an incomplete display quote and some typeface inconsistencies — this was their error. Things should be smoother this month.

Advocating for the innocents

Like many of your readers — probably all of them — I am devastated by Susan Smith's recent murder of her two sons.

I happen to be one who reads the Daily Offices from the book of Common Prayer. Yesterday, when the horrible truth came out, these were the selections: "Save me, O God, for the waters have risen up to my neck. I am sinking in deep mire, and there is no firm ground for my feet. ... I have grown weary with my crying; ... my eyes have failed from looking for my God. ... Save me ... do not let me sink; let me be rescued from those who hate me." (Psalm 69) And: "'Jerusalem, Jerusalem [substitute Union, Detroit, New York), you that kill ... and stone those who are sent to you! How often have I longed to gather your children, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you refused!'" (Luke 13).

My cries of grief and rage and despair began to subside. But not my sense of the indifference of the church — of individual Christians, many of whom do works of mercy, justice, healing, righteousness.

If the church really LOVED God's children — of all ages, but I speak especially of "the holy innocents," there would be such an outcry from every pulpit, such a surge of demands upon our self-serving legislators (and, often, clergy), such town hall meetings, such demonstrations, such demands on budgets NOT to preach at welfare mothers and teenagers having babies but to cut back on selfish budget items and to provide more for sex education, counseling (therapy before terror), good food (against selfish fast-food) — and keep to families together with preventive intervention, that even the cynical media would respond.

Robert McGovern

I have yet to hear any right-to-life persons (and I'd like to be, if this were a consistently caring society) say (s)he would be glad to have her taxes increased, if it meant all these programs could happen.

For those who read the Daily Offices, may I suggest a substitution: in the Suffrages: "Let not the needy *or the innocents* be forgotten," and "Save your children, Lord." — one small daily reminder.

— Polly Rouillard, Fort Edward, NY

Classifieds

Education conference

Mark your calendars now! Announcing ... "Continuing in the Apostles' Teaching: Educational Ministries in the Episcopal Church."

This conference is designed for congregational and diocesan leaders concerned with creating environments that promote faith maturity among children, youth, young adults, and adults. Participants will have the opportunity to reflect theologically and gain practical skills through learning tracks, workshops, Bible study, worship, music, and fun!

Learning Tracks will be offered in the following areas: Children's Ministries, Youth Ministries, Young Adult Ministries, Christian Educational Ministries.

WHEN: April 25-29, 1995

WHERE: Y.M.C.A. of the Rockies, Estes Park, Colorado (airport: Denver)

COST: $200 (plus transportation)

SPONSORED BY: Christian Education Network, Treasure Kids!/Model Dioceses, Youth Ministries Network, and the Young Adult Ministries Office. Funding for this conference provided by the Episcopal Church Center.

For further information, contact one of these offices at the Episcopal Church Center, 1-800-334-7626: Children's Ministries, exts. 5222/5212; Youth Ministries, exts. 5169/5217; Young Adult and Higher Education Ministries, exts. 5267/5195.

Bishop Charleston book

A new collection of sermons and essays by Alaska's Bishop, Steven Charleston, entitled *GOOD NEWS from NATIVE AMERICA*, is now available for only $10. All proceeds from the sale of the book will go to support the mission of the church in Alaska.

Please make check or money orders payable to the Diocese of Alaska, 1205 Denali Way, Fairbanks, AK 99701. Inquiries about selling the book at a special price are welcomed. Ask for Mary Parsons, 907-452-3040.

Spanish-language quarterly

Anglicanos, the only quarterly Spanish-language mission publication in the Anglican Communion, is available for $6/year ($10/two years). Send check to *Anglicanos*, c/o Virginia Norman, Apartado 764, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

Classifieds

Witness classifieds cost 75 cents a word or $30 an inch, whichever is less. Payments must accompany submissions. Deadline is the 15th of the month, two months prior to publication. For instance, items received January 15 will run in March.

When ads mark anniversaries of deaths, ordinations, or acts of conscience, photos — even at half column-width — can be included.

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Since 1917

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Contents

8 **Solidly rooted, ready to fly** by Rosemary Radford Ruether
Ruether looks to the people who raised her for clues about what it takes to provide a sense of family.

11 **Family values: only for the privileged?** by Julie A. Wortman
Marking the International Year of the Family, the Fourth World Movement brought families from around the world to a congress in New York. Their constituents are people who have a multi-generational relationship to poverty.

14 **David — a child of the heart** by Denise Sherer Jacobson
Denise Jacobson, who uses a wheelchair, encounters obstacles created by prejudice as she deals with the minor crisis of her young son's injured finger.

17 **Family as a principality** by Bill Wylie-Kellermann
The idolatry of family — in this culture heterosexual, nuclear families — disguises seductions from consumerism to militarism. But in the mix (and in the confusion) somewhere is the **vocation** *of family — a calling that praises God and serves creation.*

25 **"Generations of memory"** by Rita Nakashima Brock
Brock, raised by her Japanese mother, discovered as an adult that her birth father was from Puerto Rico. She goes looking for her family.

37 **1994 Index**

2	Letters	28	Vital Signs
5	Editorials	33	Book review
7	Poetry	34	*Witness* profile

Cover: Nativity *c. 1425, oil on panel, 34 x 28, by Master of Flemalle (Robert Campin?), Musee des Beaux-Arts, Dijon.*
Back cover: But pray to your God in secret, *by Dierdre Luzwick*

Valuing the family

by Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann

The ruin of a nation begins in the homes of its people.

— Ashanti proverb

On the heels of an election which purports to put family values in the center of the national agenda by withdrawing support for social programs and moralizing about people outside the heterosexual, two-parent norm, it's difficult to look at family values willingly.

At the same time, Susan Smith has dominated the headlines with her recent decision to drown her children presumably because life as a single parent was too hard.

We know that we need to take part in the national debate if there's any hope of making families flexible enough for people to live in safety. Enforced re-entry into what some vitriolic lawmakers consider to have been the lives of Ozzie and Harriet is not going to work.

This issue raises up several understandings and experiences of family. It underscores the need to broaden our definition of family so that it's realistic for each of us to be able to anticipate having one. It also offers an examination of the family as a principality. As Bill Wylie-Kellermann points out (p. 17), we can't enter the debate until we come to terms with the ways that the idea of family is manipulated by the culture and abused by the powers.

But when we do, we'll see that, at its best, what we want from our families hasn't changed much since we were children. We want to be loved and understood, supported in our efforts to stand firm or take risks to which we feel called. We want the children in our communities to be nurtured, fed and taught in ways that are healthy. We want the family to be strong enough to support members who for whatever reason don't fit the cultural norm. It's a reasonable hope, albeit fragile.

Nothing in our culture's emphasis on individual fulfillment and quick gratification prepares us for the work involved in maintaining families. Nor does the climate of commercialism and violence provide an environment where it's easy for people to hang onto their commitments and beliefs. It's the sense of threat and uneasiness in these times that allows for the rise of politicians who claim the elections were about "the three g's: God, gays and guns."

The threat is not imagined, although we contest these politicians' remedies.

Marian Wright Edelman, president of the Children's Defense Fund, said during the General Convention in August that we are in the midst of a civil war. Homicide is the third leading cause of death in children age five to 14 and *the* leading cause of death for African American male teenagers.

"Escalating violence against and by children and youths is no coincidence," she says, "It is the cumulative, convergent and heightened manifestation of a range of serious and too-long neglected problems." Where others would cite homosexuality and immorality, she lists "poverty, increasing economic inequality, racial intolerance, drug and alcohol abuse and violence in our homes and popular culture," although she does add children born outside the family structure and divorce.

Edelman puts a critical question: "Where are the family values in the richest nation on earth?"

The church, she says, is the one institution that can rise to the challenge. She preaches that adults can mitigate the influence of t.v. violence, choose against a faith in guns in favor of a faith in community and model lives free of addictions and domestic violence. She wants us to recreate neighborhoods where children can be raised within community.

"How many times have you pleaded no time when your own child sought your attention?" she asks. "How often did you write off the unruly and unresponsive child in your classroom, agency, or neighborhood because you didn't want to expend the energy or simply decided it wasn't your job or responsibility?

"The most important step each of us can take to end the violence that is tearing our country apart is to change ourselves, our hearts, our personal priorities, and our neglect of any of God's children, and add our voice to those of others in a new movement that is bigger than our individual efforts to put the social and economic underpinnings under all American children."

The work ahead in redeeming the lives of children-for-whom-no-one-has-time is huge — it's bigger, in fact, than railing against liberals and divorce.

It's a relief to know that we are not in this alone.

Rita Nakashima Brock writes about the power of *ecclesia,* the power of being loved, even when we don't know it —

continued on page 36

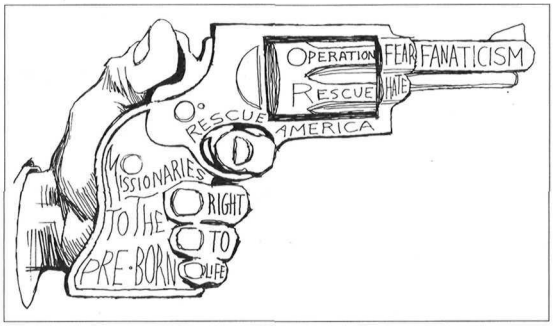
editor's note

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

Toying with violence

by Walter Wink

Most of us no doubt deplore the recent murders of an abortion doctor and his unarmed bodyguard (a retired Air Force lieutenant colonel) in Pensacola, Fla. But many of us also regard Dietrich Bonhoeffer's involvement in the death plot against Hitler as a good thing. The fact that the anniversary of that plot fell in the same week that Paul J. Hill pulled the trigger may have escaped notice. But these two events are remarkably similar and it is sobering to examine the connections.



Eleanor Mill

Both Bonhoeffer and Hill were convinced that the persons they targeted for death were committing monstrous evils. Both accepted the premise that it is necessary to kill one person to keep him or her from killing many. Both considered assassination preferable to inaction or acquiescence. Both believed that one may have to choose a lesser evil as a way of avoiding a greater evil.

Bonhoeffer was, of course, far more sophisticated. He refused to justify assassination as the will of God. He acknowledged that his involvement in the death plot was a sin, and threw himself on the mercy of God.

Hill, on the other hand, claims that God inspired him to commit the murders, that they were justified, and that he has nothing to repent about.

Nevertheless, the point is that both were willing to engage in assassination as a way of eradicating evil in the world.

Once we accept assassination as our method, there is no easy way to draw the line. If we use it, we make it that much easier for someone else to use it, possibly against us.

This may seem like a curious place to bring in the golden rule, but its ancient wisdom is still instructive. We should not engage in assassination unless we are willing to be assassinated ourselves. We should not join a death squad to kill innocent civilians unless we are willing for our opponents to organize the same and kill our families as well.

Most of those who roundly deplore the action by Hill applaud the action of Bonhoeffer. They believe in selective violence — or, as one theologian put it, "good violence." The trouble is, others have a different idea of the good.

When anti-abortionists firebombed all three of Pensacola's abortion clinics on Christmas Day, 1984, one of those convicted of the crime described it as "a gift for Jesus on his birthday."

We criticize anti-abortionists for claiming to be "pro-life" and engaging in murder, or supporting the death penalty, or (a few years back) championing nuclear deterrence. Yet many of us have also not forsworn assassination. We simply want to see it applied selectively against our own list of victims. This is extremely short-sighted of people on the left, because the left suffers assassinations at roughly 10 times the rate as the right.

The nonviolence taught by Jesus and Gandhi and King (all assassinated) was not selective. It was principled. It was based squarely on the golden rule. But it's easier to pick and choose our victims. So before we judge Paul Hill, we should check ourselves. Perhaps we aren't all that different after all. We would just choose different victims. TW

Walter Wink, a contributing editor to *The Witness*, is Professor of Biblical Interpretation at Auburn Theological Seminary in New York. Artist **Eleanor Mill** is syndicated out of Hartford, Conn.

A challenge for the right

Paul Hill's recent conviction for murdering a doctor and volunteer in Pensacola, Fla., brings together most of the major issues of our time: abortion, civil disobedience, murder and the death penalty.

Walter Wink (above) challenges the ethics of the left. The questions for the right are the same — how can you champion "the sanctity of all life" but practice selective executions?

If an anti-nuclear activist killed an employee at the nuclear weapons plant where we vigil, we would call a moratorium during which to explore our understanding of tactics and non-violence.

We ask the same of NOEL, Operation Rescue and the rest.

— *J.W.-K.*

Meterorites, 8/11/93

for Mike McEvoy

by Michael Lauchlan

Lay on your back, you tell us.
Just look up.
Siblings and kids, we've laid blankets
in right-center of the ballfield,
not far enough from street lights
for a great sky but the summer triangle
pops through — OOH BABEE!
A red tinged knife slits the ceiling of the world.
I MISSED IT! WHICH STAR FELL?
Just watch, you explain.
WHAT IF ONE FALLS ON US WHILE WE'RE LAYING HERE?
Uh-oh, you say. A meteor in Rosedale?
Above our faces, the air fills
with familytalk, with news.
Last summer a boy was killed
in this same wedge of greenspace
because he stopped a fight at a party.
Today, the shooter got forty to sixty.
LOOK AT THAT? WHERE? I MISSED IT!
A storm glowers from the northeast.
Strangers dally to chat in the dark
and everyone looks up.
Your father died in the last Perseid,
all of stretched out around him, waiting.
Your first ever verse made him astronomical.
HOW FAR IS VEGA?
25 light years.
HOW ABOUT THE SHOOTING STARS?
Right here. Right now.

Michael Lauchlan, a Detroit poet and teacher, is concluding his one-year tenure as poetry editor with this issue. The editorship of the poetry page rotates annually so we can include a variety of voices. Songwriter/composer Aná Hernandez will turn her talents to this page next.

Poetry

The Tooth Fairy's Reward: Time

by Michael Lauchlan

What did you think we did
with these loose ivories?
Pounded flat they wouldn't be nickels,
let alone the going rate.
No. We let time nest in them.
See the rough edge, the spot of blood
where this one broke from root and gum,
leaving a chamber tinged with pink.
See — roundly fluted porcelain sides
like an opening bud of bright bone,
and the top with its hint of a cavity,
its ridges and craters.
How much you've crushed
with this infant molar: granola tracks,
hard candy and lozenges,
that bit of chicken you spent
all day nudging with your tongue.
In this way it contains time, young lady,
and gives up its mystery to the trained eye,
as crackling of a wing-slapped maple tells
how great an eagle has escaped our view.

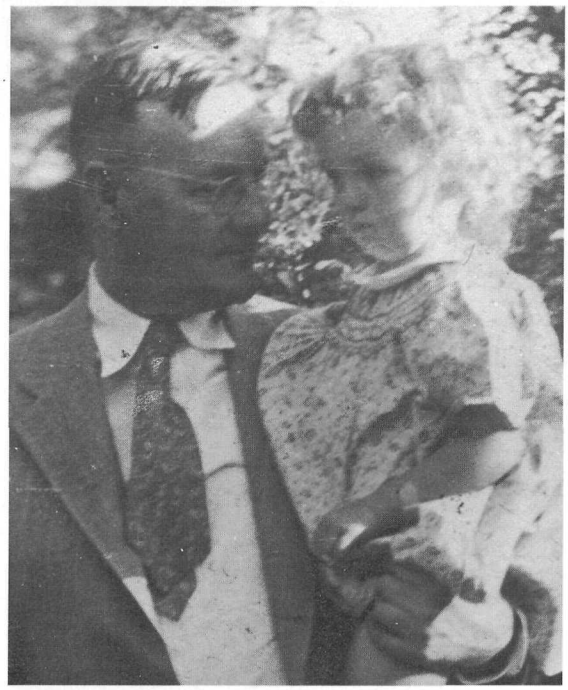
Solidly rooted, ready to fly

by Rosemary Radford Ruether

My family pattern was somewhat unusual, although it seemed "normal" to me because it was my reality. My parents married late, when my mother was 33 and my father 40. As I was the third of three daughters, my parents were the age of many children's grandparents, my mother being 41 and my father 48, when I was born.

My father was a civil engineer and during the Second World War, despite his age (mid-fifties) he went to France to oversee war projects with the Army Corps of Engineers. He contracted pneumonia there and almost died. In 1947 he went to Greece to direct the engineering work to rebuild the railroads and the Corinth Canal which had been destroyed by the Nazis as they left Greece. The family joined him there in 1948 and he died in Greece, due to a recurrence of pneumonia, in 1949. This meant that for much of my early childhood, my father was absent, away at war when I was between the ages of 5 and 9, and then for about six months when I was 11. I was 12 when he died.

My father was a "Virginian" of the old school who would leave a party if men began to tell off-color jokes that would "offend the ladies." My memories of him are of someone who was strong and principled, but who treated me with unjudgmental kindness. My mother adored him as a perfect paradigm of gentlemanliness, and I never heard them raise their voices toward each other. But he had traditional ideas about how young ladies should be educated and sent my oldest sister to Sweet Briar College in Virginia to become a Southern Lady. It was totally unsuitable to her. I don't know how he would have taken to a feminist theologian in the family, but he did not live long enough for me to find out.



Rosemary Ruether with her father, Robert Armstrong Ruether.

Several vignettes cluster around my memories of him. Father drew with consummate skill and sent Mother letters with sketches of European scenes done with the fineness of etchings. He darned his own socks with tiny stitches that looked like the sock had been rewoven. He loved sweets (in contrast to my mother, who grew up with a diabetic mother and treated sweets as something close to sin). During the two years he was home after the war, he and I used to go out monthly to see a National Geographic film in downtown Washington and then for ice cream sundaes afterwards. He always got hot fudge and I butterscotch. This was all the more delicious because we knew Mother would disapprove.

Once he and I drove down together to Fotheringay, the Radford family "place" near Roanoke, to visit his aged cousins, and he taught me how to read the map while he drove. He was a great story-teller and made up tales of Billy Bear and Betsy Bear who lived in the hills behind Fotheringay to tell us in the evenings before we headed off to bed. He was the sort of father that made a small girl feel like a princess.

My last memories of him are during several weeks in Greece when we were alone together while my mother took my middle sister to school in Switzerland. (My older sister had left Sweet Briar and was in school at the University of Montpelier in southern France.) He had decided to continue to work in Greece, and we went together to look at the house he planned to rent. There was the satisfying feeling of being special, of having all his attention for myself. Then in the middle of the night he woke me with an ashen face and told me to find someone to contact a doctor. He was dead two days later before my mother could return to Athens.

Some weeks before my father died I remember walking along a road in suburban Athens and thinking about the possibility of one parent predeceasing the other. I thought of the strengths of each, and then decided that mother could survive better without father than the reverse.

Rosemary Radford Ruether is professor of theology at Garrett Evangelical Seminary in Evanston, Ill.

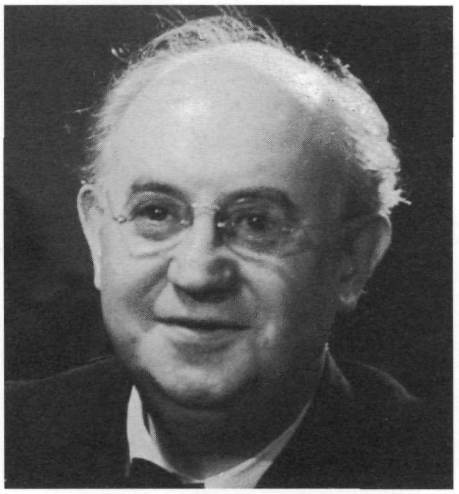
When he actually died quite suddenly some weeks later I felt pangs of guilt, as if merely thinking about his death had caused it. But then I decided it was an accurate premonition that also assured me that all would be well with mother as sole parent, despite her shocked sorrow at his death.

Mother and I returned to the Radford family house in Washington, D.C., where we had lived before. Aunt Mary, my father's sister, a single professional woman, moved in with us, to give mother a 'hand' with the house and family. My father's second sister, Sophie, was married to David Sandow, who was an architect, but who was also a fine amateur painter and musician, as well as a golfer. Uncle David became my second father, taking me on endless excursions to symphonies, the Washington National Art Gallery, which I came to know by heart, and also to play golf. Going over to Uncle David's house meant looking through his many art books, listening to his recordings of classical music, singing around the piano and being set up in his studio with oils and brushes to paint.

In 1952 my mother decided to sell the Radford family house in Georgetown and move back to southern California where she had grown up. Our leaving was painful for Uncle David who had tears in his eyes as we left. But in California I got to know a different mother, a mother who had grown up in Mexico, who spoke Spanish fluently and who reconnected with a circle of women friends from her earlier days. These women were all college educated, highly independent and socially involved.

For much of my early childhood, my father was absent, away at war when I was between the ages of 5 and 9, and then for about six months when I was 11. I was 12 when he died.

There was Helen, my mother's oldest friend from high school days, one of the founders of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, deeply involved all her life in supporting peace and justice causes, such as War Resisters and the Farm Workers. When Nixon's "Enemy List" was published, she was on it. I remember my mother and her friends all laughing and slapping Helen on the back, saying "We are so proud of you, Helen, you made the enemy's list." There was Aunt Betty, an artist and patron of the San Diego Art Gallery who, when in her fifties, had married an Englishman. There was Aunt Mimi, whose family owned horses and orange groves and lived a California way of life that was vanishing in the 1950s. She wore jeans, took me horseback riding and on camping trips in Baja, California (Mexico).



David Sandow, Ruether's uncle.

These then, are my childhood circle of "parents": Mother and Father, Aunt Mary, Uncle David, Helen, Aunt Betty and Aunt Mimi. Each of them helped parent me in crucial ways. I feel some part of my soul, some aspect of my expanding being, was nurtured through my relation to each one. My mother was the center, the unshakable *"terra firma,"* that gave me a solid sense of being rooted firmly in reality and yet encouraged to develop in whatever ways I found interesting. My father was the kindly nurturer, who made me feel deliciously special, but who passed in and out of my life in brief episodes.

Through my Aunt Mary I experienced the single woman who, to our great amazement, had been a policewoman. When we knew her she worked as a social worker in an orphanage. My Uncle David pointed me to the great worlds of art and music and taught me to play golf. Underneath his wry humor, there was a mystical sadness, drawn from the deep well of Jewish experience in Christendom. He loved Rembrandt, seeing in his darkly jeweled colors the reflection of his own soul.

My artistic interests were encouraged further by Aunt Betty and my outdoors sporting interests through Aunt Mimi. Helen took me to protest marches on behalf of peace and justice and made me recognize that all was not well in the social system called the United States. Through her I entered the civil rights and peace movements of the 1960s.

When I look back on my growing up, I don't feel like the child of a "single mother," although my mother was the sole parent through much of my growing up. Rather I feel richly parented through this circle of extended family. I come from these experiences of growing up feeling strongly that children need many parents. Certainly it is not enough for a child to grow up with only one parent. If that one parent is a woman trying to be both bread winner and parent, the task is overwhelming and unfair both to parent and child.

A household needs both economic and emotional sustenance from more than one adult. But even two adults helping

each other maintain the household and raise a family are culturally and emotionally impoverished if they lack an extended family that can help the growing child expand in many directions; learning to think about social issues critically, to appreciate culture and to develop bodily skills in sports. Five or six committed mentors with different interests, personalities and worlds into which they can introduce children, encircling a stable, reliable center, feels right to me.

With this variety of parents, nothing was lacking, almost anything felt possible. For a time I toyed with the idea of being a professional baseball player or golfer or horsewoman. Then I thought I would be an artist and spent the middle years of my childhood and college years in art classes. Gradually I moved toward being an academic intellectual interested in historical origins of ideas and their social consequences. To become a feminist theologian concerned about injustice, war and racism and seeking to make a "better world" feels like fleshing out the soil in which I was planted and nourished from these many parents.

Fathering is "in" at the moment. With a surfeit of single mothers trying to raise children by themselves, often in poverty due to low female incomes and under the stress of trying to "do it all," people begin to ask once again, "Don't children need fathers?" Unfortunately this question is often asked in such a way as to scapegoat the women who are trying to "do it all" under impossible circumstances which were not of their choosing, rather than asking about the men who are the biological fathers of the children, but have declined to be real parent figures for them.

Do children need the male parent as much as the female parent? Do they need the particular gifts and strengths that males bring to raising children? My own sense is that in the circle of parenting figures children need relations to parenting men as well as parenting women. In a gendered world we interact and expand differently in our relation to women and to men. Both girls and boys need the experiences of being nurtured and mentored by males and females, although I can only speak about this from the perspective of a female.

The best parenting points to qualities of nurture and challenge, of being grounded and upheld and of being free to separate, that need to be integrated in a community of male and female parenting figures that can help a child feel trusting and solidly rooted and so also free to fly.

The parenting I received from my own father, brief as it was, was precious to me, as was the creative mentoring from my Uncle David. However, my sense is that girls in particular (and I think also boys, although I can't speak about that directly) do not need a binary set of male and female parenting figures that fall into stereotypical masculine and feminine qualities. We don't need to have only gentle nurture from females and only discipline and intellectual, physical and cultural challenges from males.

None of my parenting figures fell into such stereotypical masculine and feminine specializations. Each was different and unique, but also whole. If anything my father was the nurturer, my mother the disciplinarian. My uncle tenderly taught me music and art, golf and a touch of the mystical; my aunts gave me social, cultural and physical challenges.

As my soul expanded with each of these parent figures, I also experienced the complexity of the worlds into which they led me, the many-sided integration of loving support and challenging discipline. I also learned to think of men and women as complex wholes, each of whom had made their own integrations of the qualities of receptivity and agency, feeling and critical thinking, the aesthetic, the ethical and the mystical. It is this expansive mentoring in the many ways of being a full human being that I think children need to grow well. The best of parenting gives children many attractive models from which they can fashion their own growth and identity.

In short, fathering is not a specialty of males and mothering a specialty of females. These terms point out qualities of nurture and challenge, of being grounded and upheld and of being free to separate, that need to be integrated in a community of male and female parenting figures that can help a child feel trusting and solidly rooted and so also free to fly. TW

Welcome the Child

Welcome the Child: A Child Advocacy Guide for Churches is a newly released resource examining children's standing in Scripture, their realities in this country today and directions in which the churched might move to provide effective advocacy. The book is accessible and designed for parish use.

Published by Friendship Press and the Children's Defense Fund, *Welcome the Child* can be ordered (for $9.95 plus shipping) by calling 202-662-3652.

Family values: only for the privileged?

by Julie A. Wortman

A couple of years ago the daughter of a family in our middle-class suburban neighborhood moved back into her parents' home with her young son. I don't know the circumstances that caused the daughter to return home, but I can guess — I know the possibilities first-hand. A friend of mine who is in her sixties will be moving in with her daughter at the end of this month because the money from a job severance package has run out and she still hasn't found new employment; another friend has become the legal guardian of her two grandchildren because her unpartnered daughter cannot offer them emotional stability or health insurance coverage; and last summer my own godchild's parents were able to ease a transition in their lives through the genorousity of relatives who gave them a rent-free place to stay.

Society tends to believe that families in which members take care of one another in times of need are to be valued. A family, after all, is supposed to be where, no matter what, you know they will take you in.

Unless, of course, you are extremely poor.

"It's often held against the person who offers the help," says Kathy Evans a full-time volunteer with the U.S. branch of the Fourth World Movement, an international anti-poverty organization. "If you're in public housing, the housing officer or social worker is likely to object if you've taken in a relative because your living conditions are now too overcrowded."

Fourth World Movement activists like Evans — some of whom themselves are living in poverty — have, since the group's founding in France in 1957, been working to stand in solidarity with the "Fourth World," those in every country who live in intergenerational poverty, especially extreme poverty.

Laura Patterson

Fourth World Family Congress delegates Patricia McConalogue of Scotland and Gavino Yucra Tunqi of Peru delivering a delegates' message at the United Nations last October. Participants came from 45 countries and included both persons living in poverty and grass-roots anti-poverty activists.

In this International Year of the Family, the Movement has been focusing on ensuring that those living in poverty aren't deprived of the right to maintain strong family ties. For 10 days last October, the group sponsored a Fourth World Family Congress in which more than 300 delegates from Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas — people living in poverty as well as persons helping to fight poverty — participated. They worshiped at New York's Cathedral of St. John the Divine and honored those living in extreme poverty at the United Nations. They lobbied on Capitol Hill and spent time building a sense of mutual solidarity. (Delegates' travel costs were paid for by concerted money-raising campaigns at home; housing in the U.S. was provided by local hosts.)

Donna Primrose, the founder/director of a day shelter called Our Place Drop-In Center in Bellows Falls, Vt., and a delegate to the Congress, tells of an English delegate whose children were taken away from her, not because she was abusing them, but because she was poor. Her children were placed in a foster-care facility where she fears they are now being abused.

Primrose says this story illustrates a simple reality — that while poverty may not be a moral failing or a crime, society often treats it that way. To change that perception, Primrose says, "you have to do away with the ignorance of the people who have the power and the money. The people who run my town are so negative about the poor. They stereotype them as irresponsible and unfit — I've even overheard some of these leaders calling the poor 'welfare bastards.'"

Superficially, such stereotyping can seem justified, the Fourth World Movement's Evans admits. She cites the example of poor parents in the U.S. who choose not to enroll their pre-schoolers in educational programs like "Home Start," where teachers come into young

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Julie A. Wortman is managing editor of *The Witness.*

children's homes to help them prepare for school. They might seem not to have their children's best interests at heart, she says, but notes that "most poor people would be afraid to have someone come into their house and see how they live — they'd be afraid that someone would come take their children. The lives of those who receive government assistance are very public — the rest of us can hide what we do and how we live."

According to participants in a United Nations seminar held in conjunction with the Family Congress, "Poverty hinders the ability of people to benefit from their fundamental rights and to exercise their responsibilities in their communities."

Responsibilities like caring for their families.

As Evans points out, extreme poverty is not just about a lack of money. "People living in extreme poverty lack all sorts of securities — work, housing, self-confidence, literacy, medical care and ignorance of how to work the system," she says. In the more than 35 years that Fourth World Movement volunteers have been collecting the stories of the poor, Evans says, they have noted that people living in extreme poverty "come from a background where expectations for a better life are not there. We see the Fourth World as a people — a people lacking basic social tools."

"People living in extreme poverty lack all sorts of securities — work, housing, self-confidence, literacy, medical care and ignorance of how to work the system. They come from a background where expectations for a better life are not there." — *Kathy Evans*

And among the skills Fourth World people might never have learned, says Primrose, is parenting. At age 19 Primrose herself spent a period of time caring for her three children in, successively, a corn crib, a tent and an abandoned car. A divorced high-school dropout, she had a crisis on her hands. But unlike people who have lived in extreme poverty all their lives, Primrose was rich in self-confidence, vision, motivation and social skills, managing to get herself a college education (her welfare caseworker allowed her to continue receiving benefits if she could work out financial aid and child care — the college helped her with the former and a local minister helped

Our children are our blood

... Many of us,
from Asia, Africa, Europe,
Australia and the Americas,
have lived in extreme poverty all our lives,
just like our parents.
We have experienced the same suffering and humiliation.

We are the children of men and women who have faced up to hunger, homelessness,
mistrust and violence.
We know how our parents struggled, often alone,
to keep our families together.

We are families who survive
in makeshift shelters,
in shanty towns, abandoned buildings,
welfare or bed-and-breakfast hotels,
under bridges, in old cars,
even in caves.

One of our greatest fears
is to spend the night out of doors,
so we do all we can so that no one
is alone on the streets after dark.

We are people who exhaust ourselves
doing unofficial, undeclared
and irregularly paid work:
on rubbish dumps, in parks and factories,
on farms and in mines.
All too often, to feed our families,
we have to look for work away from home.

We are weakened and humiliated too
by long periods without work,
by having to beg
and depend on the charity
and goodwill of others.

Our children are our only wealth.
It is especially for them
that we want a different life.
All our hopes are for their future:
in schools where they will really learn,
in jobs where they will sense
they are building the modern world.

Many of us have known
the unbearable suffering
of having children taken away,
and placed in institutions,
adopted, stolen and even sold,
just because we are poor.
Sometimes, all we have
is a photo, a toy,
or a piece of clothing they have worn,
and these things
we keep very close to us.

In spite of everything,
our children are our blood;
they are part of our family
and always will be. ...

— excerpted from the "Message of Fourth World Delegates to the Fourth World Family Congress," offered in honor of the victims of extreme poverty at the United Nations October 17, 1994.

with the latter) and, eventually, a well-paid teaching job. Her three children are now in their thirties — a lawyer, a music teacher and a contractor.

"I met a young, poor couple from the Netherlands at the Congress," Primrose says. "They had three children and she was pregnant. 'Teach us how to take care of our kids, don't take them away,' they said. I think that's the big message people want to put across: 'You need to listen to us to find out what we need.'"

Evans agrees. "People in poverty have knowledge and experience that is useful. And they are already making efforts to improve their situation." But policy-makers need to listen.

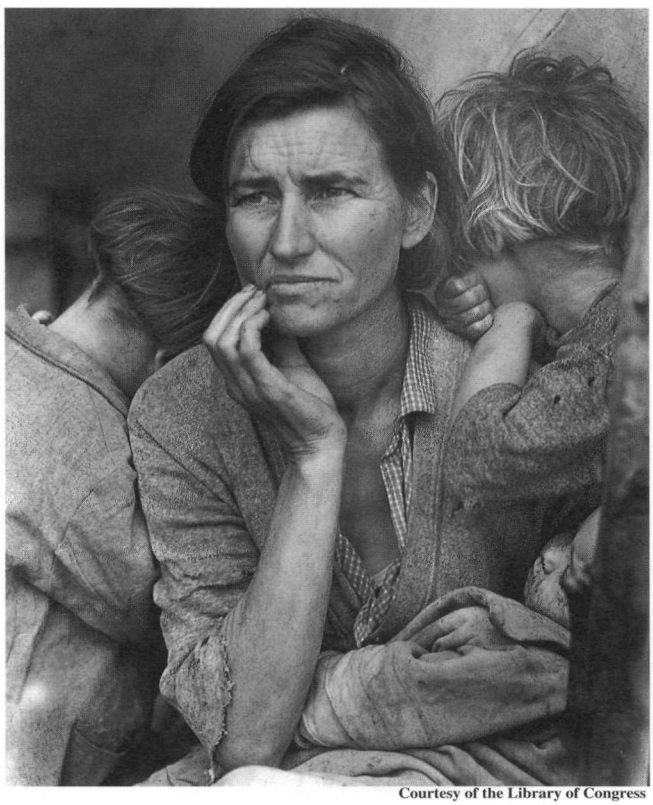
Her Home Start example is a case in point. "People in poverty could have told the people who designed that program that they wouldn't welcome teachers coming into their homes — a neutral site, like a community center, would have been better."

Drawing from data gathered during experimental projects, Fourth World Movement activists say that to be effective, assistance must be comprehensive and long-term — what programs accomplish with some people in two years will take three, four or five years when the very poor are involved.

"When people have suffered deprivations for so long, any given program needs to be comprehensive and to simultaneously address the main areas of life which give basic security to a family: housing, health, education, work and income," a 1993 article in the Movement's newsletter, *Perspectives*, states. "Experience has shown over and over again that to be able to work or take advantage of any training, people need a minimum of stability in their lives."

While people in poverty have little power to change the way governments approach assistance, those who haven't been completely broken by their situation *can* organize, a basic Fourth World Movement tenet. Shirley Jordan, for example, a Fourth World Family Congress delegate from Covington, La., works with a support group for parents and children in her neighborhood. "We get together with a bunch of kids, help read stories to them, help them with their homework, have dinner for them at the park," she says. A single parent with daughters aged 13 and 15, Jordan has worked in a nursing home for the past 13 years, but she knows she's living on the edge: "I live from paycheck to paycheck. I don't have any kind of medical benefits — it's hard when your child gets sick."

Through support groups like Jordan's and through events like the Fourth World Family Congress that bring the concerns of the poor to the United Nations and Capitol Hill, the participants are not only fighting the "poverty of isolation" which so often accompanies economic poverty because shame and fear lead many to be secretive about their lives, but also tapping into the self-affirming energy that comes from realizing that, despite how little they might have materially, they still have something to contribute to one another and to the larger human-rights battle.



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Migrant Mother, Nipomo, California, 1936, by Dorothea Lange

"The delegates to the Fourth World Family Congress will go back to their lives and materially nothing will have changed," says Evans. She refers to the English delegate whose children were taken away from her. "That mother will be returning to the same situation — and that's hard. But she will go back with a feeling of solidarity. She can be useful — she has something to give, even if it's only to speak up and tell her story."

It doesn't seem like much, this telling of stories, especially in light of last month's state and local elections in which political candidates made it clear they would reduce budget deficits on the backs of people who were characterized, one way or another, as social free-loaders. In the rhetoric, "welfare mother" sounds like a dirty name, not a family value.

But the Fourth World Movement community is hopeful.

"Maybe you're not going to turn peoples' lives around, you are up against so many social, economic and political forces that keep people poor," admits Movement volunteer Evans. "But to give up means that another generation will be broken as well." TW

David — a child of the heart

by Denise Sherer Jacobson

Denise and Neil Jacobson were asked, in 1985, to adopt an infant who was believed to have a physical or developmental disability (though it was later found that he does not). The Jacobsons, both of whom have cerebral palsy and use motorized wheelchairs, agreed. Their son David is now 8 years old.

Just a few more blocks, was the foremost thought on my mind as I saw the corner of 51st and Broadway up ahead. My back ached badly now and David, sitting on my lap at this hour of the late afternoon, felt as heavy as the 40 pounds he weighed.

We passed the entrance to Grand Auto and neared the rounded corner of Broadway and 51st. It was not one of my favorite crossings. Traffic came from all directions. Lights and arrows changed at the blink of an eye. Cars breezed through the narrow right turn-off between the curb cut and triangular island that I had to reach before crossing the wide thoroughfares of either Broadway or 51st.

David bent over the armrest of my chair watching the wheels go around. The motion had fascinated him ever since he was a baby. He seemed to be leaning a little further than usual, and I thought about saying something, but the right turn lane was clearing. I saw our opportunity to make the first leg of that precarious crossing.

I started, only to be stopped — just as we made it to the edge of the island — by the piercing shrieks of my son. He sprung upright. I was all ready to scold him for doing whatever it was he knew he shouldn't be doing while we were in the midst of crossing the street until I saw the drops of blood dripping down onto the sleeve of my pink jacket, my pants, and my chrome footrests. He held up the middle finger of his right hand. It was drenched with blood.

Instinctively my palm pressed forward on the joystick so we would be clear of traffic. My wheelchair squealed laboriously up the curb cut and then rested. I ignored the ominous squeal and examined David's finger to see if it was still all there, knowing that if it wasn't I'd have to start looking for a little piece of finger. The wound was pretty deep but the fingertip was still there, joint and all.

"It's gonna be okay, David," I tried to soothe above his hysterical cry.

On the corner we had just come from, I spotted a young girl wearing the plaid uniform of St. Theresa's high school. She was on her way over.

"We can go back in there and wash it off," she suggested, nodding in the direction of Grand Auto.

I coaxed him to go with her and, very unlike him, he went without protest.

As I watched them disappear, I suddenly questioned my decision: Should I have let him go? This wasn't the only way into or out of that building — what if she took him out another exit?

There seemed to be very little forward power on the right side of my wheelchair. I had to back up the slight incline of the doorway. Once I got on the flat vinyl surface I could turn. I approached one of two bored-looking women at the counter.

"Where's the little boy?" I asked.

"Huh?"

I repeated. "Where's the little boy?"

"She wants to know where the little boy is," her coworker translated.

"Oh. They took him to the bathroom," she answered her peer.

"Where is it?" I demanded.

She disappeared down the aisle of car gizmos and white-walled tires. I creaked after her, having the first chance to glimpse down over the right side of the wheelchair. I was relieved when I saw what was wrong. The quarter-inch rubber drive belt had come off its track. It would be a cinch to fix, especially at Grand Auto!

"I don't think she could get back into the bathroom," I heard somebody say. "He'll be right out, anyway."

So she hadn't taken off with him! I breathed with relief, already thinking about whether I should take David home or call the doctor and find someone to drive us there. Or I could whiz us straight down College Avenue to the doctor's office a little less than two miles away. First, however, I needed my drive belt realigned or we wouldn't be going anywhere.

I was all ready to scold him, until I saw the drops of blood dripping down onto the sleeve of my pink jacket, my pants, and my chrome footrests.

There was a man standing nearby wearing a short sleeve white shirt and dark blue tie. He looked like he might be the manager, since all the other men passing me were in dark gray mechanics' uniforms. I opened my mouth to speak as soon as he glanced down at me, but he immediately averted his eyes, looking helpfully into those of a standing customer who had just approached.

Gritting my teeth, I swallowed and waited for him to finish. When he did, he

Denise Sherer Jacobson is a writer in Oakland, Calif.

started to turn away — just as I had expected.

"Sir. *Sir*. SIR," I persisted louder and louder until, when others started looking, he could no longer ignore me. "I need some help with my wheelchair."

I pointed down to the drive belt. He barely bent down to give it a look before calling over a man in overalls. Then he walked back behind the counter, leaving me to explain what needed to be done to a very intimidated auto mechanic. In the midst of my struggle to explain, David came out of the bathroom. His howling grew louder as he approached. I heard voices trying to console him.

"They'll be here soon. They'll make it all better."

"They" sounded ominous, but at that moment I was too involved to even ask who "they" were. David, his injured finger wrapped in a brown paper towel, stepped up on my footrests, straddled my left leg, and settled into my lap. Tears streamed down his cheeks. I wanted to comfort him, yet his cries were interrupting my attempt to direct the two mechanics now working on getting the drive belt back in place. I wanted my wheelchair working again, so that we could get out of there before "they" came. Unfortunately, both happened at the same time.

The woman clerk led the two paramedics to us. A blond-haired one squatted down in front of David. A bearded dark-haired one with glasses stood beside him, hands on hips.

"She his mother?" the bearded one asked.

Who the hell else would I be?

Someone answered yes.

"What's his name?" the one who squatted asked.

"David," I replied, as I glimpsed quickly at his name tag.

"David, can I see your finger?"

"No!" David howled through tears.

"David, honey, you need to show him your finger," I coaxed in a deliberately calm voice.

"It hurts to touch," David sniffed.

"I know," I said, "but right now, he just wants to look at it."

After carefully examining the finger, Kevin raised his eyes to his partner. "Here, take a look."

"Geez, looks like the tip of it is gone."

Could I have been wrong? I peeked over David's shoulder again. It still looked the same to me.

"He'll probably need stitches," the bearded one said. "Let's get him to the hospital."

"No," I protested immediately. "I'll take him to his doctor."

"We can't let you do that."

"Why not?"

"He needs immediate attention."

"I'll get there in 10 minutes," I lied.

The two paramedics gave each other wary glances, indicating they had no intention of letting us go anywhere. The blond one spoke. "We need to fill out some paperwork. Why don't I go get it and David can come out to get his finger bandaged?"

Instinctively, my arm tightened around David's waist, although he made no move to get up. In fact, he scooted back further into my lap.

"I'll go with you," I started to move.

"No, you stay here." His cajoling tone sounded very suspicious.

Leon, David and Denise Jacobson

When their tactic of trying to separate us didn't work, the paramedics pressured me again as they stood in the corner parking lot. "We need to take him to the hospital."

"And what about me?" I questioned. "How will I get there?"

The bearded one suggested, "We could call a paddy wagon for her."

"For her" meant they were still taking David in the ambulance. I couldn't let that happen. "No!"

I knew that if I let them take him, David's trust in me would begin to waver.

A small crowd had followed us outside. The paramedics had turned from me to have a *tête-à-tête*. They spoke in low voices, but as a lifelong eavesdropper I filtered out the traffic and the murmurs of onlookers to catch their words. "We'll have to call the police," the blond said to

the nodding beard.

Like a bad dream, this was getting more and more out of control. I knew my credibility was nonexistent. I had to convince them to call somebody, somebody who could get them to see me as something other than a hysterical cripple.

"Look, call my doctor," I desperately demanded, getting them to at least look at me again. "Please, don't call the police . . . Call my doctor."

The repairman, who had fixed my drive belt, knelt on the other side of me. When I turned my head, his face seemed less than three inches from mine. He spoke in a tone as if he were admonishing a child. "You don't understand, he needs to go to a hospital."

"No, you don't understand!" I answered back in a voice from deep inside me, articulated with strength and clarity I never knew I had. "He's not going anywhere without me!"

I strained my head, searching the crowd for sympathetic eyes.

I made eye contact with the girl in the uniform again, who was looking somewhat forlorn at the trouble I was having, and, for the second time, she came to my rescue. Borrowing a small pad from the repairman and a pen from the bearded paramedic who was busily informing his partner (above my head) that he had just radioed the police, she wrote down the number I gave her and our last name. Then she disappeared.

A few minutes later, the girl reappeared into the small chaotic crowd and announced, "The doctor would like to speak to one of the paramedics!"

Suddenly, a hush settled over the crowd, as if everyone had been slapped into sense. The bearded paramedic went to take the phone call. The crowd dispersed, leaving the other paramedic to squat down to my eye level and finally speak to me as a human being.

"We'll do whatever the doctor says," the paramedic named Kevin now assured me. "If he wants us to take you to his office, we'll do it — even though we're really not supposed to. But he may want you to go to the hospital."

I was almost certain that we would end up being sent to the hospital if the other paramedic had described David's finger as he saw it. I intended to pursue an agreeable course of action. "How will we get there?"

His answer surprised me. He had actually thought it out. "We could lift David and you onto the stretcher and put your chair up front next to the driver's seat."

I felt an obligation to warn him that my wheelchair weighed 300 pounds without me. That wasn't a problem, he said.

The bearded paramedic returned and spoke to me. "The doctor said you probably should go to the hospital because he'll most likely need stitches and X-rays."

"Okay," I nodded, giving David a reassuring squeeze. "We're ready."

I provided Kevin, who rode with us in the back, with all the necessary information so that the company could bill us its standard fee of $300 for the 10-block ride I had never requested. We were all so calm now. I spoke so clearly; he understood me so well.

"It must be hard," he commented, looking at me with his blue eyes full of sympathy.

I'd heard that comment so many times and never really knew how to respond. The question reflects so many assumptions: How could someone like me meet the demands of an active child? How could a child not take advantage of the obvious physical limitations of his parents? People seem to get so caught up in what they can see that they ignore that which is invisible to them, the most important part of raising a child — the relationship between him and his parents. Suddenly, I knew how to answer that question.

"It must be hard," the paramedic commented. I looked straight into his eyes and said: "The hardest thing is having other people assume that I'm not capable of being a parent."

I looked straight into his eyes and said: "The hardest thing is having other people assume that I'm not capable of being a parent."

The sympathy in his face disappeared. "I'm sorry for what happened back there. Very sorry."

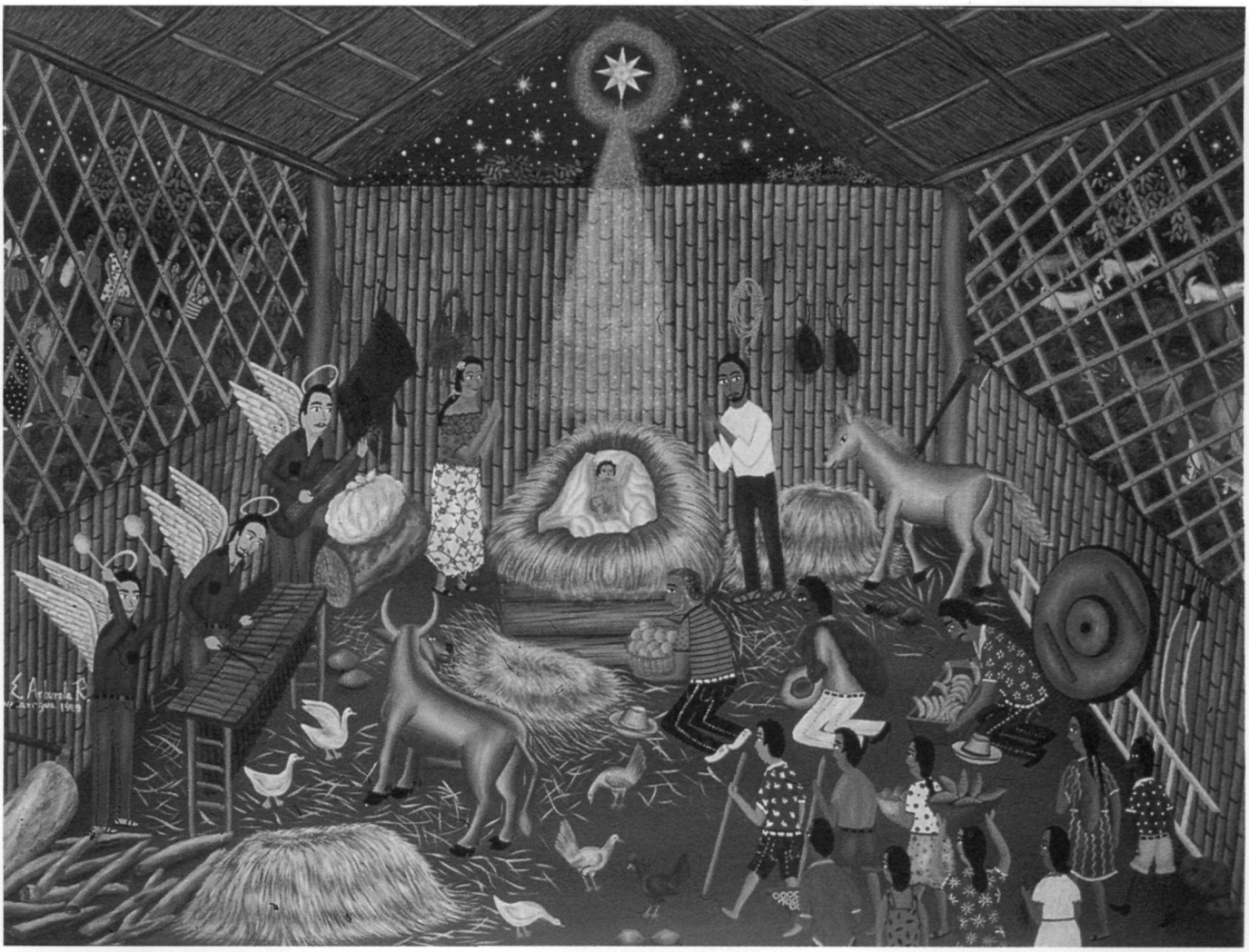
As if to make up for it even more, when we arrived at the hospital, he announced my maternal ability to every staff member we passed on our way to an emergency cubicle where David and I spent most of the next two hours.

David caught a second wind. He charmed the head nurse when she asked him his full name. "I have two," he told her. "One is David Jacobson and the other is David-the-Great!"

She couldn't stop laughing.

The X-rays showed no broken bones. A resident ordered David's finger to be soaked in an antiseptic solution. Another resident wrapped the finger in a medication-treated strip and then a gauze bandage. She gave David an injection and wrote a prescription for an antibiotic.

Tomorrow I would take David to Dr. Berberich. I wanted my own doctor to check his finger. I also wanted to gloat: Not one stitch! TW



Noel! Noel! **by Edmundo Arburola**

Courtesy of the Nicaraguan Cultural Alliance and Quixote Center/Quest for Peace

Family: icon and principality

by Bill Wylie-Kellermann

The holy family is an icon of Christmas time. It is an image of humanity, speaking of God's love for and presence with us all. It stands virtually as the seasonal emblem of love. We must not forget, however, that this is love under pressure. Here is a family beset, a family in crisis. They must overcome the public shame of unwed motherhood. They are moved about by government order. They are foreigners without resources and shelter. They become the target of violence and flee as political refugees. In these and other ways the family of Jesus represents the experience of family today. It is beset by the principalities and powers.

However, if we are to defend the family and speak on its behalf, family itself must be numbered among the principalities and powers of this world.

Bill Stringfellow certainly counted it so — including it in one of those interminable and exhaustive listings of the powers that be: with all institutions, ideologies, and traditions, with the likes of the Pentagon, the Ford Motor Company, and Consolidated Edison, with sports, sex, technology, money, and a legion host of others. More than once he pronounced that he must write something on the topic: family as principality.

To name it so means to recognize in the family a social reality with a life of its

own, a God-given structure with a vocation to praise God and serve human life, indeed a creature accountable to judgement — to the sovereignty of the Word of God. It also means that we acknowledge the family as subject to the fall, as suffering a confusion and distortion of vocation, as regularly enslaving (instead of serving) human beings, capturing them in the bondage of death.

Amidst the call for attending to the family and its values — and I am one prepared to join that call — we best be thoroughly realistic about the fallenness of this "most basic social unit of human society."

A fallen system

One gentle way into this is via the therapeutic community's understanding of "family systems," let's say with respect to alcohol addiction. Years ago the alcoholic was treated in isolation as a solitary individual afflicted with a disease, a genetic or personality or behavior disorder. Subsequently, members of the family were brought into the treatment process for the sake of supportive relationships. But lo and behold, as theory and experience developed, these very family members were discovered to be "enabling" the addiction. The family member called upon for support turned out, often as not, to be codependent.

As family counseling has progressed, it's been recognized that the family is a configuration, a system of relationships. Even in its most dysfunctional state it operates to bind its members in a status quo, to hold and conform them to a "homeostasis." As Edwin Friedman names it, "the tendency of any set of relationships to strive perpetually, in self-corrective ways to preserve the organizing principles of its existence."

Healing, apart from addressing this entire system, is often misdirected if not futile. The one who is sick or addicted may be merely the place where the pathology of the whole system has surfaced. The people are in the pattern and the pattern is in the people. It operates with a kind of spiritual force. While "dysfunction" is hardly an adequate synonym for the distortion of the fall, it is not unrelated. One may be literally in bondage to a position in the dysfunctional pattern. Naming and seeing (and then breaking) that pattern are key to healing and freedom.

We acknowledge the family as subject to the fall, as suffering a confusion and distortion of vocation, as regularly enslaving (instead of serving) human beings, capturing them in the bondage of death.

Family and violence

Going a step further, such patterns are regularly replicated generationally in what therapists call the "family field." So it is that violence, particularly against women and children, and sexual abuse are not only handed down but carefully and systematically maintained. The family, in this regard if no other, presents itself as a fallen principality.

In *For Your Own Good: Hidden Cruelty in Child-Rearing and the Roots of Violence*, psychoanalyst Alice Miller recounts the internal and systemic mechanisms by which the "silent drama" of humiliation and abuse is played out from one generation to the next — often in the guise of discipline, which is to say, corporal punishment.

Because of their utter dependence upon adult family members, because their love and tolerance for their parents knows no bounds, children are completely vulnerable. Their sense of betrayal, their anger, even (as we now know) their painful memories can only be repressed to be discharged later in adulthood against others — most often their own family members — or themselves.

The statistics of family violence horrify. Some 1,200 children die each year from abuse or neglect. One in six Americans claims to have been physically abused as a child; one in seven report being sexually abused. Of the 11,000 handgun deaths each year in the U.S., the great majority of these occur within the family. Each day, four women die at the hands of their male partner. As the Surgeon General recently put things, "The home is actually a more dangerous place for women than city streets."

The family, called to love, to nurture and protect human beings, turns out to be often as not the very site of violence, raising up members of society readily conformed to the larger — even global — systems of domination. We are in the pattern and the pattern is in us.

A biblical view

The Bible is not unfamiliar with such patterns. When Phyllis Trible exegetes her biblical "texts of terror" for women, all but one of them arise from the violence of power in family relations. Moreover, in scripture the first murder, that seminal act whose consequences mushroom in myth and history, takes place among siblings of the first family of creation (Gen. 4:1-16).

Biblically, the legacy of family is plainly synonymous with patriarchy,

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Bill Wylie-Kellermann is a United Methodist pastor and editor of *Keeper of the Word: Selected Writings of William Stringfellow,* Eerdmans, 1994. Cards from the Nicaraguan Cultural Alliance, PO 5051, Hyattsville, Md., 20782; 301-699-0042. Artist **Marek Czarnecki** sent his work from Brooklyn, NY.

though this is not (as much of the Christian family movement would suggest) grounded in the natural orders of creation but explicitly in the fall. The creation story clearly identifies the domination of men over women as a curse (Gen. 3:16), the consequence of disorder and confusion, a very emblem of brokenness.

The ancient Hebrew family bore little resemblance to the American nuclear family so often romanticized. It was an extended family and then some. The common Hebrew term is literally "house" as in "Abraham's house" (no small entourage moving to Canaan let alone trailing through history) or that most famous royal family field, the "house of David." As a social unit the Hebrew family embraced more than just those united by blood. It included servants and slaves, widows and orphans, resident aliens — all those who lived under the authority and protection of its head. Where there were several wives, a practice also related to the fall (Gen 4:19) though common in semitic culture and in Israel prior to the monarchy, the family clan would be clustered into distinct mother-centered circles.

In the gospels, the fallen character of the family is practically a theme. Walter Wink points out how often it is cast as a barrier to discipleship. Whoever comes without hating father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, cannot be a disciple (Luke 24:26). Is this a hard word or what?

Jesus' experience of his own family, where mentioned in the gospels, is most often recorded as a hindrance to his ministry (Mark 3:21, 31, even Luke 2:48 and John 2:4). At one point his family becomes convinced he's gone off the deep end and they come to fetch him home. He won't even go out to them, turning their intrusion to a teachable moment: Who are my mother and my brothers? ... Whoever does the will of God (Mark 3:33,35). Is Jesus not making a clean break with the bloodlines of patriarchy?

Marek Czarnecki

Neither was Saint Paul big on family. Among his notorious opinions in 1 Corinthians 7 one might extract some oneliners to render as principles of a Christian family movement. He does offer certain words of encouragement and advice. But read the chapter whole cloth and it's hardly an admonition to marriage and family. On the contrary, in preaching

the radical urgencies of Christian expectation, Paul counsels a freedom from family's binding obligations and thereby from the driving anxieties of the whole world system. He may be, Wink suggests, closer to Jesus on this score than commonly acknowledged.

Family as image and idol

Idolatry is an issue here. Isn't it always whenever a principality blocks the call of God or becomes confused in its own vocation? When the family places itself, or is placed, above the good of its members, or the good of human life, it has become an idol supplanting God.

An example from the therapeutic realm again illustrates. In a dysfunctional family — be the issue alcohol addiction, spouse abuse, or incest — there is a tremendous pressure to keep up appearances, to preserve the family by projecting the image of normalcy. All members conspire to this conformity of appearance. Care of the image is made more important than the health and wellbeing of individuals, more important than truth. Denial and idolatry go hand in hand. The image is a lie.

The culture also sponsors images of family normalcy. Television images come to mind. In this respect we're still "playing old tapes" of *Father Knows Best*. In *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*, Stephanie Coontz identifies the TV image around which a new configuration of family values coalesced in the 1950s. The happy homogeneous white suburban nuclear family which we all remember was uniformly portrayed in an array of programs. That image belied the diversity of experience and social reality of large segments of the population. It was a cultural exercise in denial. At the turn of that decade a third of the children in American families remained poor. African American families suffered the systematic brutalities of Jim Crow in the south and ghettoization in the north. Here in Detroit, when all "normal" TV families had moved to the suburbs, 10,000 black men crossed the city line to work in Ford plants in suburbs where not one of their families could relocate. And in an era in which gay baiting was nearly as common as red baiting, many people were forced into the family closet.

Amidst imperial culture in Babylon, the Hebrew family became a focal point of cultural resistance — the family-based festival of Passover was a vehicle of memory, grace, and survival.

Say it again: the image functioned as an idol.

This is pertinent in reflecting critically on the Christian family movement. There are some good things to say about that movement — and I will try to say a few further on. For the moment it is significant to note that much of what this movement yearns for is actually nostalgic worship of that cultural image. It would return in many respects to denial and conformity. It would urge family members to find their meaning, their justification (the theological term is used here advisedly) in the family itself. St. Paul would be more than wary of any such source of justification save in God's grace alone.

Consumption and political economy

In the post-War period it was women above all who were urged to locate personal worth and justification in the family. At least for the moment as the boys came home, Rosie the Riveter was being forced out of the plant. The family image was sold in government films. Babyboomers were getting born.

And for all the "durable goods," the stoves and automobiles of postwar industrial conversion, the family became the basic unit of consumption. The American Dream had a new emblem: the single family home with a car in the driveway. Think of Ozzie and Harriet holding conversation in the kitchen. That Hotpoint refrigerator (proud sponsor of the program) was nearly another character in the scene — the defining prop of any heartwarming American family. Or recall Richard Nixon's shrewd political instincts for taking on Nikita Khrushchev in the famous impromptu "kitchen debate." Here, he proclaimed, was capitalism's reply to communism. Never mind the nuclear bomb. We would bury the Russians beneath the superior conveniences of the nuclear family's buying power.

Here is the period in which the American doctrine of justification shifted from the "work ethic" to the "ethics of consumption." Though it initially fostered the nuclear family and claimed it as a locus, in the long run the consumption ethic is proving disastrous to family values and long-term commitments. Throwaway culture comes home to roost.

This is only one way of saying that, overall, the commercial principalities of capitalism have not been particularly kind to the family. They have broken it down, inside and out. Early American families were held together with a measure of self-sufficiency: the family farm, the cottage industry and family business. Industrial capitalism removed its members one by one from the home, turning them into wage-earners. The Victorian family, sometimes touted as another traditional image, was made possible and sustained by African American families torn asunder in the cotton fields, the child labor of the industrial mills, and the cheap domestic "help" drawn from immigrant families. The economic exigencies of the

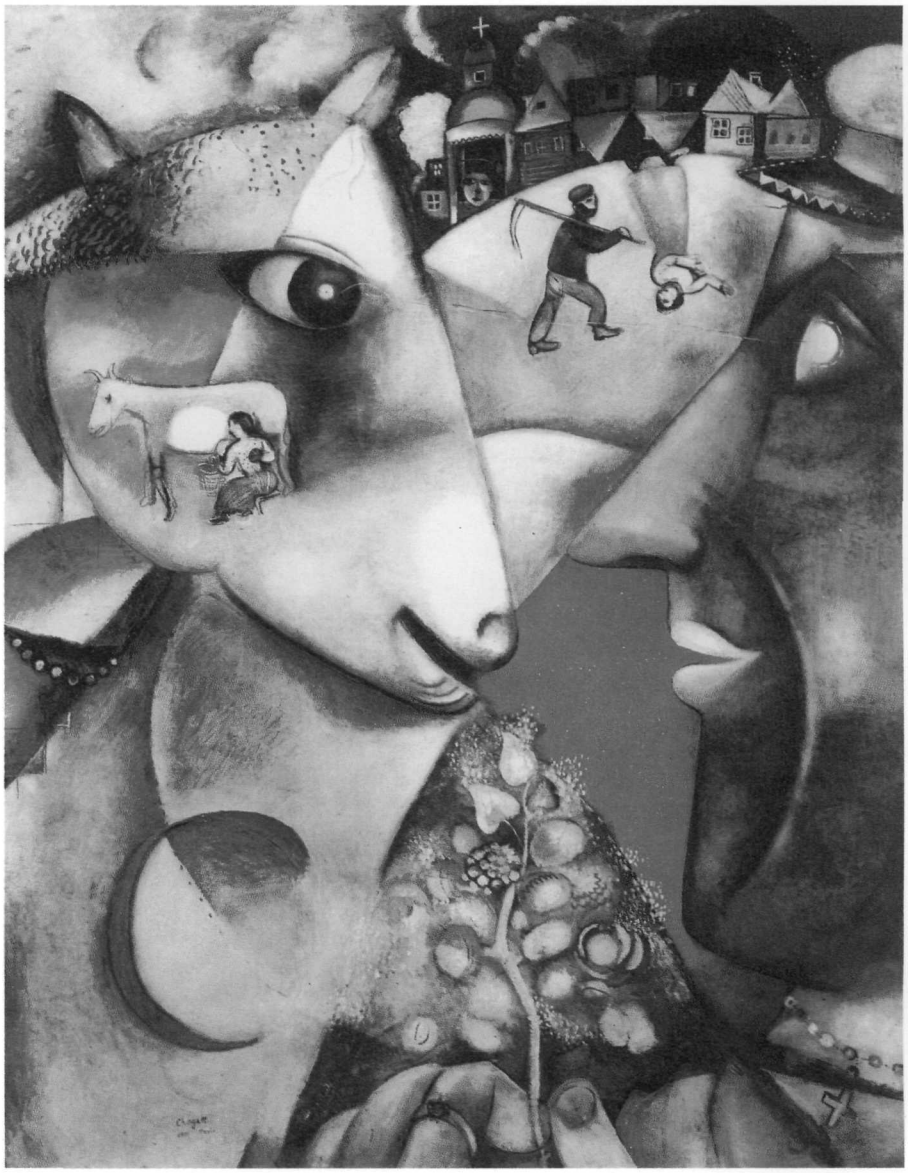
nuclear family have made the truly "traditional" extended and multigenerational family a thing of the past. The ethics of consumerism (now less and less focused on the home) have rendered small two-earner families the most common American variety. Such families have little time left for their children.

Refusing captivity

The families most ravaged by the economic powers are the very ones most often scapegoated for the family crisis, those in the black community. In the economic interests of chattel slavery this breakup was a conscious and systematic strategy of repression — to fracture kinship solidarity and render the lot more manageable. Capture and the middle passage did its work, the block in the slave market divided further, then masters would regularly dissolve and scatter families. African filial names and traditions were suppressed, forbidden, and replaced. Nevertheless, family became virtually a form of resistance and social survival. New forms of extended kinship and childrearing were improvised from African traditions. The "grandmothers" stepped forward as primary anchors. And "roots" were carefully tended to in oral memory and record.

Given the relentless assault of poverty linked with racism, given the mechanisms in which the regulations of the welfare apparatus often enforce family breakup, what is most astonishing is the utter resilience of the African American family. It has fulfilled its vocation serving human life. For this very reason worry arises when families seem to unravel.

In *Race Matters* Cornel West includes these same "sustained familial and communal networks of support" among the ingenious legacy of black foremothers and forefathers which have served as a buffer against despair. They "equip black folk with cultural armor to beat back the demons of hopelessness, meaninglessness, and lovelessness."



I and the Village **by Marc Chagall** — **Museum of Modern Art**

West is concerned that these cultural shields are now failing. A deep and active despair he calls nihilism, driven by market forces and market morality, has penetrated even black families. This he regards as a spiritual crisis. He writes critically of conservative behaviorists who speak of values and attitudes in a vacuum, as if political and economic structures barely existed. However, he is equally citical of liberals who see things only in terms of economics and politics, remaining blind to cultural issues of meaning, spirit, personal responsibility. Beyond both he calls for a "politics of conversion," which remains alert to the structural conditions which shape peoples'

lives (one might say: remains radically realistic about the fallen powers and authorities), but which meets the threat of nihilism head on as a matter of the heart, meets it locally and at home with nothing less than love.

A rightness of the right?

It may be that something similar lies beneath the best of the Christian family movement. To suggest this does not mitigate in the slightest the idolatry of nostalgia, the naivete concerning the family's place in an array of fallen structural powers, the homophobic ideal type which conforms and excludes, the principles of male headship which seek patently to reestablish patriarchy, or the narrowing of social obligation to a kind of self-interested privacy — all of these are deeply and perhaps essentially entangled. Still, goodhearted Christian evangelicals have become convinced that the family is in a cultural and spiritual crisis, that it needs renewing in its vocation, that time and long-haul commitment and personal responsibility will be required, that open and honest communication — even prayer and worship together — are key to this renewal. I dare say they are to that degree right. And that Christians of the left have been wrong in the degree to which they have utterly ceded the concern or simply re-upped in the culture war against "family values." Radical Christians ought truly to be family advocates, structurally alert to the assault it suffers, and nurturing its vocation in new and renewed forms through the politics of conversion.

I look around my own community committed to nonviolence and simplicity, committed to life in the city of Detroit, committed to the work of social transformation — and I am struck how much of our energies are devoted to life in families of one sort or another. Occasionally I admit worry that we are being domesticated by a familial principality (and need I say it's worth being realistically wary on that score). But marriage and family have my heart — they are to me a source of delight, a place of joy, as well as a discipline. And I am convinced that this concrete work of love is not a substitution but one and the same with our other commitments. We are better able to see society and the future from the viewpoint of our children and the children of others.

I testify from experience that we love because we first were loved. Through our families we can pass on the love we received (or break the cycle of violence)

Opting for hospitality

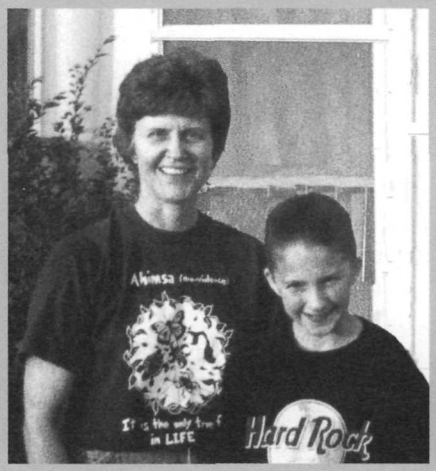
Last year, Pat Kolon sold her house, took her then 9-year-old daughter Emily to live in an inner-city shelter for homeless women and left her position as religious education coordinator for a suburban Detroit parish.

"When I taught baptism classes, I would say that baptism reminds us whose family we're part of, that family goes beyond bloodlines once we acknowledge God as the giver of life," says Kolon, a single mother. "I was saying it over and over, and finally I was hearing myself saying it and knowing its truth."

At Day House, Kolon and her daughter share a home with four other Catholic Worker community members and — at any given time — six or eight guests. She receives no salary and has no health insurance. More important than financial security, she believes, is that her daughter live among people acting on their faith, in a racially diverse setting.

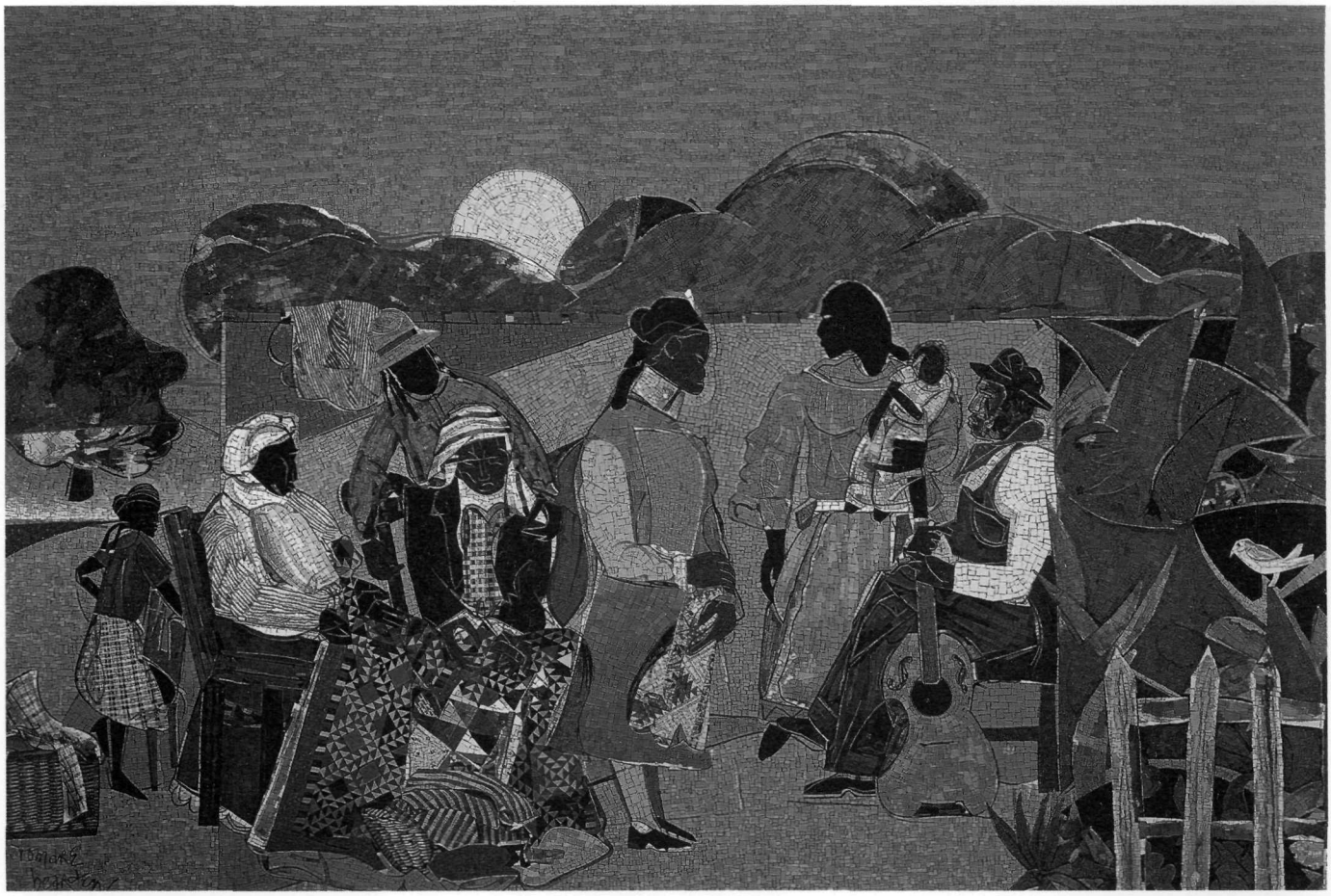
Emily, an effervescent and outspoken fifth-grader, is frank about the pros and cons of her new home.

"I get to meet new people and help people out, and learn how problems are different for other people," she says. But "at first the bathrooms were yucky, and there were mice, and sometimes the guests will be wacko or make me upset."



When her next-door playmate expressed wonderment at her toys and pretty bedroom, she remarked that "Cassie must feel like I feel" at the home of a suburban friend.

Kolon, who never married, reflects that her single-parent status has been "one of the most painful but also the most freeing things for Emily and me. As a white middle-class woman there are a lot of constraints and assumptions about where we would live and what our lifestyle would be like if we were connected with a man." As it is, there's "a freedom in being able to say something as 'naive' as 'Where would Jesus be?' or 'What would Jesus do?' and make my choices according to my beliefs." — *Marianne Arbogast*



Quilting Time, **1986 by Romare Bearden**

Courtesy Estate of Romare Bearden

and thereby seed the future. Family is both means and end. (I have heard Rosemary Ruether identify, as a revolutionary effort, the time and involvement a new generation of feminist fathers gives to raising their children.) We resist the cultural breakdown of the century, by holding together. We honor the promises of partnership and marriage.

Resistance and transformation

Amidst imperial culture in the exile of Babylon, the Hebrew family became a focal point of cultural resistance. It rose to the crisis of history. In the absence of temple and state, the family-based festival of Passover was a vehicle of memory, grace, and survival. One thinks again of kinship networks bearing the humanity and hope of American slaves through a long dark time. How might the family in this our own imperial culture praise God and serve human life — serve all creation — as a circle of resistance? How can the unconditional love of long term commitments resist the market morality of consumption, resist the plague of materialistic individualism? How might new forms and ways of ordering family life and child-rearing seed a nonviolent future free of patriarchy and domination?

Jesus once uttered a strange promise: "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age — houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields with persecutions — and in the age to come eternal life" (Mark 10:29f). Houses and lands? It sounds like he had some new economy in mind. And this, inseparable from new patterns and definitions of family, must surely have been a scandalous pronouncement. It appears he described the "kindom" movement as precisely that, a new and renewed family — one not constituted exclusively on bloodlines. "Looking at those who sat around him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother'" (Mark 3:31f).

Imagine families a very form of the gospel. TW

***Beulah's Baby,* 1948, by Primrose McPherson Pascal**

North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, Purchased with funds from the North Carolina Art Society

"Generations of memory"

by Rita Nakashima Brock

The life-giving power of women is the seeing of sacred power in ordinary needful acts, in daily care, persistent presence, and embodied loving. Marilou Awaiakta's poem "Motherroot" describes this sacred power:

> Creation often
> needs two hearts
> one to root
> and one to flower.
> One to sustain
> in time of drouth
> and hold fast
> against winds of pain
> the fragile bloom
> that in the glory
> of its hour
> affirms a heart
> unsung, unseen.

What images will open our own eyes, so long clouded by patriarchal ideas and images? What enables us to touch, to smell, and to see here, and here, and here, and here, the presence of God, the motherroot?

Millions of the world's women have lived out love's fierce embodied commitments at great risk to themselves, perversely persisting against all odds. Erotic power, God incarnate, enters into life through the work of ordinary women, through our struggles and vulnerabilities. That power is born in our passion for physical and spiritual healing and wholeness. It is found in our protective embracing of relationships against powers of control and violence and destruction. Our passions feed motherroot; without it no society can survive.

I suggest as motherroot an image of God drawn from the story of my own life. Almost exactly a decade ago, I learned that I had a Puerto Rican father. I had grown believing my stepfather who brought my mother and me from Japan when I was six, was my birth father, my only father who had died in 1976. When my Japanese mother passed away, she left behind my adoption papers. They contained no information about my lost father.

Rita Nakashima Brock with her grandparents.

Through a series of bizarre coincidences, accidents and searching, I discovered his name and an old address in Dorado Beach, Puerto Rico. I went there to find what I could, not knowing if he knew anything about me, if he was alive or why such a secret had been kept from me for so long.

I found 10 aunts and uncles and many cousins who had hoped that I would be found some day. My father, who had left for Korea when I was six months old and had not contacted my mother for two years, was living in New York. My mother, after two years of silence from him, had cut all contact, which is why I did not know of him. I met him later.

In that visit to Puerto Rico, I found grandparents, a grandfather who prayed every night before he slept that he would see his first grandchild before he died. My grandmother did not pray. She was sure this child she loved only from a few faded baby pictures would someday be found. She was so sure I would come that she had pasted those pictures to her dresser mirror where she peered expectantly at them for 33 years. And my *Abuela Maria* was right.

I arrived unexpectedly one winter looking for a family I wasn't sure existed. It never occurred to me that they would be waiting for me with open arms. I was amazed to learn that a grandmother whom I did not know and who knew me only from faded photographs cared passionately that I would be well and that I would return.

My grandmother's commitment to loving me did not rest on my knowing her, but on her memory of me. *Abuela Maria* loved me though she was unknown to me.

To be loved even when we do not know we are being loved is the power of *ecclesia* in our lives to be called out by those who care. From *ek*, out, and *kalein*, to call, *ecclesia* is grounded in the Christian confession that God is love and we are to love one another. We must look for

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Rita Nakashima Brock is associate professor of the humanities at Harding University in St. Paul, Minn. This article is adapted from an address given at the Re-Imagining Conference in which Brock presented three images of God.

The chosen baby

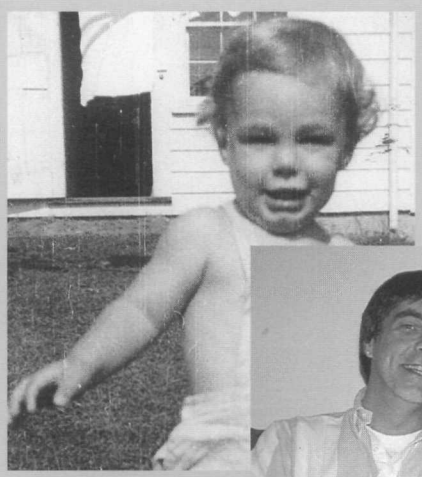
by Richard Matteson

I remember the day in July, 1953, when I was told I was adopted. I was given a book to read, *The Chosen Baby*, and then told that I was the boy, Peter, in the book. I was a smart kid, with a vivid imagination, and decided that my folks must have gone to a Supermarket of Babies and picked me off the shelf. I never decided what the criteria for selecting me were, but it seemed something akin to shaking melons or pinching peaches.

Sometime after the revelation, I started to feel that something must be wrong with me, that my mother didn't want me because of something I either was or wasn't or did or didn't do. "Not good enough" became part of my being. Coupled with thinking of myself as "The Chosen One," a complicated personality dichotomy started to exist.

Secrecy became a means of self-protection. I didn't want anyone to know that I was adopted. I was afraid that I would be labeled "different" or "bastard." I agonized over the Information Sheet we had to complete at school every fall. BIRTHPLACE jumped off the page at me. I thought I was born in Boston, but my Birth Certificate (altered at the time of my adoption) said I was born in Cohasset, Mass. Some years I listed Boston as my birthplace, others I wrote Cohasset.

My feeling of being rejected and abandoned by my birth mother translated into tremendous fear of it happening again, and manifested itself in separation anxiety. For years I was afraid to be away from my adoptive mother, convinced that when I got home she would be gone. The first days of school and summer camp were pure hell for me.



Richard Matteson and his birth mother.

How envious I was of kids who could look at a mother or father and know where they came from and who they looked like. I remember walking through the streets of the town where I grew up and looking into the faces of countless women, always wondering: Is she my mother?

My adoptive parents were, and still are, wonderfully supportive of my need to know.

I decided to actively search for my birth mother in February, 1992. I worked with an adoption search and support group located near Boston. The agency provided me with her current name and address, offering counseling and support, and suggested a letter format for initial contact. Great care was taken to word the letter in such a way that my identity would be known only to my birth mother.

"Dear Emma: It will be 45 years this coming June 22nd (my birthday) since we last saw each other in Cohasset, Massachusetts. My name is Dick Matteson; however, I was born a Peterson (my birth name.)"

I included brief biographical information and my phone number, asking her to call if she wanted. On the evening of the second day, I heard from her.

We talked for what seemed hours about her pregnancy, my birth and the adoption, and met the following week.

I learned that my birth mother and I do look alike and that I inherited many characteristics, including my musical talents, from her.

Emma and I have had many conversations about why I was given up for adoption. I was conceived shortly before she and my birth father divorced. She was living with her widowed mother, working full time and helping her mother keep up the house. In 1947, single mothers were frowned upon. As much as she wanted to raise me herself, she felt that it would be very difficult for all of us. At the time of my birth she chose not to see me, knowing that after one look she would be unable to give me away.

Emma remarried in 1953 and both she and her husband, Dick, wanted to locate me, but were told by a lawyer to forget it.

I recently asked Emma if she regretted giving me up. She told me that she had lived in hell for 45 years, wondering where I was, what I was like and if I was all right.

At our first meeting, we stopped in the lobby of Emma's apartment building so she could get her mail. A neighbor came into the lobby and I was introduced as "Dick, from Hartford." The neighbor looked from Emma to me and back again and asked: "Is he your son?" Emma smiled and said: "He is the son I always wished I had."

images that bind us to each other more strongly in communities — *ecclesia* struggling for justice, for wholeness within ourselves, with each other, and with the earth — for passionate, committed loving. We must look to images that help us resist disconnection, alienation, denial and apathy. For we need each other beyond all speaking and more deeply than we know, at the core of our deepest motherroot, in our very body-selves, as *ecclesia.*

And this *ecclesia* of motherroot comes through flesh, through the legacies of bodies of our people who enfold us in a vast circle of kinship and care. Belonging to generations of a people creates a huge sea of memory that nurtures hope and love. This sea surrounds us with people who did not know us and whom we may *never* know. The imaginations and promises of generations of grandmothers and grandfathers who have called us out and remain in the memory of our legacies. God here and here and here — *ecclesia.*

To be a citizen of the world without generations of memory to anchor us to herstory and to the earth is to float without patterns, without dreams, without meaning — without *ecclesia.*

Without a people and their legacies, we live without those who made miracles and kept their promises, without those who held fast against winds of pain.

For each of us there have been thousands of people over many centuries and across many miles who have loved us without knowing us, hearts unsung, unseen. Their hopes and dreams for the future — their hard, gritty clinging to life sometimes against all odds — is their work to keep life going, to hold fast to the bonds of love and care. No one protecting the gossamer tendrils of love's fragile blooms can survive without *ecclesia.* And through our hopes and dreams, holding to life against all odds, we, too, pass on this legacy of loving to those who will never know us.

Because I was adopted by a stepfather, I have been given an additional legacy. It binds me to many other adoptees who struggle to understand the legacies brought to us by the suffering of our biological parents.

To have a people means to inherit an ambiguous, historical legacy, an enfleshed reality passed body to body, incarnate spirit to incarnate spirit.

Without people to belong to whether through birth or adoption, without those people whose hopes are like faded photographs on a dresser mirror peered at expectantly, the world is a cold, lonely, and hopeless place.

But *ecclesia* is not easy. While the world without *ecclesia* may be lonely, the legacy of our peoples includes the ghosts of those who loved us who are angels as well as the ghosts of those who murdered souls, who are demons. To have a people means to inherit an ambiguous, historical legacy, an enfleshed reality passed body to body, incarnate spirit to incarnate spirit, heart to heart, truth and pain grounded in earthly life. For all its ambiguities and tragedies, this affirmation of *ecclesia* is why my life is tied to the church — church that is defined in the broadest sense possible which includes the wild women, the marginalized, and the heretics, as well as the patriarchs. In the church I have a legacy of the lives of ordinary women. TW

Given by the Members of the Committee on Painting and Sculpture, the Philadelphia Museum of Art

***Three Nudes (The Aunts)*, 1930, by Julio Castellanos (1905-1947)**

Same-sex unions

by Jennifer M. Phillips

[Ed. note: Jennifer Phillips was a deputy from Massachusetts to the Episcopal Church's 1994 General Convention. She offers the following theological reflection in response to what she considers the bishops' disappointing efforts to "continue the dialogue" on human sexuality.]

I have been blessed by the unusual experience of serving in a eucharistic community in which for nearly a century a large group of gay and lesbian parishioners have been a visible, welcome part of the congregation. Within this community are people from every socio-economic group who are urban and suburban, married and single, liberal and conservative, old and young, employed and unemployed, housed and homeless, mixed in background and living in a variety of household configurations. They reflect much of the diversity of God's creation. God has called us together in our variety to be a parish, a local instance of the Body of Christ, celebrating God's presence known among us.

Every household of the community — whether a person living alone, a couple, a person or persons raising children or caring for aging parents, groups of friends, or those making their home temporarily or permanently within a large institution — is called to order itself as a small church community in which God is made manifest,

hospitality offered and baptismal vows lived out. Over time, the wider community in its relationship with a household can discern whether that household shows forth God and builds up the community or not.

Where a household and its relationships are found to be violent, exploitative and destructive, the discernment of the community offers the discipline of healing, correction or conclusion. Where a household is discerned to be filled with love, respect, kindness and prayer, where it reaches out in care to others, where wrongs are forgiven and labor shared, the community rightly desires to return thanks to God for it. And when a couple find in one another a source of joy and comfort, strength in adversity, the knowledge and love of God, then they properly desire to return thanks to God for their relationship and to ask God's continued blessing and the community's prayerful support.

A blessing sets something apart as holy and revelatory of God by recognizing, affirming and giving thanks for the presence of the Blessed One from whom all blessings flow and by petitioning God for the continuance of God's grace. It is not a private matter, since it is the diversity of gifts that gives sanctity to the whole community and builds it up. Thus in our congregation we bless the offering of vows for religious life, a couple bringing their new baby into the community, civil marriages, water for baptism, the things and animals and people within a home, commitments to Christian service and the penitent after confession and absolution. Other congregations bless fishing fleets, foxhunts and farmlands.

Human experience of sexuality and gender comprises a vast spectrum. Those who fall outside the dominant categories often live lives of extraordinary suffering and ostracism. The church has not begun *to make room for them.*

In a eucharistic community, when many of the lives and relationships of members cannot be celebrated, where God cannot be publicly thanked for them and asked to assist them, the eucharistic body begins to unravel. Loving one another, members no longer desire to celebrate their own joys, knowing that their sisters' and brothers' similar joys may not be celebrated. Occasions of celebration become burdened by grief and ultimately members fall away from the table fellowship. Thus, the failure to recognize gay and lesbian households as places where God's faithfulness may be known diminishes the whole parish community, homo- and hetero-sexual.

Properly, at different times, the church revisits its understanding of suitable family structure, as in the Lambeth conversations about polygamy in the 1980s and the Episcopal Church's rethinking of its divorce and remarriage practices in the 1960s and 1970s. It will take time for the Episcopal Church to reach a generally common mind about matters of homosexuality, particularly as the fear and loathing of gay and lesbian people has made many areas of the church unsafe for them to give witness to the presence of God in their lives. In the absence of the visible witness of gay and lesbian households in their midst, congregations have difficulty altering their understanding.

A few congregations, like the one I serve, have a long history and strong testimony to share. We say gladly, "Christ has been seen and known to us, among us, in the breaking of the bread and the shared journey over decades." Our call to evangelize gay and lesbian people outside the church is strong and clear. But we cannot offer the invitation of the Gospel and then say, "but you must leave your intimate lives and loves, your deepest personal identities outside the door." Nor can we say to those baptized, "*Your* vocations to holy relationship, fidelity and service we will not honor," especially when their lives may be those that most show to us the activity of the Holy Spirit.

One final reflection, from my many years as a hospital chaplain. I have had

the privilege of hearing the stories of the lives of many persons who have not fit the tidy categories of male and female: transsexuals, transgendered individuals, transvestites, those with ambiguous chromosomes (XXY, XYY), those with congenital genital abnormality, with hormonal dysfunction and those who have been traumatically mutilated — as well as gay, lesbian and bisexual persons. They have taught me that creation is far more various than I once believed. In humankind as in some other species, God has created more than just male and female.

This has been as transforming a realization for me as my discovery that the Newtonian construction of the physical universe I learned as a child has been radically revisioned by quantum and chaos theory. I stand in even greater awe of the Creator who has generated such complexity and elegance than I did of the God I thought of in Aristotelian and Platonic images back then.

Human experience of sexuality and gender comprises a vast spectrum. Those who fall outside the dominant categories often live lives of extraordinary suffering and ostracism. Many of them hunger for and seek God. They also strive for intimacy and community.

The church has not *begun* to make room for them, to see them created also in the image of God and to inquire how God may be calling them to shape holy lives! They have given me the gift of knowing a little more of the fullness of God, for which I am profoundly grateful and through which I have come to have a changed heart and understanding.

They have reminded me again and again, if you would know the face of Christ, look at your neighbor. Especially look at the one you imagine to be most different from yourself. You will see there the holy image of your blessed, redeemed, common humanity.

— Jennifer Phillips, who says she is most at home in the Anglo-Catholic portion of the Anglican tradition, is rector of the Church of St. John the Evangelist in Boston. A former hospital chaplain, she has written and published extensively on AIDS ministry and care for caregivers. This piece is a condensed version of a longer article on the same topic.

Marriage á la Mode, Signing the Contract **by William Hogarth (1743-1745)**

An hispanic/latino(a) agenda for the church

by Luis Barrios

[*Ed. note:* The Witness *has received a number of responses to our recent story on the* Instituto Pastoral Hispano *in New York (see the August/September 1994 issue). In November, we published several letters to the editor about the story and there is another letter in this issue. This piece by Luis Barrios and the one by Richard Shaull on page 31 are two further reflections on the church and its ministry with and among hispanics.*]

One of the historical realities that hispanic/latino(a) communities face at the present moment is what politicians are calling, "the hispanic/latino(a) challenge." There is an incredible effort in local and national political campaigns to attract our vote. With this in mind I think it is necessary to initiate a critique of our Episcopal Church, which does not have a "working agenda" to face the fact that we will soon be the second largest ethnic group in the U.S.

We must recognize that we worship in a church that is stricken with "institutionalized racism." But I also believe that in order to present a reliable agenda, we must stop putting all the blame on the dominant culture that controls and leads our Episcopal Church; we need to recognize that we also have to accept responsibility for not developing the appropriate mechanisms to stop these injustices. There is a strong need to develop our particular agenda, taking into consideration different expressions of theological praxis. This pastoral agenda will include, but is not limited to, the following: a theology of our identities, our Exodus and our exile — and a theology for urban ministry and our alliances.

Theology of identities

First, we need to destroy the myth of

"hispanic culture" by recognizing the pluralism of the hispanic/latino(a) cultures and traditions. We are people coming from different countries and we represent a lot more than just Spanish language. We speak different languages and dialects. Despite those sociologists and anthropologists in the U.S. who have used the "hispanic umbrella" to classify and categorize all of us in a very disrespectful way, we are not one people, one race, one language, one tradition or one culture.

Once we recognize this reality in our "theology of identities," we have to develop mechanisms to preserve our individual and collective identities in a country that preaches a "melting pot" as a way of dealing with assimilation. This theology needs to include our brothers and sisters who identify themselves, with honor and pride, as chicanos(as), nuyoricans, dominicanyorks, to mention a few.

Another reality is the second and third generations that have grown up or were born in the U.S., for whom English is the dominant language. With this we are faced with the reality of doing hispanic/latino(a) ministry using the English language. Are we betraying our identities? I don't think so. I really believe that this is a reality that we need to accept and incorporate into our pastoral agenda.

However, in doing hispanic/latino(a) ministry I do see a strong need to include learning Spanish and/or English, with the understanding that being bi-lingual in the U.S. is one of the most powerful weapons that we need to learn how to use if we want to gain power. In my understanding, "English Only," a legal way to stop bi-linguism, is a racist project.

In our "theology of identities" there is also a strong need to take back our history by recognizing and accepting our diversities in all their magnitude. We are not going to build a critical mass of unity if we do not exorcise the demons of male chauvinism, homophobia and racism. In some way these three manifestations of partiality and prejudice have no respect for the blessings of diversity that God gave us in creation. We challenge the dominant culture in this country that discriminates against us because we are hispanics/latinos(as), and at the same time we build ways and odious explanations in order to discriminate against hispanic/latina sisters, hispanic/

Luis Barrios

latino(a) gays/lesbians/bi-sexuals and/or black hispanics/latinos(as). A serious social analysis of these issues will also help us to identify how class struggles frame our theological explanations to justify our prejudice and discriminations against the unity of the diversity in the body of Christ.

Theology of the Exodus

Second, in our pastoral agenda there is a need to understand and live the experience of the historical salvation that was given to us in the Exodus paradigm. We need to destroy those "magic responses" related to the explanation of a "world beyond" that perpetuates a kind of worship of the culture of poverty, without allowing us to fight and destroy the demons that create socio-economic injustices. The political dimensions of our faith need to be faced as we and other people live with the painful reality that socio-economic conditions continue to deteriorate in hispanic/latino(a) communities; the Puerto Rican community in particular remains among the poorest in the country. We cannot continue to say that by praying and going to church we are going to bring changes in these issues. Our response with social service programs in our churches (e.g. soup kitchen, shelter for the homeless, after school programs, senior citizen programs, drug addiction services, etc.) is also inadequate, because we are dealing with symptoms and not with the causes of the problems. If we do not add the conscientization component to these services so that people learn skills of social analysis, then we are perpetuating and patronizing the injustices of this political system. We must recognize that our ministries need to be attached to social actions developed by community organizations connected to broad-based leadership. Our goal is to improve people's quality of life by destroying injustices. This is what really happened in the Exodus where people experienced redemption in all its dimensions; religious, political, economic, psychological and social.

Another aspect of the theology of the Exodus in hispanic/latino(a) communities, particularly poor communities, is the incredible religious syncretism in which there is a manifestation of a combination of Protestant, Roman Catholic, cult beliefs and elements of other religions (e.g. Yoruba, Voodoo, etc.). Sometimes this mix is going to bring elements of magic and superstition that can function as a psychological escape. This escape in some way is the beginning of analysis and the wish to gain power. When it comes to developing ministries, we need to approach this diversity seriously to understand the component of cultural theology without underestimating the value of these beliefs. In other words, without destroying those elements that are necessary to keep people's hope and identities, we can rediscover in the particular ways that we worship God the real liberation that will empower people to bring significant changes without expecting magic solutions.

Theology of exile

Like the Israelites at Babylonia looking for their roots and the preservation of their identities in the exile, we need to do the same to explain the reality of how we came to this country and where we are going. We need to recognize that not all of

continued on page 32

An *Instituto* retro

by Richard Shaull

As a missionary in Latin America, I was greatly perturbed by the close identification of Christian faith and life with western culture, white western male ways of thinking and middle-class values. I was forced to see the inadequacy, for other cultures, of the models of church life developed over the centuries in Europe and North America. I concluded that the future of our mainline churches would depend, to no small degree, on our ability to recreate our theological heritage and re-invent the church within other cultural contexts. I spent four decades teaching in theological seminaries in Latin America and the U.S. but never found an institutional base from which to work toward that goal.

And then, in 1982, I met Enrique Brown, who convinced me that the *Instituto Pastoral Hispano* in New York might provide me with the opportunity I was looking for. I accepted his invitation and had the privilege of working with him and Maria Aris-Paul at the development of an alternative model of theological education for hispanics, one in which the experience and culture of hispanic women and men were valued. Our pedagogy started out with and built on their experiences in the communites and churches in which they were rooted.

One of my first tasks was to facilitate a weekly colloquium. In it, students related what they were studying in their basic courses in theology, Bible and history to their own life experiences and to the struggle of people in their communities.

I found the experience fascinating. A middle-aged woman who had been the victim of discrimination all her life because of her race, ethnic origin and gender, gradually got confidence in her ability to think, to speak and to provide leadership in her church. She demonstrated her transformation in a moving commencement address. Similarly, a man who had only a high school education and who at first felt incapable of expressing himself clearly in English or Spanish, became the one who often spoke words of wisdom in our discussions of theology and pastoral work.

As director, Aris-Paul related to the *Instituto's* students in such a way that they would find themselves constantly supported in this difficult process of growth and transformation. The *Instituto* became the place where women and men immersed in hispanic culture and history could read the Bible from their situation and from the perspective of the poor. It was a place where they could enter into dialogue with the heritage of faith in such a way as to re-create and re-articulate it. They became participants in the struggle to make the Gospel incarnate in the hispanic world. They made use of their own ways of thinking and drew on the resources offered by their culture and history as they studied the writings of European and North American theologians. They found much help in Latin American liberation theology; at the same time, they discovered that this theology, too, would have to be recreated to respond to the unique situation of hispanics in North America.

It was a place where students could enter into dialogue with the heritage of faith and into the struggle to make the Gospel incarnate in the hispanic world.

The *Instituto* also dared to work toward creating, within the Episcopal Church structure, an authentic hispanic community of faith, in which marginal people would not only feel at home but would have the space they needed to develop their own liturgies, order their ecclesial life and be agents of transformation in poor communities. One step taken toward this end was the effort of both teachers and students to immerse themselves more completely in the cultural world, the sufferings and the struggles of hispanics in major metropolitan centers. Our aim was to learn firsthand what it might mean to give shape to authentic communities of faith in the center of that world. For me this meant living with a team of women belonging to the Grail who lived and worked with the poorest people in the South Bronx. As I gradually entered into that world, I was profoundly changed by the experience and became convinced of the theological importance for students of becoming more involved in local community struggles.

Eventually, the *Instituto* was invited to move its office and classes from the Diocese of New York's cathedral to the General Theological Seminary. It turned out to be a wise move. We had complete freedom to have our own board of directors and develop our own program. At the same time, we were able to draw on the resources of the seminary's library, faculty and some of its courses. The presence of this hispanic community at the seminary, in turn, offered the seminary's students and faculty an opportunity to be in touch with Latin Americans and their cultural and spiritual perspectives.

Under Brown's and Aris-Paul's leadership, the *Instituto* took bold steps in re-inventing theological education for hispanics and learned a great deal along the way. I can only hope that those now responsible for hispanic work in the New York area will pay serious attention to what has been accomplished and build upon it.

— Richard Shaull is the Henry Winters Luce Professor of Ecumenics, Emeritus, Princeton Theological Seminary. He has also taught at seminaries in Brazil and Costa Rica.

continued from page 30

us came here for the same reasons or under the same circumstances. We can start by recognizing that our ancestors were the first people to take the lands from the Native Americans, some of whom are also our ancestors. We need not feel proud of this savage action, but recognizing it is a way of clarifying who came first.

Another point for this theology is that the first immigration of hispanics/latinos(as) to the U.S. resulted from politics of imperialism when the U.S. took more than half of the land that belonged to Mexico (e.g. Florida, Texas, California, Nevada, etc.). The U.S. continues the colonization of my country, Puerto Rico. These people never came to this country. They were moved to a "coerced exile." Other people came for "political exile," trying to escape from political oppression in their own countries, a reality that is not disconnected from socio-economic issues. Our brothers and sisters coming out of Cuba do not have any difficulty being recognized as "political exiles." However, it is not so easy for our brothers and sisters coming every day from the Dominican Republic, Mexico and El Salvador, to mention a few.

Sooner or later our ministries will need to challenge racist laws that classify our people as "illegal aliens." To be specific, residents of this country are the Native Americans. Everybody else came from some other place to occupy this land. Sooner or later in dealing with this theology of exile our ministries will need to recognize the need to create "sanctuaries" to protect the people of God.

Urban ministry

In order to bring back a church that feels and acts with the people, not for the people, we need to recognize that we are doing ministry in poor communities and that there is a strong need to develop non-traditional models for doing ministry and theological education.

We must not become only "sacramental priests"; this dangerously ignores the majority of people's psycho-social-spiritual lives. We can develop broad-based community ministry instead of parochial ministry. In this kind of relevant community ministry the church will find itself recognizing that there is always a need to create a "church of the people" in which liberation in all its magnitude can be experienced. The cornerstone for this kind of ministry is a teamwork approach in which the major goal is to empower lay people. This is God's project to destroy the culture of poverty at the same time that we empower its people to bring significant changes in the communities.

In addition to broad-based community ministry there is also a strong need to offer theological education in a way that is not going to give our people a second-class education. If we are going to criticize the traditional seminaries because they are not relevant to the needs that our people represent, we better do so with educational projects that will guarantee a popular theological education that will be of the same quality as any formal seminary. What we critique is the relevance, not the quality, of the theological education. The non-traditional model should include skills in social and political analysis, community activism, community organizing, urban politics, learning English and/or Spanish as a second language and the traditional courses, including Anglican history, theology and liturgy.

Theology of alliances

In the past we have made the mistake of isolating our struggle by not creating alliances. We need to recognize that not all white people are racist and that some of them are ready to become part of the struggle. By the same token, we can perceive that our struggle against discrimination is very similar to the struggle that our brothers and sisters in the African-American communities are living with. We must realize that the dominant cultue has been trying to get hispanics/latinos(as) and African-Americans to fight and compete against each other. When we fight one another, we are fighting the wrong enemy. The strongest alliances need to be formed with people that are suffering from oppression and alienation.

Some people in the dominant culture struggle with guilty feelings and decide that they are going to do ministry for hispanic/latinos(as). In other words, their ministry is based on helping themselves to feel better. These people can be encouraged to join our crusade of doing ministry in our communities. However, when it comes to dealing with their personal issues of believing that they need to rescue us, or save us because we are powerless, I become extremely suspicious. These are the people that get into hispanic/latino(a) ministry with the mentality that we need directions because we know nothing. They become "experts," "consultants," or "specialists" in doing hispanic/latino(a) ministry and at the same time replace us, the indigenous people. I strongly believe that in a struggle for justice, any person who is willing to fight for justice is always welcome. However, in a liberation experience, those who are living the painful reality of alienation and oppression need to take the power and control, in order to give some kind of indigenous direction that will safeguard the identity elements of that struggle. We cannot tolerate the perpetuation of a "welfare mentality" in our liberation struggle.

These considerations for a hispanic/latino(a) pastoral agenda are the result of prayers, meditations and struggles in my church. They are not the rules or the absolute truth. As a hispanic/latino person I give priorities to our hispanic/latino(a) agenda without any intention of being disrespectful or underestimating other struggles that we have in our church. Probably you may feel happy or angry about what you read here. I hope that I got you thinking; that is and will continue to be my intention.

—Luis Barrios is associate priest at St. Mary's Manhattanville Episcopal Church in New York City. He serves on the pastoral-care faculty of the Blanton-Peale Graduate Institute. This piece is a shortened version of a longer article on the same topic.

Dr. Spock's views

by Chris Payden-Travers

A Better World for Our Children: Rebuilding American Family Values, by Benjamin M. Spock, National Press Books, Bethesda, Md, 1994.

Benjamin Spock begins his latest book with a chapter entitled, "Where I'm Coming From." That seems like an appropriate place for me to begin as well. A former pre-school teacher, I am now a parish priest serving a small, rural congregation in southwestern Virginia; my husband and I are the parents of two teenage daughters.

Both personally and professionally I care passionately about the kind of world in which our children live. From what is, in many ways, a fairly sheltered community, I see a world in which three young people from our parish have gone on anti-depressant medication in the past year, two of whom are struggling not with issues of being unpopular but with issues of trying to live up to their very popular public personas. My own daughters tell me stories of their friends' struggles with depression and anorexia. These are the stories of "comfortable" middle-class children. Earlier this fall the stories of children whose lives are marked by poverty and violence were before me as our parish participated in Children's Sabbath, an event sponsored by the Children's Defense Fund whose executive director, Marian Wright Edelman, addressed the 71st General Convention in Indianapolis this past summer.

Like Spock, I, too, am concerned about the present state of the world, and I, too, have spent time trying to understand why it is the way it is. Spock addresses those issues in a section titled "What We've Got." The subheadings of that topic include: "The New Social and Economic Realities," "Sex, Marriage and Family Life," "Violence and Brutality," and "Deteriorating Health." I did not find any startling new revelations in the above chapters, just a good summary of the problems we face.

Spock then moves to a discussion of "Back to Basic Values," specifically exploring: "What Happened to Our Standards and Beliefs," "The Roots of Idealism," and "Instilling Values." While I would agree with Spock's insistence that we desperately need to regain our sense of idealism and spiritual values and teach them to our children, I was uncomfortable with his definition of the optimal environment for learning those things: the traditional two-parent family unit. I believe that it is also possible to learn those things in a single-parent family, in a gay/lesbian family, in a communal living situation. So in reading this section I had to redefine Spock's concept of "the family" in order to appreciate his ideas.

While I would agree with Spock's insistence that we desperately need to regain our sense of idealism and spiritual values, I was uncomfortable with his definition of the optimal environment: the traditional two-parent family unit.

I personally found the last chapter, "Creating a Better World," to be the most interesting and challenging part of the book. Being a person who tends towards both idealism and impatience, I like to get to the solution of the problems, and Spock insists that it is primarily through political activity that the problems can be solved. And therein lies the challenge, for political activity takes enormous amounts of time — how do I, a full-time working mother, both follow Spock's "12 Steps to Building Strong, Positive Family Values" (pp. 147-150) AND be politically active at the same time? I obviously don't — some days I do one, some days the other. But that is all right because the responsibility for creating a better world for our children falls on ALL of us, not just on the biological parents of the children. In the liturgy of the Episcopal Church we are reminded of that responsibility every time we welcome a new child into the household of God in Holy Baptism when we promise to support that child in her/his life in Christ. From Spock's perspective, that is a promise to be a political advocate for that child.

I am not sure that this book will have a strong appeal for readers of *The Witness,* most of whom are already aware of the needs of our children. I think its real value lies in reaching the same people Spock reached in *Baby and Child Care:* mainstream Americans who have not devoted much thought to the problems and the solutions before us. If Benjamin Spock can activate THAT group of people with this book, he will have done our children — and the rest of us — a great service. TW

Chris Payden-Travers is rector of St. Peter's Episcopal Church, Callaway, Va.

book review

Making love manifest

by Marianne Arbogast

The family blessing rite at Benjamin Walters Sciaky's baptism held special significance for his parents: It was the first public, formal prayer offered over their life together.

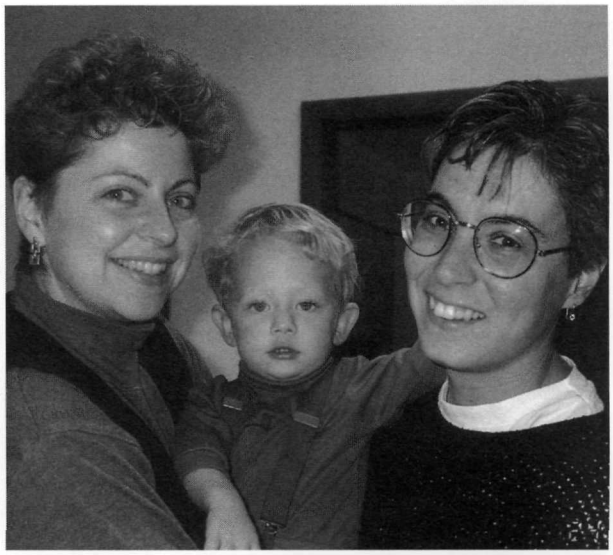
For Jennifer Walters and Alexandra Sciaky, Ben's arrival "made real something that was already the case," says Walters, now an Episcopal priest in the Diocese of Michigan. (Walters' ordination in August provoked a storm of controversy over Bishop Stewart Wood's willingness to ordain an out lesbian.) "The love we shared went beyond two people. Ben is one manifestation of that, but not the only one. The irony of the church being willing to baptize a child, but not bless our union, challenged me to think anew about how we think of people as individuals or couples, and only when there are children, talk of families. I believe it's a disservice to all families to create a model that's so walled-up."

Walters, Sciaky and 21-month-old Ben — who became their son through an open adoption — share a small home in a quiet Ann Arbor subdivision, which also serves as Walter's office for her ministry at Church of the Incarnation. A family/dining room with sliding glass doors opens onto a sloping, tree-filled backyard.

"We're doing as well as we are because we're not isolated," Sciaky said, settling Ben into his high chair as Walters prepared his lunch. "We have our church, community at our jobs, and our families of origin."

"Ben's birth mother is part of the family in some way, and his half-dozen godparents," Walters added. "People in the church are also invested in his well-being in a way I don't remember having as a child."

"The love we shared went beyond two people. Ben is one manifestation of that."
— Jennifer Walters



Alexandra Sciaky, Benjamin Walters Sciaky and Jennifer Walters.

Ben's birth mother, a single woman unprepared to raise a child, met Sciaky and Walters during her pregnancy through a member of their church who knew they were thinking about adoption.

"She was isolated, and relied on us a lot to be her friends," Walters recalls. "She hadn't met openly lesbian women before, but she was very open. At times it was confusing; we were mindful that it was her baby, and whatever her decision was, we wanted to support her."

By the time of her delivery in February of 1993, Ben's birth mother was clear that she wanted Sciaky and Walters to be his parents. They accompanied her to the hospital and served as coaches at Ben's birth.

For all three women, open adoption seemed a healthy alternative to secrecy.

"For a birth mother, open adoptions help to mitigate feelings of guilt and loss and having to keep a secret," Walters says. And she and Sciaky know that "the person who chose us chose us knowing who we were; we can have an open relationship."

Ben's birth mother visits regularly, and circulates photos with pride. His father, who had to be traced by court officials, hesitated to terminate his parental rights when he learned the child was a boy; but his own attorney persuaded him that, since he had no job or stable residence, he would be unable to care for a child. He has visited Ben just once, but Walters and Sciaky have assured him that he is welcome to get in touch at any time.

Ben, a blond, curious toddler in love with trains, has named Sciaky "Mommy" and Walters "Mommo." He spends morn-

Witnesses, the quick and the dead

Marianne Arbogast is assistant editor of *The Witness*.

ings with Walters, then goes to day care for the afternoons. Sciaky works full-time as a physical therapist, but would like eventually to cut back her hours. Saturdays are set aside as family time; a favorite outing is a trip to an area shopping mall, where "Ben thinks God lives in the fountain," Walters says.

"We're probably more equal caregivers than most heterosexual couples are," Sciaky says, noting that their differences have most often centered around "overkill or overlap."

"Like, 'I already did that nurturing — put him to bed!'" Walters laughs.

The struggles they speak of are those familiar to every new parent: lack of sleep, concern over day care arrangements, the adjustment to focusing their attention "24 hours a day on a little being who is totally dependent on you," Sciaky says.

Both women's parents have been supportive, though Walters says that their mothers "didn't rush out or worry about us the same way" they did when their other daughters gave birth. They attribute this to their mothers' assumption that with two women in the house, all would be well.

Not everyone has agreed.

Walters' grandmother told her that "two women have no business raising a child, especially a son;" and an old college friend sent her "a really scathing letter telling me we've done a really terrible thing in denying Ben a father."

January/February issue:
Political Prisoners

She and Sciaky believe that, first and foremost, "kids need a loving home. Alexandra and I provide all the love we can give, all the wisdom we have — however much or little it might be — to nurture his goodness and happiness. To say that Ben has some particular challenges to face in the world is true — but if someone else had been his parents, he would just have a different set."

Sciaky notes that Ben is close to his godfathers, and will grow up knowing other children with similar families.

Walters feels that "it may be easier to be open to what Ben's going to be" than it would be with a girl. "People have told me that as the mother of a daughter, my buttons would get pushed more."

"To say that Ben has some particular challenges to face in the world is true — but if someone else had been his parents, he would just have a different set."

— Jennifer Walters

Walters and Sciaky began planning for Ben more than 10 years ago, as they laid the early, tentative groundwork for their commitment to each other. Though they had been best friends throughout college, it was not till several years after their graduations that each emerged from a personal struggle over sexual identity with a dawning sense of a call to share their lives.

For Sciaky especially, a large part of the struggle was the question of children.

"I was the oldest of five, and I expected to grow up to be driving a station wagon in the suburbs with a big family," she says. "This threw a wrench in the works." With the support of a nun at an Episcopal retreat center who counseled her to seek "what God wants for you," she came to believe that "we could be whoever we wanted to be, and who God wanted us to be, in a lesbian relationship."

Sciaky and Walters reached some shared conclusions: Though both would like to be parents, neither felt it necessary for self-fulfillment. They would not try to become biological parents, but would be open to adopting a child who needed a home.

"We prayed long and hard and thought long and hard," Walters says. The chain of events that brought them together with Ben felt providential.

Walters says that adopting a child has sensitized her "to the way our culture makes inappropriate distinctions." For instance, she says, reporters will mention that a child is adopted even when it is irrelevant to a story. "It diminishes the relationship families have," she believes. "The way families are shaped has always been more diverse than the picture that is presented."

But overall, the family has received "unexpected and delightful support," Sciaky says. "We had three baby showers, and sent out 95 thank-you notes."

They value those connections highly.

"An atomized family withers," Walters says. "An extended family is the only family that survives." TW

Greening the church

The Greening of Faith — Part I: "Theology and Spirituality" (30 min.); Part II: "Ethics" (27 min.); Cathedral Films and Video, $29.95 each part.

If there is anyone out there who still wrestles with whether Christians and the church may have a meaningful role in the environmental movement, here are two videos designed to spell it all out.

In *The Greening of Faith*, the skillful video producer Jim Friedrich, together with Scott Miller, has made a thoughtful and serene presentation of the variety of concerns which illumine — and hound — the discussion of the relationship of church and nature. The natural photography and videography are of the usual high quality associated with Cathedral Films and Video.

Interviews with people from a variety of organizations, sacred and secular, are the backbone of these two videos; all, with the exception of a Native American woman, are white. Their comments range from the pithy and quotable to the more puzzling; saying, for instance, that nature is not a revelation *about* God but *of* God is less lucid than it sounds. Nevertheless, all the bases get covered and ample study guides that accompany the videos will help groups concretize the ethereal statements.

More than one speaker helpfully describes the Bible as having little to say explicitly about environmental care because such was not an issue in the day the scriptures were assembled. One woman insists that care for nature is present in Scripture, but that the church has tended to read past these tenets in the same way we have read past feminine imagery and women's history in the church.

The interviews are lovingly tied together with peaceful images of natural splendor and what has come to be called "new age" music. This allusion to a whole genre of serenity-based art is appropriate to the topic and is undoubtedly designed to invoke the reverence the speakers describe. An unfortunate side effect is that the several ideas begin to blend together, even when they contradict one another. As in the experience of monastic retreat, some are going to find their senses heightened and their awareness sharpened and others are going to fall asleep.

But sleepers, wake. There's meat in the salad. The tough issue of sustainable development is raised, with the insistence that the reversal of poverty and care for nature are not exclusive goals. And the brief exchange over whether or not nature is to be redeemed by Christ contains something for everybody to disagree with.

These videos are most stirring when they cry out for and posit a special role for the church in grappling with the environmental crisis. The journey the church will undertake will probably include more thunderstorms than limpid sunrises. But images and ideas, placidly presented, are a reasonable and helpful single step preceding a thousand miles.

— Bruce Campbell is a filmmaker living in New York City who spent many years working as a communications specialist at the Episcopal Church's national headquarters.

continued from page 5

even by ancestors no longer living.

Our ancestors — by blood or by faith — can offer a sanctuary in which we can do the work.

A friend of mine who struggles with a pattern of abusive relationships confided this to a great aunt in a nursing home. The aunt reciprocated by saying that her ex-husband was sometimes cruel. One night he came home drunk; she grabbed the baby and her mother, who was visiting, and they locked themselves in the bathroom. The aunt's mother, my friend's great-grandmother, said "I had no idea you were living with this." She took her daughter from the house and arranged that she never see the husband again.

There's a photograph of this matriarch with her adult daughters around her and it is powerful beyond words to know that in the blood-line is a strong woman who rejects abuse and can protect her daughters.

Blood lines of course aren't everything. Another friend recently examined a table of friends who have known one another for the duration of her life. Weathering 40 years, they have become family and she realized that her parents were not her favorite members. Being known and cared about by the others filled in holes that would have been gaping, if the nuclear family was the only reality.

Through time, backward and forward, run lines of blood and love. Coursing through them are the strengths and the fears of generations. We carry within us the stamp of those who preceded us. Whether we study them or take them for granted, we work with what they created. Likewise our own efforts will be felt through the seventh generation (as the American Indians tried to teach the Europeans).

Let's speak to these family values with enough compassion and hope that our voices can be heard over Rush Limbaugh's. TW

1994 Index

Allen, Chude Pamela
Outside the tradition 7/94
Arbogast, Marianne
Building on common ground: opponents in abortion controversy join forces 4/94
Liberating the baptized: shared ministry in northern Michigan 8-9/94
Bach, John
No Draft! No War! 1-2/94
Bergman, Gregory
Church and union 3/94
Boggs, Grace Lee
Beyond corporate bondage 5/94
Fifty years on the left 3/94
Brock, Rita Nakashima
Generations of memory 12/94
Brubach, Holly
Whose vision is it? [dialogue betw. Linda Nochlin and Thierry Mugler] 11/94
Brueggemann, Walter
Disrupting hegemony in God and us 4/94
Bucklee, Sally M.
Winds of change 7/94
Campbell, Bruce
Greening the church [video review] 12/94
Cannon, Nancy
Walking by faith 11/94
Colatosti, Camille
Controlling the beast 5/94
?Por que no somos la iglesia? 8-9/94
Chomsky, Noam
How bad is it? 5/94
Cox, Anne
The spirit on the move 7/94
Donovan, Mary Sudman
The cost of integrating 7/94
Finkel, David
In the absence of a movement 3/94
Gateley, Edwina
God in improbable places: a Catholic inheritance 10/94
Gould, Jane Soyster
The second circle 7/94
Hartman, Tari Susan
Changing public perceptions 6/94
Harvey, John
A community of restless spirits: learning accountability at Iona 8-9/94
Heyward, Carter
Staying power [guest ed.] 1-2/94
Jacobson, Denise Sherer
David — a child of the heart 12/94
Jaquet, Demetra
Pluralist, feminist and Orthodox 10/94
Kolb, Quentin
A different communion [guest ed.] 8-9/94
Kyung, Chung Hyun
Re-imagining God 7/94
Leech, Kenneth
Holy communists 10/94
Sixties' culture and mysticism 1-2/94
Manana, Gloria House
Witness to murder 1-2/94
Marable, Manning
The war against black youth [guest editorial] 5/94
Matteson, Richard
The chosen baby 12/94
Meyer, Erika
Left without Marx [guest editorial] 3/94
Miller, Ariel
The Philadelphia 11 7/94
Mollenkott, Virginia Ramey
Loving our enemies 4/94
Myers, Ched
Captivated by pretensions 11/94
Placing the question [guest ed.] 4/94
Northup, Lesley A.
Misogyny in Scripture 7/94
Rehberg, Wes
Insurrection in Chiapas 6/94
Ruether, Rosemary Radford
Can women stay in the church? 7/94
Solidly rooted, ready to fly 12/94
Schaper, Donna
Post-Christian women 7/94
Sehested, Ken
Why I am (still) a Baptist 10/94
Skees, S.R.
From Clairol to persuasion 11/94
Pulling down God from the sky: Women-Church 8-9/94
Solle, Dorothy
Moses, Jesus and Marx 3/94
Stringfellow, William
Embracing an ambiguous heritage 10/94
Strohmier, Linda
Loving Maggie [guest ed.] 6/94
Washington, Paul
Black power and church reparations 1-2/94
Wink, Walter
Looking for a consistent ethic 12/94
The Bible and exclusion, bias and prejudice 6/94
***Witness* staff**
Episcopal Church Publishing Company Awards for 1994 in Indianapolis 7/94
Passing the ADA 6/94
Protesting the Human Genome Project 6/94
The Witness wins praise 7/94
Wolfe, Kathi
The healers 6/94
Wortman, Julie
Family values: only for the privileged? 12/94
Harnessing church funds: an interview with Doug Theuner 5/94
Lay presiders in Australia? 8-9/94
Voting for more than pizza 6/94
Wylie-Kellermann, Bill
Family as a principality 12/94
Free in obedience [guest editorial] 10/94
Spiritual warfare and economic justice 5/94
Wylie-Kellermann, Jeanie
Challenging assisted suicide: an interview with Anne Finger 6/94
Dan Corrigan dies 11/94
Daughters of prophecy 7/94
Digging graves with dialogue: the views of Marc Ellis 4/94
ECPC awards 10/94
Haiti — What then must we do? 11/94
Looking to the next century: an interview with Chung Hyun Kyung 11/94
Passion and dialogue: Steve Charleston 4/94
Pulling together an agenda: an interview with Manning Marable 3/94
SDS, SNCC and the Communist Party: an interview with Michelle Gibbs 1-2/94
Stop children, what's that sound? 1-2/94
Trashing Re-imagining conference 7/94
The witch, actor and Hebrew queen 11/94

ARTISTS

Amdur, David 12/94
Anderson, Judith 7/94
Averill, Peg 1-2/94
Bach, Claudia 7/94
Bearden, Romare 12/94
Blackwell, Fred 1-2/94
Bozarth, Alla Renee 7/94
Bragg, Dane C. 8-9/94
Brancato, Helen David 6/94
Break the Silence Mural Project 4/94

Bryer, Diana 12/94
Castellanos, Julio 12/94
Cendrowski, Dwight 1-2/94
Chicoine, Wendy 8-9/94
Craighead, Meinrad 4,7/94
Czarnecki, Marek 5/94, 12/94
Denham, Therese 8-9/94
Dorsey, Patricia Lay 7/94
Duffy, Irene 5/94
Finkle, Harvey 6/94
Francino 5/94
Gassel, Alexander 1-2/94
Gibbs, Michelle 12/94
Guercino 11/94
Hogarth, William 12/94
Kahlo, Frida 6/94
Klein, Doris 7-8/94
Lentz, Robert 7/94
Luyken, Jan 10/94
Luzwick, Dierdre 4,7,10/94
Mayes, Elaine 1-2/94
McLimans, David 5/94
Michelangelo 4/94
Mignon 7/94
Mill, Eleanor 3,7/94
Moore, Ellen E. 5/94
Pascal, Primrose McPherson 12/94
Paulos, Dan 3/94
Rodgers, Daniel 11/94
Ross, M. 12/94
Siegl, Helen 3,5,10/94
Snydor, Ida Mae 6/94
Thompson, Margaret 1-2,3/94
Toyokuni, Utagawa 11/94
Trudeau, G.B. 10/94
Waldman, Max 11/94
West, Jim 1-2,11/94
Willens, John 5/94

ART & SOCIETY
Tobia, Blaise and Maksymowicz, Virginia
America's finest? [D. Small, E. Sisco, L. Hock and D. Avalos] 3/94
Bringing cost to light [J. Freeman] 5/94
Celebrating disabled and minority women [S. Aronson] 6/94
Challenging canons [M. B. Edelson] 7/94
Christ in New York [D. Michals] 8-9/94
Frustrated dialogue [M. Abramovic and Ulay] 4/94
Parallel understandings: retrosp. 10/94
Revolutionary art [Art Workers' Coalition] 1-2/94

BOOK REVIEWS
Agne, Joe
Church People in the Struggle: The National Council of Churches and the Black Freedom Movement, 1950-1970, by James F. Findlay, Jr. 1-2/94
Finger, Anne
Feminism and Disability, by Barbara Hilyer 6/94
LeBlanc, Doug
Hodding Carter: The Reconstruction of a Racist, by Ann Waldron 4/94
LeJeune, Sandy
Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community, by Wendell Berry 5/94
Payden-Travers, Chris
A Better World for Our Children: Rebuilding American Family Values, by Benjamin M. Spock 12/94
Peacock, Larry J.
Bridge Over Troubled Water: Ministry to Baby Boomers — A Generation Adrift by James Bell 10/94
Schlicklin, Jean
Grandfather, by Tom Brown 8-9/94
Wondra, Ellen K.
New Wine: The Story of Women Transforming Leadership and Power in the Episcopal Church, by Pamela W. Darling 7/94
Wylie-Kellermann, Bill
Engaging the Powers, by Walter Wink 3/94
Zola, Nkenge
MEDIA-TIONS by E. Rapping 11/94

EDITORIALS
Wortman, Julie A.
Playing dress-up 11/94
Wylie-Kellermann, Jeanie
Banking on community 5/94
Breaking the silence 4/94
Find the cost of freedom 1-2/94
Looking for full participation 8-9/94
Rejecting "normalcy" 6/94
"Something like the church" 3/94
Why I stay in my denomination 10/94
Valuing the family 12/94

POETS
Aleshire, Joan 1-2/94
Dennis, Carl 8-9/94
Dove, Rita 10/94
Lauchlan, Michael 10/94, 12/94
Levine, Philip 3/94
Madgett, Naomi Long 4/94
Orr, Gregory 3/94
Renker, Skip 5/94
Senghor, Leopold Sedar 11/94
Westerfield, Nancy G. 6/94
Wilner, Eleanor 7/94

VITAL SIGNS
Anonymous
I was one of you once [clergy sexual misconduct] 11/94
Atkins, Henry
Fasting in El Salvador 1-2/94
Barrios, Luis
An hispanic agenda for the church 12/94
Bucklee, Sally M.
Second-class priesthood: a matter of conscience? 7/94
Crew, Louie
Counting down to Indianapolis 3/94
Cracks in the wall of opposition to lesbians and gays 11/94
Douglas, Ian T.
World mission in perspective 10/94
Gessell, John M.
Is there hope for this pastoral? 6/94
Hooper, John
Church Reaganomics 5/94
Johnson, Sally A.
Revising Title IV: fighting for the needs of victims 11/94
Nunley, Jan
Condemning arms sales, Manifest Destiny 5/94
On earth as in heaven?: environmental issues at General Convention 8-9/94
The hot-button issue: clergy sexual misconduct 6/94
Phillips, Jennifer M.
Same-sex unions 12/94
Porter, Diane M.
Some thoughts on racism as the church approaches General Convention 1-2/94
Rodman, Ed
Beyond the smoke and mirrors 8-9/94
Restructuring the church for justice 3/94
Shaull, Richard
An *Instituto* retro 12/94
Sherrod, Katie
In dialogue with an ESA bishop-elect 7/94
Tolliver, Richard L.
The sin of racism 8-9/94
Wortman, Julie A.

Addressing conscience 5/94
Can we avoid this budget quicksand? 5/94
Can we talk? 4/94
Church decision-making: P. Chinnis 4/94
Fighting the "Let's kill 'em" mentality: William W. Rankin 6/94
Of God, family, and earth 10/94
PB okays air strikes in Bosnia 4/94
Sex — getting it straight? 10/94
Still addressing sin 1-2/94
V. Matthews elected bishop 1-2/94
Women's victories in both houses 10/94
Wylie-Kellermann, Jeanie
Jubilee — an international cry 10/94

WITNESS PROFILES (listed by subject)
Alexandra Sciaky and Jennifer Walters
Making love manifest [M. Arbogast] 12/94
Catrina Ganey
Parables and theater [M. Arbogast] 11/94
Coleman McGehee
Outspoken listener [J. Wortman] 4/94
Jennifer Atlee
Changes in Nicaragua's left [J. Wylie-Kellermann] 3/94
John Perkins
Re-allocating ownership [M. Arbogast] 5/94
Maria Aris-Paul
Moving beyond hierarchy [J.Wylie-Kellermann] 8-9/94
Richard Feldman
And it's 1-2-3-what are we fighting for? [M. Arbogast] 1-2/94
Robert O. Dulin, Jr.
"Come out from all sects" [E. Meyer] 10/94
Suzanne Hiatt
Quiet revolutionary [S. Pierce] 7/94
Veronica Robinson
Finding shelter [M. Arbogast] 6/94

THEMES
Jan./Feb.: The sixties
March: The left
April: Dialogue: conversing with adversaries
May: Economic justice
June: Disabilities
July: Women's spirituality: in the church and beyond
Aug./Sept.: Alternative ways of doing church
Oct.: Staying in my denomination
Nov.: Glamour
Dec.: Family values