The Witness

Volume 80 • Number 3 • March, 1997

Grieving rituals: learning to let go

Fasting in Babylon

I REALLY LIKE YOUR MAGAZINE; it reminds me of *The Wittenburg Door*. We really need alternative religious media to give balance to the hucksters.

I also really like your themes and I find a lot of important material in between the seams of indulgent lefty babble. There, I said it!

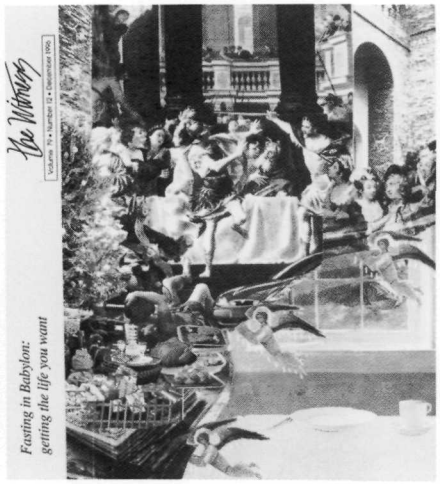
Basically, the leftism that's in *The Witness* seems inserted and artificial. It seems gratuitous and pandering — none of it needed in order to have challenging things to say. More openness and mixed evaluation seems to be in order in a religious magazine. Life is not political, at least it's not politically coherent.

In Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann's reflection on fasting [12/96], we get slamming of America and a conspiracy theory. I think the obvious truth is that we use as much resources as we do simply because we are the world's #1 valuer of resources. The rest of the world knows that materialism is of only minor interest to the core value of culture and so they have less. We don't keep this up due to military power, but from the fact of our material convictions, the illusions of our needs, which the rest of the world seems happy to let us have.

Jeff Potter
Williamston, MI

Jubilee economics

OUR FRIEND, Elaine Silverstrim, just sent us the Jan./Feb. edition of *The Witness*. I have read about half of it and felt impelled to drop you an e-mail note. SSAP (Sustainable Society Action Project) has put on seven annual conferences in the series "Delaware Valley Conference on Evolving a Sustainable Society." These conferences are held in late Fall at colleges in the Philadelphia area. Each conference has a theme in relation to sustainability. The theme for the Eighth Annual Conference will be "Ethical Issues in Sustainability." It is slated for November 1997, at either Rutgers-



Camden Campus or Swarthmore College.

At present, we are interested in making contact with others in the Delaware Valley who are concerned about sustainability, and have ideas relating to the ethical issues involved. Evolving a sustainable society is too important a project to be left to secular humanists, by default. We can be reached at SSAPinc@aol.com; 525 Midvale Rd., Upper Darby, PA 19082; 215-352-2689.

Ernest & Elaine Cohen
Upper Darby, PA

Witness praise

I HAVE ENJOYED MY FIRST TWO issues of *The Witness* so much that I wish to share it with a friend. (Subscription enclosed.)

Lily DeYoung
Plainsboro, NJ

YOUR MAGAZINE IS ONE I READ avidly from cover to cover. It gives me much to think about. My mother grabs it as soon as she can — she promises to return it but doesn't. Frankly, I think one of the reasons she visits me is to steal my copies!

Anne B. Shaw
Adelphi, MD

I FIND YOUR EFFORTS ILLUMINATING as it seems I am far from Christians who are working on issues of economic and social justice. Many do not comprehend how to treat others as human beings. I feel as if I am surrounded by people who refuse to understand that righteousness is *not* a virtue, but a sin, and a mortal sin at that. (I was raised Polish Catholic at SS. Peter & Paul Church on Detroit's west side where I also attended eight years of Catholic school.) I treasure my roots and have nurtured and sustained my own sense of spirituality in doing so. I am a follower of the earth wisdom/mysteries.

Christina Pacosz
Clover, SC

I AM ENCLOSING MY CHECK for a $35 sustaining membership subscription plus $12 for back issues. Your magazine is helping me find my way to faith and my path in the world, at last. It is truly a gift from the Spirit for me.

Anne Eversoll
Murphy, NC

I'VE LOVED YOUR MAGAZINE for years. Time to stop borrowing it!

Elizabeth N. Pierce
Fremont, CA

I LOVE *THE WITNESS!* I don't agree with every viewpoint expressed — sometimes even Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann's, but I have never been *fed* as much by any publication, month after month.

Eve Vitaglione
Raleigh, NC

WITH EVERY ISSUE *The Witness* sets a new kind of measurement for my Christianity and causes me to rethink segments of my living. I am grateful for your leadership. Your magazine certainly plays a big part in reminding me that my God has to be much larger. Thank you for your example of always pushing the envelope.

Betsy L. Willis
Zionville, NC

Spreading the word

FINALLY HAVE GOTTEN to your Nov. issue which really interested me — especially the dialogue with Jim Wallis — letting go of the "either: or" — "this way: that" is the hardest thing for us westerners to do. The freedom that comes when we finally do is not only bliss, but energy is free to pour into us.

On another note — in terms of spreading the word about *The Witness* — would it work

for loyal subscribers to send in names of potential readers, to whom you could send a complimentary issue? Here are my names.

Elvira Latta Charles
Washington, CT

[Ed. Note: Thank you so much! It's *really* helpful to us when subscribers suggest others who might like the magazine. It's not just anyone who would like a magazine that is condemned by critics as a "pagan, New-Age left-wing rag."]

Advent letter

THANK YOU FOR SENDING the Advent Letter. I've reread it several times. We all need the give and take of people in our daily lives. Somehow we manage to keep a balance. Your letter also shows that we are not alone in our struggles.

During the season just before Christmas, I noticed the constant repetition of carols — even on the classical music station — of Northern European origin, nearly to the exclusion of those from other areas of the world. I also noticed the lack of people of color in the collegiate choirs that appeared on TV, with the exception of the group from two black colleges. Their participants were represented by not only blacks, but Asians, Native Americans, and a few Caucasians. Am I the only one who notices little inconsistencies?

Keep up the good work; I find *The Witness* challenging and interesting.

Jean Seals
Parkchute, CO

POSTED ON THE NET: "If you subscribe to *The Witness,* you will already have read the following 'Advent letter' excerpt. The words speak to my own heart and mind with remarkable clarity, as do most of the journal's offerings. I pass them along with joy, with recognition and with enormous thanksgiving. They are, for me, a gift to treasure and to share."

Dianne Smith
Edgartown, MA

I SAVORED YOUR WONDERFUL Advent letter. I love your process as well as your product (clearly an intimate relationship there!) Delighted with picture of Jeanie (had imagined her a short-haired blonde!) — and came down on Jim Wallis' side in the dialogue re: The Left.

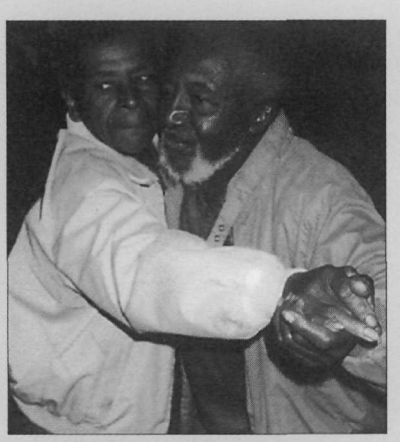
Barbara Potter
West Buxton, ME

Apoplectic in Florida

A visitor recently noted how lovely the church, good the music, cogent the sermon — until he saw *The Witness* on our reading table. The man became apoplectic. "How could you have such material here to subvert your parishioners?" I replied that Anglicans practice comprehensiveness.

He complained to Bishop John Howe about the radical he is nourishing here.

Pierre Whalon
Fort Pierce, FL



Corrections

Juanita and Wally Nelson, profiled in our December, 1996 issue tell us that while they have been together for 50 years, they are not married.

The artist who produced the image "The time of singing" in the January, 1997 issue is Judith Hankin of Eugene, Ore.

The area code for the Kirkridge Retreat Center, where the Jubilee Economics conference was held last November, has been *changed*. The correct number is 610-588-1793.

Classifieds

Episcopal Urban Intern Program

Work in social service, live in Christian community in Los Angeles. For adults 21-30. Apply now for the 1997-98 year. Contact: The Rev. Gary Commins, 260 N. Locust St., Inglewood, CA 90301. 310-674-7700.

Vocations

Contemplating religious life? Members of the Brotherhood and the Companion Sisterhood of Saint Gregory are Episcopalians, clergy and lay, married and single. To explore a contemporary Rule of Life, contact: The Director of Vocations, Brotherhood of St. Gregory, Dept. W, Saint Bartholomew's Church, 82 Prospect Street, White Plains, NY 10606-3499.

Travel education

Celtic Pilgrimages 1997. Prayer and study programs to Ireland July, Sept.; to Wales May, August. Emphasis on deepening relationship with God through lectures by outstanding scholars; visits to holy sites, worship. Sr. Cintra, Convent St. Helena; 134 E. 28th St.; New York, NY 10016; phone 212-725-6435; fax 212-779-4009.

Out of the Whirlwind

The Center for Progressive Christianity's second national forum, "Out of the Whirlwind — Part II," will be held May 1-3 at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Houston, Tex. Focussing on "Building Community With Our Differences," the conference will explore questions of inclusion and discipleship from a progressive Christian perspective. For conference information contact Helen Havens at St. Stephen's, 1805 Alabama, Houston, Tex. 77098; 713-528-6665.

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.

The Witness

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Cover: Lamentation by Nicholas Poussin (1594-1665).

Back cover: Community members digging a friend's grave in Madison County, N.C. Photographed by Robert Amberg/Impact Visuals.

The Witness offers a fresh and sometimes irreverent view of our world, illuminated by faith, Scripture and experience. Since 1917, *The Witness* has been advocating for those denied systemic power as well as celebrating those people who have found ways to "live humanly in the midst of death." We push boundaries, err on the side of inclusion and enjoy bringing our views into tension with orthodox Christianity. *The Witness'* roots are Episcopalian, but our readership is ecumenical. For simplicity, we place news specific to Episcopalians in our Vital Signs section. *The Witness* is committed to brevity for the sake of readers who find little time to read, but can enjoy an idea, a poem or a piece.

Manuscripts: We welcome multiple submissions. Given our small staff, writers and artists receive a response only when we are able to publish. Poetry can be sent directly to Leslie Williams, 2504 Gulf Ave., Midland, TX. 79705.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: $25 per year, $3 per copy. Foreign subscriptions add $5 per year. CHANGE OF ADDRESS: Third Class mail *does not* forward. Call or send your new maiing address to *The Witness.*

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Respecting 'the freedom of the dead'

by Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann

A therapist in the Detroit area visits her own grave site each year on her birthday. Friends say she is blonde and coiffed — not especially alternative, yet she takes a lawn chair and lemonade to recline above the soil in which she expects one day to be embedded.

This image flies in the face of most Americans' death avoidance. As several articles in this issue make clear, our society has taught us to surrender one of the most intimate moments in our lives to professionals who whisk our loved ones away, embalm them, dress them, transport them and bury them without much involvement from us.

A few years ago I was part of a women's circle learning about "death, change and transformation." In the course of it, a woman in her forties told us there had never been a funeral for any of her family members in her lifetime. If burials happened, it was without the family's presence. She did not know where or if her grandparents had been buried.

Suddenly, despite the church's imperfections and the petty deceits or false tranquility that can mark its ceremonies, I was grateful to have been raised in it.

My own father's unexpected death in 1974 was excruciating. But, with my mother's help, we faced it. We knew it. We surrendered to it in the context of a community. As per my father's instructions, we were washed in Romans 8 and hymns by Bach. In the tears and the confusion, we let my father go. The ancient language of the liturgy wove into our pain, assuring us of the companionship of generations and of a faith that was clean and taut.

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

I had taken this for granted, never imagining that some Americans endure all their losses, even the most permanent, alone.

Rather, I had been conscious that Christian ceremonies — at least those of European Americans — can be pretty tame. I long for an even more honest acknowledgment of the enormity of death. Perusing the Book of Common Prayer and the New Zealand Prayer Book, I wonder if the church doesn't turn too quickly to prayers that promise quick release into life everlasting.

In the Celtic funeral described by Dan Berrigan in this issue, the chairs that held the coffin are kicked over. Chants, prayers and movements are used to send the dead on their way and to cleanse the space of the living. There is no naiveté about the claims of death. No muting of death's greed. Likewise, in the African ritual, described on page eight, attention is paid to sending the dead on their journey, to denying them the ability to wreak havoc among the living. For several days, the routines of the living are interrupted by the wailing and prayers that accompany death. Strong invocations for protection follow.

A woman in her forties told us there had never been a funeral for any of her family members in her lifetime. She did not know where or if her grandparents had been buried.

This paradoxical impulse — to wail for the dead and yet to release them — appeals to me.

This same impulse, I think, accounts for Bill Stringfellow's decision to conduct an exorcism immediately after burying the ashes of his companion Anthony Towne on Block Island, R.I.

Stringfellow later wrote:

"What is involved, in the end, is learning to respect the freedom of the dead to be dead; honoring the dead in their status as dead people, and refraining from harassment of the dead — by refusing to mythologize or enshrine them."

In the course of my women's circle, we were asked to find ways to grieve for and let go of the deaths of individuals and the little personal deaths that we had survived but still dragged along behind us.

After a day spent in silence, one woman — a medical student — observed that plants and animals, as well as people in some cultures, have a sense of give and take, a sense of cycle, a willingness to be part of the give-away that moving through life requires. She wondered what healing powers would be unleashed if human beings chose to give themselves back to creation, even surrendering their bodies to the soil.

There are people in this culture, some in this issue, who are helping us find ways to reclaim the burial process from the experts. They are inviting us to wash and bury our own dead.

Meanwhile, no one has told me what the therapist on the lawn chair thinks about. Picturing her surrounded by the starkness of death, yet reclining in the manner of the living — lemonade in hand — I imagine she is finding a way to respect the freedom of the dead by considering the way in which she will live. TW

Burying the executed: healing the living

by Camille Colatosti

Two hours from Atlanta, on 260 acres of red Georgia clay, stands Jubilee Partners, a nondenominational Christian service community of nine adults. Their primary work involves helping to resettle refugees who have just arrived in the U.S.

Jubilee Partners also runs a small prison ministry. As Robbie Buller, volunteer coordinator and prison ministry coordinator, explains, "Some of us visit prisoners on death row and work as paralegals. We sometimes transport families to visit prisoners, and we organize other activities in opposition to the death penalty."

In the 1980s, when the state of Georgia was performing a number of executions, Jubilee became involved in burials.

"If the prisoner's family is too poor to bury the prisoner," explains Buller, "the state will bury the body on prison property. But when we found out how they do it we were appalled. We asked for permission to bury the people here and we established a cemetery plot.

"When the prison buries people," says Buller, "the only marker is a prison I.D. number—no name. We felt this was so disgusting and dehumanizing. It was really a way to justify the death penalty. It's as if the prison is saying, 'This isn't a human being. This is just someone we executed, a number.'

Jubilee Partners carry a casket to the cemetery. Don Mosely

"We felt this person was a child of God. He may have been a wayward child of God but still he needed to be shown respect. We've buried five prisoners on our plot."

Before each burial, a minister who has worked with the executed prisoner and knows him well performs a memorial service at the grave site.

"People remember who this person was and what this person was like," says Buller. "The person is memorialized in a respectful and loving way."

The five prisoners share space in the cemetery with several homeless people. Jubilee Partners shares a sister community relationship with the Open Door Community in Atlanta, a Christian community that invites 25 to 30 homeless people to live with them. As people age and die, they have also been buried in Jubilee's plot.

"Digging the graves is a long, arduous process," says Buller. "We dig by hand. Our ground is red Georgia clay with a lot of rocks mixed in. During the mid-1980s, we were working with Central American refugees who were fleeing death squads in El Salvador. The refugees would help us dig the graves. It was ironic that people who had fled their own country to avoid execution were helping to bury people executed by this government.

"To dig the graves, we have to use a pick axe. As the Central Americans would dig, they would say, 'This is for my mother. This is for my father.' They would remember executions of their own family, people who had been killed at the hands of their government in El Salvador.

"Later, they would participate in the memorial service. Then they would say that this was the kind of service they were not able to have for their own family members.

"In El Salvador," Buller continues, "family members could not reclaim the bodies without risking their own safety. Participating in the memorial services that we had, the refugees were able to reconcile what had happened to their own family members." TW

Camille Colatosti teaches English at the Detroit College of Business. Photographer **Don Mosely** is a founder of Jubilee.

Mothers

by Dorothëe Sölle

Two women on a summer evening
sitting on the terrace
they drink wine and tell each other stories
about their mothers

Says the young woman
now she avoids all the places
where she was with my father
she takes detours
so she won't be reminded
no i'll never set foot there
she says it hurts too much

Says the older woman
my mother seeks out the places
where memories grow
she lures the dead closer
never forgets a date
it hurts but it doesn't occur to her
to protect herself

This is how they chat about their mothers
who could hardly sit
drinking wine alone with a friend
under the moon
in the evening
she threatens
and the others laugh
she serves her master
but she is fully free
I'd like to be ariel
she is a woman
born of air

Remember

by Christina Rossetti

Remember me when I am gone away;
Gone far away into the silent land;
When you can no more hold me by the hand,
Nor I half turn to go yet turning stay.
Remember me when no more day by day
You tell me of our future that you planned:
Only remember me: you understand
It will be late to counsel then or pray.
Yet if you should forget me for a while
And afterwards remember, do not grieve:
For if the darkness and corruption leave
A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,
Better by far you should forget and smile
Than that you should remember and be sad.

Grieving: a gift to community

by Malidoma Patrice Somé

A non-Westerner arriving in this country for the first time is struck by how little attention is given to human emotions in general. People appear to pride themselves for not showing how they feel about anything. A husband might lose his job yet deploy tremendous effort to show some modicum of indifference. A couple has a crisis in relationship, yet unless seen together, it is impossible to tell what turmoil they hide inside. And the worst case of all is witnessed when someone dies. It took me the longest time to figure out that a long line of cars with headlights on in the middle of the day meant someone had died. As attractive as the modern world is with its material abundance, it is repulsive with its spiritual and emotional poverty.

What overflows in the West is barren in the indigenous world, and vice versa. Among the things that the indigenous world can share from its abundance with the modern world are spirit and emotion.

There are countless ways of expressing emotion because countless ways are needed. No one is supposed to repress emotion. If death disturbs the living, it offers a unique opportunity to unleash one of the strongest emotional powers humans have: the power to grieve. Yet, anyone who has had an opportunity to participate in a grief ritual in another culture would be shocked by the effort deployed by people in this culture to prevent themselves from feeling anything when someone dies.

People die in newspapers, in television reports. People die on bulletin boards. But they are rarely shown dead. To an indigenous person, showing a picture of a person alive and saying that this person is dead is anachronistic. Why hide death?

Knowing how to weep

People who do not know how to weep together are people who cannot laugh together. People who know not the power of shedding their tears together are like a time bomb, dangerous to themselves and to the world around them. The Dagara tribe understand the expression of emotion as a process of self-rekindling or calming, which not only helps in handling death but also resets or repairs the feelings within the person. This is needed because death, and the sudden separation around it, puts the living in a state of emotional debt, loss and disorientation. The unresolved energy produced by the death of a loved one translates itself emotionally as grief. And grief is in fact owed to the dead as the only ingredient that can help complete the death process. Grief delivers to the dead that which they need to travel to the realm of the dead — a release of emotional energy that also provides a sense of completion or endedness, closure. This sense of closure is also needed by the griever who has to let go of the person who has died. We have to grieve. It is a duty like any other duty in life.

People who do not know the power of shedding their tears together are like a time bomb, dangerous to themselves and to the world around them.

One of the most sophisticated rituals designed by the Dagara for its own people is the funeral ritual.

The invocation itself looks very simple, involving the throwing of white ash by a priest called the ash thrower. The house where the death occurred is circled with a ring of that ash to prevent evil spirits from penetrating the room where the invocation is taking place.

There are three elements in the funeral ritual that are in constant interaction: the musicians, the mourners and containers, and the assembled villagers. This interaction is needed to maintain the power and the energy that steers the grieving. The music group consists typically of two xylophone players, one single drummer and two singers. These singers are improvisers whose function is to recreate, through their singing, the history of the family up to the death that resulted in the separation. The singing theme combines the deeds and the sorrows of the family.

Words stir the grief when they concentrate on the absurdity of the cycle of life and death with love in between. But words carried by music have an even greater impact on the display of grief. The xylophones weep the tune, the drum dramatizes the circumstances, and the singers verbalize the event. Everybody else then becomes free to express his or her own emotional response whichever way it comes to him or her.

The dead person is seated a few yards away from the weeping crowd on a wooden stool freshly built from a special tree. The same tree is used to build a

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Malidoma Patrice Somé was born in a village in Burkina Faso, West Africa. He is initiated in Dagara ancestral tribal traditions. A former college professor, he teaches with Robert Bly and Michael Meade. This article is adapted from *Ritual: Power, Healing and Community,* Swan Raven & Co., 1993; P.O. Box 190, Mill Spring, NC 28756; 800-366-0264. Distributed by APG. Artist **Cheryl Phillips** lives in Detroit.

shrine around the dead. The dead person is dressed up in full ceremonial regalia. The shrine is decorated with colorful fabrics and with the sacred objects that belonged to the person now dead. The shrine represents the place from where the dead reach out to the great beyond.

Two women elders are consecrated to take care of the corpse. They each sit on one side of the corpse with fresh leaves in their hands representing the new life that has started for the dead person. They also use these leaves to chase flies away from the dead body. These women elders, although they weep discreetly, must be inattentive to what is happening outside the space in which they sit. This is because they are accompanying the dead person, collecting all the grief poured into the space and loading it on the soul of the dead one as it readies itself for the grand departure.

A place for turmoil

Between the shrine and the people there is an empty space that represents turmoil. It is the place of chaos and turbulence. It is the place where disorder must be acted out. It is the sacred space. In it every form of emotion is permitted, encouraged and expected. People are free to get angry and to shout out loud to God and to any spirit. People are free to make any absurd comment they have as long as it pertains to the phenomenon of death and how they feel. They can dance their emotions, run around in response to a strong urge or just weep their guts out.

Behind the singers and the musicians stands the crowd of people who have come to join in the ritual after hearing the initial wailing of the women. In fact, every person in the village is obligated to join in the expression of grief that follows death. Strangers who happen to pass by the ritual space during the grieving must either join in or walk to the place where the deceased is seated to pay respect before continuing with their business. This means that death stops every activity pertaining to life and disrupts the continuity of human feeling and relationship.

Death is chaos visiting the quiet of human life. Consequently, it is criminal to pursue business as usual knowing that someone in the village has died. Such behavior would indicate that one is used to death — which is impossible. For no one can get used to the idea of death, and to villagers, no one is supposed to get used to it. Not to participate in the ritual means one is evading what one owes the dead (and this is criminal since it traps the dead between here and beyond). Not to participate can also pollute one's life because the living cannot live peacefully until the dead are really dead, gone to the realm of the ancestors. Death requires the suspension of normal activities.

The people who gather for the funeral ritual are grouped in specific ways. On one side of the musicians are the male villagers, the female villagers on the other. The mourners grieve. The containers make sure the mourners do not go beyond the ritual space nor do anything that is harmful to themselves or to the villagers. Mourners are usually close relatives of the deceased. Their feelings, a combination of the desire to join their loved one in the great beyond and a deep frustration with life's vicissitudes, make them prone to a lot of violent displays. They are insane in a way.

SOSAD **Cheryl Phillips**

Containing the chaos

Keeping their insanity bearable requires a trail of people who are not as upset. These containers typically are relatives who come from afar. They are there to keep the sacred space alive, to contain the chaos within it by assisting the mourners. Thus, the whole village attends the funeral in order to help the family and relatives express their grief. The villagers also take this opportunity to bring their own unfinished business with their own dead relatives. In the largest sense, the ritual is not only about this one dead person but a ritualized process that encompasses all the dead of the village up until then.

Any persons who enter the ritual space must first walk three times past the dead in a straight line. At the fourth passing the newcomer must walk toward the dead twice and make an offering as a presentation from themselves and their own dead relatives and parents before joining the gathering. Offerings, or give-aways, are usually in the form of cowry shells or domestic animals.

People notice when you don't go to a funeral ritual. Sooner or later a death will occur in your own family, and you'll find that the relatives of those people whose funeral you didn't go to will hesitate before they come to yours. If they come, they come to make a statement about your declining sense of community, and they will do that in a singing fashion. In their song they will describe how the person was not at their relative's funeral. They will emotionally harangue you on social ethics pertaining to death and the responsibility that weighs on everybody who learns about the death of anybody. Consequently, a person's social failures are brought out in the course of funeral ritual, and as a result create an occasion for a special kind of grief. Death reminds the person who is not paying his or her social dues to the community that he or she must repent and grieve for past failures.

The xylophones produce a musical space so that the wailing that accompanies grief can happen in melody. After a while the drummer enters, creating a rhythmical space. Cantors speak to each other as if no one else is there. One cantor will come forth, with a very incisive statement about humans being trapped in a world in which they are not in control because of the mighty power of death. They will go on to sing that the family whose relative has died has been chosen in order to have everyone remember that our death may be next. Another cantor will respond very quickly with a short sentence sung at a high pitch, and as he sings, all the men will initiate a chanting pattern that will then be taken up by the group of women, finally involving the whole group of family members, relatives and villagers.

While the group is involved in chanting its sorrow, individuals may get in touch with areas inside themselves that require specific grief attention. These are moments when individuals separate from one of the groups and allow themselves to be carried away by the energy surging in them. People feeling this deep grief wail in the direction of the shrine and within the space of chaos in an attitude of despair. As they near the shrine, the sacred place representing the great beyond, other people will touch them on the shoulder. The touch is a reminder that they must throw their grief into the sacred space of the shrine and return to the village to gather more grief. They must not walk into the sacred space of the shrine. To walk into the sacred space of the dead without being consecrated is to join with the soul of the dead as it gathers the fuel of grief to march into eternity.

The ritual is not only about this one dead person. Individuals may get in touch with areas inside themselves that require specific grief attention.

The members of the immediate family of the dead are called *kotuosob,* which means the-center-of-the-heat people or primary mourners. People are assigned to look after them for the duration of the ritual. These caretakers will mimic exactly what the relatives do. For example, if a relative begins to run off, they will follow until it becomes necessary to remind the relative that he or she is moving out of the ritual space. Most of the time these actions end in the form of a rhythmical dance that consists of pounding the ground with the feet and jumping up and down in cadence to the drum.

Funerals go on for at least three days and three nights if the departed one is an adult. Children's funerals last one day. Adolescents' funerals last two days and one night.

There is yet another category of people whose role it is to downplay the emotional intensity of the relatives' grief. In contrast to those who assist the members of the primary family stirring their grief, this other group acts out the whole ritual as if it were a joke. They call this group *laluoro*, or the joking partners. The Dagara believe that grief can kill when it is carried up beyond a human level of intensity. These joking partners are needed to balance the energy of grief to an appropriate human level.

Joking partners will always leap at a primary member who goes wild and will ask for cowrie shells, for instance, or remind the person of the fact that he brings food to someone (the dead) in the compound who is not hungry. They can also be seen at the shrine talking to the body of the dead. It is not surprising to hear them say to the dead, "Now let me see you do as you used to do if you're a real man," or "I've always asked you to be quiet, and you have never listened. Now you are still and quiet without my asking, and I am the one making all the noise. How about that?"

Although these reminders appear to have no connection with what is going on, they are very effective in grounding an individual at the extreme end of expressing grief. No one escapes the emotional energy triggered by such a ritual.

Everybody gets the opportunity to shed some tears, and regardless of the purpose for which the tears are shed, the dead will have plenty of tears to swim in on the way home to the other world. TW

Fire workers, get a raise

CEOs who presided over massive lay-offs earned higher salaries than their counterparts in corporations which did not cut jobs, according to an Institute for Policy Studies report. Executives of the 22 firms which laid off at least 3,000 workers in 1995 received an average pay raise of 13.6 percent, while raises for executives of large firms in general averaged just 10.4 percent. Salaries of these higher-paid executives averaged $244.5 million in 1995.

— John Rodwan

Investors confront Texaco

Religious shareholders in Texaco, who have been challenging the company's social responsibility performance since the early 1970s, met face-to-face with Texaco Chairman Peter Bijur just hours before Texaco's November announcement of a $170 million settlement of racial discrimination lawsuits. Over 70 investors who are members of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility called on Bijur to implement 16 anti-discrimination measures, and notified him of their plans to file shareholder resolutions on these concerns. Religious investors will also submit a shareholder resolution on Texaco's operations in Burma, a country run by a military dictatorship notorious for human rights violations.

***— The Corporate Examiner,* 12/10/96**

Prisoners of Conscience Project

Retiring *Witness* board member Mike Yasutake, Director of the Interfaith Prisoners of Conscience Project (IPOC), was recently honored at an evening of tribute sponsored by five organizations concerned with prison human rights issues. A Japanese-American citizen, Yasutake's imprisonment in U.S. internment camps during World War II led to a lifetime of advocacy on behalf of political prisoners in this country. Contributions to further this work can be sent to IPOC, 2120 Lincoln St., Evanston, IL 60201.

Power and church giving

Church member giving patterns are connected to power dynamics in congregations, according to a new book by John and Sylvia Ronsvalle (*Behind the Stained Glass Windows: Money Dynamics in the Church*, Baker, 1996).

"We encountered many congregational leadership boards that valued the status quo more highly than expanding the support base of the church," Sylvia Ronsvalle said. "Because the issues of money and power are often closely connected, these leaders were willing to keep their congregations at a maintenance level rather than risk a shift in the congregation's power structure."

The Ronsvalles also suggest that the church has failed to adequately address the responsibilities of wealth.

"Seminaries have not trained pastors in either the practical or the spiritual aspects of money," John Ronsvalle said, adding that many pastors feel pressured to make people happy, rather than challenge them. "In the resulting void, church members' attitudes toward their increasing resources were influenced more strongly by consumer advertising than by any religious perspective."

Gay/lesbian marriage

The Hawaii Equal Rights Marriage Project (H.E.R.M.P.), on the brink of winning equal rights and protections for gay and lesbian couples, is facing a financial crisis which may severely curtail their activities at a crucial moment in the campaign. Send contributions to H.E.R.M.P., P.O. Box 11690, Honolulu, HI 96828.

— Walt Gordon, Episcopal Diocese of Minnesota

Printers cut pollution

Four Illinois printers — in a state where printing is the largest manufacturing industry — have voluntarily agreed to reduce pollution by using inks made from soybean oil, using water-based solvents, recycling ink and paper and improving energy efficiency. The printers hope to enlist at least 250 additional shops in their Illinois Great Printers Project, which has been endorsed by Printing Industries of America (100 Daingerfield, Alexandria, VA 22314) and several unions.

***— Chicago Sun Times,* 9/17/96, reported in *Initiatives,* 12/96**

Peace teams

Opportunities to join peace teams and short-term delegations to various countries are offered by a number of peace and justice organizations. For information on trips to Iraq, Cuba, Chiapas (Mexico), Nicaragua, Guatemala, Senegal and the Middle East, contact Michigan Peace Teams, 1516 Jerome St., Lansing, MI 48912; 517-484-3178.

Taking people seriously

"America is a conservative country in so many ways. It's deeply racist, it refuses to interrogate corporate power, it's deeply homophobic, it's deeply patriarchal.

"So institutional religion is generally conservative — that's true anywhere, and it's true in the United States as well. But there's also a prophetic wing among these religious traditions.

"It's the responsibility of progressives to respect folk — and to respect them is to take them seriously, not to trash them. And by taking them seriously, you bring your critique to bear, but you also recognize that there are some elements in who people are and where they are that you can build on."

— Cornel West in an interview with John Nichols, *The Progressive,* 1/97

short takes

A kaleidoscope of grief: Readers tell their stories

'Keep the coffin closed'

It was 1986 and I was a brand-spanking new deacon, ordained only three weeks. It was the first "liturgical event" for which I had to assume full responsibility in terms of planning and leadership — the funeral of a colleague in AIDS activism and education. His name was Jimmy Mack. He was 26 years old and dead too soon, a beautiful bud killed by an early frost. I was 36 years old and full of ideas and opinions about what the church was, and who clergy ought to be, and how things should run, and, in the way only the newly ordained can be, myself.

"We are Anglicans," intoned my field education supervisor from seminary, to whom I had turned for advice. "We believe in the Resurrection. The focus is not on the body, but on the spirit." "On the spirit not the body" I dutifully wrote on my note pad. "So, the first thing you must remember is to keep the coffin closed during the service," he continued in his BIG voice, the one he always used when he wanted to impress you with something of importance. The top of my pad read, "KEEP THE COFFIN CLOSED," circled and underlined — twice.

That night, I went to the funeral home to talk with Jimmy's mom. I swear to you, the first thing she said to me was, "Okay, so we'll have the funeral service in the chapel right here in the funeral home and," she added without stopping for breath, "we'll KEEP THE COFFIN OPEN."

I tried not to look startled or concerned. "Oh, Ms. Mack," I said, ever so pastorally, "you know, well, we're Anglicans. We believe in the Resurrection, and . . ." She was way ahead of me. "Yeah, yeah, yeah," she said, "I know what we are. We are in denial, is what we are. We're in the midst of the biggest health crisis ever to hit this country and nobody wants to pay attention." I gulped. She continued.

"Look at my boy." she said, her voice heavy with sorrow and laced with anger. "Look at my beautiful, beautiful baby boy. Look what AIDS has done to him. I want EVERYONE to see. I want EVERYONE to know what we're dealing with here. I want people to pay attention to what AIDS has done — is doing — will do — to EVERYONE — if we don't pay attention."

She — her voice and body — began to move from the heaviness of grief to a wonderful, powerful energy. "So, I believe in the Resurrection, yes, but I also believe in REALITY. Let's give Jimmy one more of those 'teaching moments' he always talked about. Let's let him give people the best education possible. Let's keep the coffin OPEN."

Blue hair. Green hair. Black fingernails and lipstick. Red coats made of feathers.

"Yes, ma'am," I agreed softly.

So much for the "solid ground of Anglican theology."

Case closed. Coffin open.

The funeral service was the next day at noon. I thought I looked magnificent in my never-been-worn-before cassock, surplice, tippet and hood. I paled in comparison, however, to the . . . well, the proper term is "congregation," but it was a bit of a stretch to find its application in this setting.

I should explain. Jimmy Mack had been a radio announcer. All of his friends were either employed by the entertainment industry or engaged in what was euphemistically referred to as "the arts." How to describe them . . . funky? Not a good Anglican word, but most appropriate for the occasion. Blue hair. Green hair. Black fingernails and lipstick. Red coats made of feathers. Somber black dresses with outrageously colored, floor length silk scarfs. And, that was just the men! Some of the women wore beautiful black hats with heavy veils draped over their faces.

The local radio station had a satellite system set up in the balcony of the funeral home chapel. I had been instructed that they were going to announce that the next hour would be a tribute to Jimmy Mack. It would begin with "his song" and continue with an uninterrupted selection of his favorite contemporary hits. Then, I was to begin the service in good Episcopal fashion: "straight up BCP," as his mother had said.

There we were. Me looking for all the world like the proper Anglican priest. They looking, well, funky. The coffin was open, and Jimmy Mack looked like a mere shadow of his former self.

The music of Martha and the Vandellas floated down from the balcony like a surreal angelic choir, "Jim-my, hey Jimmy! Jim-my Mack, when are ya comin' back?" Heads bobbed and weaved to the music. Row upon row of green and red heads and heavily veiled black hats nodded in time to the beat. Occasionally, someone dabbed a tear from a heavily

Artist **Ralfka Gonzalez** lives in San Francisco, Cal.

mascara'd eye. Someone in the back began sobbing uncontrollably and several folk rushed to console the bereaved. "Hey, Jimmy, Jim-my, Jim-my Mack, when are ya comin' back?"

Then, the music stopped. What seemed like an eternity suspended in the bubble of a microsecond suddenly burst onto my head and I jolted into action. I stood up and moved into the silence. The pain of the present reality joined with the ancient lament of the words of Job. "I am Resurrection and I am Life, says the Lord." I began. "Whoever has faith in me shall have life, even though he die."

In that marriage of ancient and modern, the words I had heard so many times before suddenly seemed more real. I understood them in a completely new way. I found new strength, new hope, new meaning to the power of the resurrected spirit of Christ, who was suddenly very present in the midst of these, his *anawim*. Their modern psalm of lament had not escaped his ears. He was there among us, in the middle of our grief and sorrow, in the midst of the epidemic of fear and denial.

That was the first of hundreds of funerals and memorial services I would perform for people who had died of AIDS. It certainly was the most bizarre, but it was not the most creative. The "teaching moment" Ms. Mack wanted so much to provide one last time for Jimmy was not just about the reality of AIDS. I learned that, if I truly believe that liturgy is "the work of the people," then people are infinitely more important than rubrics. That has freed me to make each service I perform a relevant and unique tribute to that person's life. And, that has helped me to fill my self with the power of the resurrection and not my own sense of power and control.

—Elizabeth Kaeton, Diocesan Canon Missioner to The Oasis, Newark, NJ

Ralfka Gonzalez

'I don't need that'

Twelve years ago, I was mourning the deaths of my grandfather and a teaching colleague. I went to the All Saints' Day eucharist to hear their names included in the prayers, but was still left feeling incomplete.

At the close of the service, as I sat in the pew thinking, one of the priests who had celebrated the liturgy came by and handed me something, saying, "Here, this is for you."

Thinking it was kleenex, I replied, "I don't need that."

With a laugh, he answered, "Maybe, but it is for you." And then he left.

Inside the red tissue paper lay two bulbs. When I caught up with their giver, I asked what I was supposed to do with them.

"I see you going outside at night and quietly planting them in a place which you go by regularly. You don't have to tell anyone about what you're doing, but they will be a reminder for you that life comes out of death."

"What are they?"

"Oh," the priest answered with a smile, "You will have to wait and see."

Ever since that All Saints' Day in 1984, I have gone out and planted bulbs—daffodils, tulips, narcissus, bluebells, whatever will grow wherever I have lived. I have planted bulbs for countless people whom I love and who have died.

I do it in broad daylight now, around my yard and house. I plant upwards of a couple of dozen bulbs. Maybe I weep as I plant them. I always pray. When they emerge from the ground in the spring as daffodils, tulips, narcissus, bluebells, I will rejoice in their colors and beauty, for those flowers speak to me of resurrection and life.

—Lee Alison Crawford, Saint Mary's Parish, Northfield, VT

Ninety on a dirt road

When I was in high school there was a Roman Catholic nun who encouraged, upheld, mentored, and generally urged me to greater and greater heights.

After I graduated she fell sick, retired and waited for the end.

When I found out about her illness I started going to see her every week, bringing daisies. I was the only one of her former students who came to see her regularly.

Well, I moved away and did not see her as often. One day I got a call from the convent. She had passed away. They asked if I would like to come to the requiem mass. I thought I was okay, until I found myself doing 90 on a dirt road while driving to the requiem and starting to cry.

I remember crying like hell throughout the whole service. After everyone had left I went up to the altar. I gave her a formal salute, said a few words, turned and walked away. I planted daisies in my garden which are there to this day some 20-odd years later.

— Paul Courry, Orangevale, CA

Living imagination

When I was a practicing psychotherapist, a client and I performed a grief ritual that was very simple. We went to her favorite park. We found a place where it was okay to burn. She showed me several pictures of her father, who had been a sexual abuse perpetrator, and told me what each picture represented to her. One by one, she placed each picture in the fire.

When thinking about the creation of ritual, I use this guideline:

Remember the intention.

Use your intuition.

A ritual should benefit all and harm none.

Keep it simple.

Stay balanced.

Keep in touch with your feelings and with the other people.

Honor the power of words.

Keep the imagination alive.

Attend to detail.

Rituals should be incorporated into life as much as possible. Many churches do a fine job of ritualizing transitions.

—Barb Chandler, Sacramento, CA

The power of conviviality

Recently the AIDS Memorial Quilt in Washington, D.C. delivered a powerful psychic punch to my emotional gut. Yet, when I returned home to Boston, I found myself able to sleep. I think my unforeseen tranquility had something to do with the nature of the power present.

The power most present there was not like the power that needs to tower higher than all the rest, the power memorialized in phallic marble standing pointedly at one end of the quilt. The power most present there was not like the power managed in a domed building at the other end of the quilt. The power there was not violating, excluding or diminishing. The power there did not wear me out by igniting my many and varied instinctual reflexes to protect. The power there filled me full.

A simple quilt panel near the center of the AIDS memorial quilt says it best for me: "So many heartaches. So many hearts to restore." The powers and principalities that flanked the AIDS quilt crush those affected by AIDS as much as the virus that causes AIDS. But souls crushed by AIDS, and the politics around it, reconfigure and coalesce in a powerful way that shatters darkness with light.

And what's the quilt's power? Conviviality. Martin Luther, in speaking of how Christ offers counsel and help, suggested a fifth way beyond the preached word, baptism, the eucharist and the forgiveness. Namely, mutual conversation and consolation.

The only power I could hold onto more powerful than the power of wasting and dementia that killed Craig, more powerful than the power of a health maintenance organization that abandoned him, was the power released when Craig's father, a good old boy from Maine, reached across Craig's quilt panel for Tim, Craig's lover; a lover Craig's father previously knew as, and, in fact, called a queer.

At the quilt, I discovered again that the power of conviviality is stronger than the powers and principalities.

So you haven't been to the quilt? Not so fast. You've been there if, at any time, you found the hand of a fellow struggler wrestling with and for you during your sickness unto death, amidst your dealings with despair, while you fended off the powers and principalities.

Remember these quilt panels of your experience. Sew them together and see a piece of the promised land.

Take your tired bones and sleep on that.

— Bill Wallace, rector of Emmanuel Church, Boston, MA

Christmas grief

The Saether Funeral Home in Blanchardville, Wis. holds an annual "Day of Remembrance" in early December. The funeral director sends invitations to everyone who has lost a family member during the year.

As people arrive, they are invited to write the name of the deceased on a red ribbon and to hang it on the Christmas tree. The service begins with a prayer and a Christmas carol. There is a video (about 10 minutes long) about the grieving process. Then there is a litany of remembrance and a candle-lighting ritual. There is a time for refreshments and conversations.

People are invited to take their ribbon from the Christmas tree and hang it on their own tree at home, or to put it in a special place so that their loved one is symbolically present during the holidays.

The event is held at the funeral home so that everyone feels equally welcome to participate. Prayers are led by three clergypersons — over time every church in the area has an opportunity to assist. A local parish nurse or hospice volunteer leads the litany.

— Janice.Mynchenberg.
parti@ecunet.org

Dreaming of a church

When I was elected bishop, suffragan in the Diocese of Newark, it became apparent that I was going to have to do some church closings. As one can imagine, there are all manner and sorts of issues to be considered and emotions to be lived with and honored.

I asked Corin Morris to help me develop a service that would reflect truth, emotion and human concerns. The service is an opportunity for me, representing the diocese, to confess ways that we have fallen short and ways that we might have been remiss in relating to the congregation. The congregation pronounces its absolution and then likewise acknowledges ways that it has fallen short in the Common Prayer of Confession. I, representing the diocese, then pronounce absolution.

Together, we realize that we are being resolved by God, but it seems important also to acknowledge that we do it in an Incarnation Way.

The service reads in part:

For the life and witness of this congregation let us bless and praise the Living God: Thanks be to God.

For the worshipers who have prayed and sung in this place for over a century:

the faithful few who dreamed of a church in this place;

the steadfast supporters during the years when many moved away;

the faithful few who have struggled to sustain a ministry here;

For all these saints of God, let us bless the Lord: Thanks be to God.

— Jack M. McKelvey, suffragan bishop, The Diocese of Newark, Newark, NJ. Copies of this service are available, call 201-622-3870.

The burden bearers **by Marek Czarnecki of Bristol, Conn.**

Welcome to the catacomb

Christians in ancient Rome met and worshipped amidst the grave niches — tangible reminders of death and separation from loved ones. Perhaps because of this age-old witness, worshipers in the modern electronic catacomb called LUTI welcome the presence of the loved dead into their community.

Conceived and brought into being by Louie Crew, LUTI began in 1991 as a mailing list for gay and lesbian Christians and their friends — an electronic sacred space where all are welcome and valued as beloved children of God. Many more people read the articles, and contribute their prayers and spiritual presence to the community, than those who raise their voices in the electronic discourse. Yet each presence is felt and valued.

When did we first welcome the dead to that silent community? It seems that they have always been with us. But now, when any member suffers the loss of a loved one, we give that one a formal welcome to the LUTI catacombs and an invitation to take a seat in the rear pews. There all our catacomb "angels" reside and watch over us. It is rumored that even Elvis sings out in psalms from the flickering shadows of the catacomb depths!

—Ann Carlson
<acarlson@widomaker.com>

The Dove Mound at "The Highground" Vietnam Veterans Memorial Project in Neillsville, Wis. Another Dove Mound was recently constructed in Vietnam as a memorial for the Vietnamese dead. David Giffey

Blood brothers: combatants share wounds

by Tom Boswell

"Nothing gets swept under the rug forever," Mike Boehm says, alluding to the wounds of wars and the wounds of families.

"I had this fantasy, before I went over to Vietnam, of being wounded, seriously, but not too seriously. I guess basically so my father would love me."

Boehm, a carpenter from Madison, Wis., had "what most guys lusted for" back in 1967, a 4-F deferment for reasons of health. But he lied his way into the army and went to Vietnam in January, 1968, in time for the Tet offensive.

Abused by his father and addicted to alcohol, Boehm bluntly admits he was too "shut down" to empathize with or even think about the Vietnamese back then. "It wasn't until I overcame alcohol that I got outside of myself and thought about Vietnam," he says.

Now Boehm spends much of his time thinking about and visiting Vietnam, part of a process of healing his own internal wounds by tending to the wounds of the country he helped devastate. A year ago, Boehm took the process of reconciliation a giant step further by bringing the dove of peace to Vietnam—literally.

Boehm and 13 other volunteers from the U.S.—primarily veterans—worked side-by-side with Vietnamese vets in fashioning a 25-acre park devoted to peace and reconciliation. The park, located in rural Ha Bac Province about 35 miles northeast of Hanoi, will soon include a sustainable fruit farm, fish ponds and buildings. The centerpiece is an earthen mound, similar to Native American effigy mounds, in the shape of a dove.

"People in war inherently have incredible feelings of guilt. Guilt because they killed people or guilt because they themselves did not get killed. I guess I have guilt feelings too, because I watched, in a few months, a very beautiful country decimated by munitions."

— David Giffey

The park is patterned after the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Park at the Highground in central Wisconsin.

Nguyen Ngoc Hung, a North Vietnamese combat veteran, had visited the Highground in November, 1990, while on a tour of reconciliation. The park had a profound impact on Hung. He stood on top of the dove mound at the Highground, burned incense, and prayed for his brother, missing in action since the war.

Tom Boswell is a writer and photographer living in Madison, Wis.

Boehm later learned of Hung's visit and invited him back to Wisconsin, where the idea was forged to create a similar park in Vietnam to promote the spiritual healing of both countries.

Boehm and the Madison Friends Meeting (Quakers) raised over $30,000 for purchase of the land and construction of the Vietnamese park. The dedication ceremony took place on November 11 last year, Veterans' Day in the U.S.

The ceremony began with Vietnamese veterans and U.S. volunteers pairing off to plant trees. Soil from the Highground memorial, which had been blessed by a Native American spiritual leader, was mixed with the soil of the peace park. Betty Boardman, a 78-year old Madison Quaker who had delivered medical supplies to the North Vietnamese in 1967, planted flowers with Mrs. Ho Thi Hanh, former director of the Women's Union of Quang Ngai Province. Hanh made the 500-mile pilgrimage to the peace park in hopes that a similar park could be built near her home at My Lai, where 507 Vietnamese civilians were massacred by American soldiers in 1968.

With Nguyen Ngoc Hung translating, Boehm read a congratulatory letter from Ann and Emily Morrison Welsh, the widow and daughter of Norman Morrison. Morrison, the Quaker who immolated himself in front of Robert McNamara's office in 1965, is considered a hero in Vietnam. Another vet then read the poem *Emily* by To Huu, in which the poet has Morrison explain to his daughter why he sacrificed himself. Written in 1965, the poem is required reading in all secondary schools in Vietnam.

"Art speaks a language that words can't," says David Giffey, the artist and veteran who designed the original Dove Mound. Raised on a Wisconsin dairy farm, Giffey was a combat journalist in Vietnam in 1965 and 1966. Today he has a national reputation as a painter of icons for Greek Orthodox churches.

After returning to Vietnam for the dedication of the peace park, Giffey wrote: "Separated by 9,000 miles, the Dove Mounds are silent alternatives to abusive power, ignorance, hatred and misunderstanding, the engines that drove the U.S. government's war machine."

While in Vietnam last year, Giffey met with fellow artists and spoke to students at the Fine Arts University in Hanoi.

"When you go as a soldier, the military precludes any kind of education about the culture of people you're supposed to overcome and destroy," Giffey said.

Hung, the Vice Director of Hanoi's foreign language institute, who spent six years fighting in the jungle, agrees.

"There was no communication whatsoever between Vietnamese and American soldiers during the war," Hung said. "When we saw them, we only shot at them.

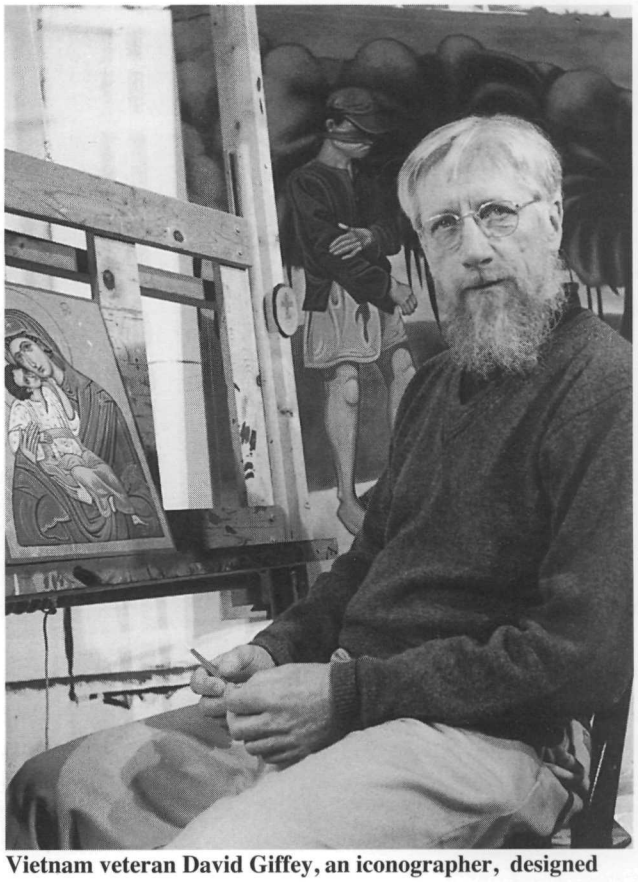
"In 1990, for the first time, I went to America and I met veterans and their organizations and their families. It was then that I learned more about Americans and the suffering of veterans. I realized the possibility of building a bridge between veterans of Vietnam and America."

Boehm's first experience of building peace with Vietnam occurred in 1992. He joined a small team of veterans who helped the Vietnamese build a medical clinic near Saigon. It was an experience that brought Boehm in contact with other vets who, like himself, were suffering from the wounds of war in substance abuse and suicide attempts.

"Going back over, I was kind of afraid," he recalls. "I didn't think I had any trauma because I wasn't in combat, but it was overwhelming! Of course, there were the Vietnamese and their stories, and their attitude that the past was the past. One of the things that stayed with me is that they don't hate us. I couldn't picture myself *not* hating, if that had happened to us."

Returning to Wisconsin, Boehm organized the Indochina Support Group to raise capital for a revolving loan fund for development ventures in Vietnam. Funds are funneled through the Women's Union in My Lai to poor women in the region for small agricultural and economic development projects.

"It bypasses a lot of bureaucracy and gets right to the people who need it," Boehm says about the loan fund, which



Vietnam veteran David Giffey, an iconographer, designed the Dove Mound. Tom Boswell

has raised over $14,000 to date.

The Vietnamese-American Peace Park is also intended to serve as a tool for local economic development. Fruit and fish sales can be used to maintain the park and to sustain the local farmers caring for it.

But the main purpose of the park is to provide a place for spiritual reflection, a place where former warriors can unload their grief and pain, and a place where former foes can meet and commit themselves to peace and friendship.

"It was really thrilling to see the men from the two sides hugging each other, all of them in tears," Boardman recounted after the dedication ceremony.

"Vietnam vets, like other vets, have a reputation for being crazy, and of course it's true," says Giffey. "War does make you crazy." More than 58,000 Americans were killed there, and more than 59,000 Vietnam vets have since taken their own lives, he notes.

"People in war inherently have incredible feelings of guilt. Guilt because they killed people or guilt because they themselves did not get killed. I guess I have guilt feelings too, because I watched, in a few months, a very beautiful country decimated by munitions. I also saw a beautiful culture decimated."

But in some ways, coping with the war has not been as difficult for Vietnamese veterans, Hung says.

"Unlike American veterans, we returned to a very warm welcome by the population," he says. "Veterans were given the best care from the community because the government was too poor to take care of them."

Still, there are an estimated 300,000 Vietnamese soldiers missing, Hung says, and the government lacks the resources to locate them, which requires a lot of understanding and cooperation from veterans and their families.

"Unlike America, Vietnam had 4,000 years of fighting against foreign domination," he says. "There is a sense of purpose here. We want Vietnam to intermingle with the rest of the world. We want to develop our country. We want to make peace."

Helping to rebuild Vietnam has given Boehm a sense of purpose, too.

"All we hear about is our own pain and suffering," he comments. "People have got to hear another voice."

Boehm is committed to raising another $30,000 to complete the Vietnamese-American Peace Park, and then will help begin another park at My Lai, as well as economic development projects.

Through hard work, commitment, courage and art, these Wisconsin veterans have begun the long process of healing themselves while helping to heal a small country ravaged by war. At the peace park last November 11, Giffey performed a ritual. With a pipe provided by a Native American spiritual leader, he prayed to the heavens, the four directions and to Mother Earth for guidance and blessing. After the prayer, the pipe was filled with tobacco and passed about, from veteran to veteran, from Vietnamese to American. After smoking the pipe, the group gathered together and released ten white doves.

Later, Boehm recalled that special moment: "We stood there, on that hill, veterans, peace activists, farmers, government officials, teachers and children, all of us transformed by what we had done. After two years of hard work we had created the physical manifestations of a deep spiritual need between our countries — the need for healing, and most important, the need for hope." TW

Contributions to the Vietnamese-American Peace Park can be sent to: Religious Society of Friends, 1704 Roberts Court, Madison, WI, 53711. Make donations payable to Madison Friends Meeting and specify that your donation is for the Peace Park.

A Celtic passage

by Daniel Berrigan

I have a story to tell about a ritual on Clare Island, which is off the west coast of Ireland. It was one of the most devastated areas during the famine of the 19th century.

The winters out there in the North Atlantic are very cruel and the worst tragedy is the loss of young fishermen who go out with their fathers and are lost in the great winter storms. This loss is compounded with the fact that there's a Celtic idea that the sea is in charge. Once someone is swept overboard, efforts to recover the person are minimal, because it's looked upon as a curse to try to draw someone out of the sea. And you risk further trouble.

A friend of mine, Patrick O'Brien, was a new priest and his first parishioner, the daughter of a shepherd who had died 30 years before, was taken very ill that first winter. The helicopter was unable to arrive to take her to the mainland. They had to risk the boat. He went over with her — in her very bad condition in a very primitive open boat. In the middle of the storm, he was swept overboard into the January waters. Because he was the priest, they labored to recover him. He ended up in the hospital with the dying woman. He had pneumonia and barely, barely recovered; she died.

He got back on the island in time for the funeral. He was a new priest and he was very attentive to the pre-Christian Celtic ceremonies.

So it happened like this. In the little house where her father had lived and then

Daniel Berrigan is an anti-nuclear recidivist, poet and mystic living in New York where he works with cancer and AIDS patients. He told this story for *The Witness* on a late summer night on Block Island, R.I.

Courtney Davis

she had lived, they set up the box on two chairs between the hearth and the table. People gathered all through and outside the house. O'Brien celebrated the eucharist at the kitchen table. At the end of it, he knew enough to know that his part was over. He just joined the other people in the congregation.

Two men came forward and they kicked over the chairs, one in the direction of the hearth and one in the direction of the table. (We were later informed this was so the ghost would not return either to the hearth or the table.) Then they picked up the box, which had been sealed, and proceeded outdoors. They were followed by the entourage of people around the cottage. Chanting, they paced out — three times — a Celtic rune, which means that they did not finish the circle. In the Book of Kells, the rune is always an incomplete circle which ends mysteriously in another round and eventually the circle is completed, but it's never one circle. It's more like a maze. This was so that the ghost could not return to the house.

Chanting, they paced out — three times — a Celtic rune, which means that they did not finish the circle. This was so the ghost could not return.

Well, they proceeded upward to the cliffs, the priest in the background. When they got near the cliffs a few of the men went down on hands and knees and began to move into the underbrush which is similar to Block Island's — the Atlantic does not allow for great trees. Because the soil is so thin, they cannot bury the dead; they shove them into the underbrush and leave them there.

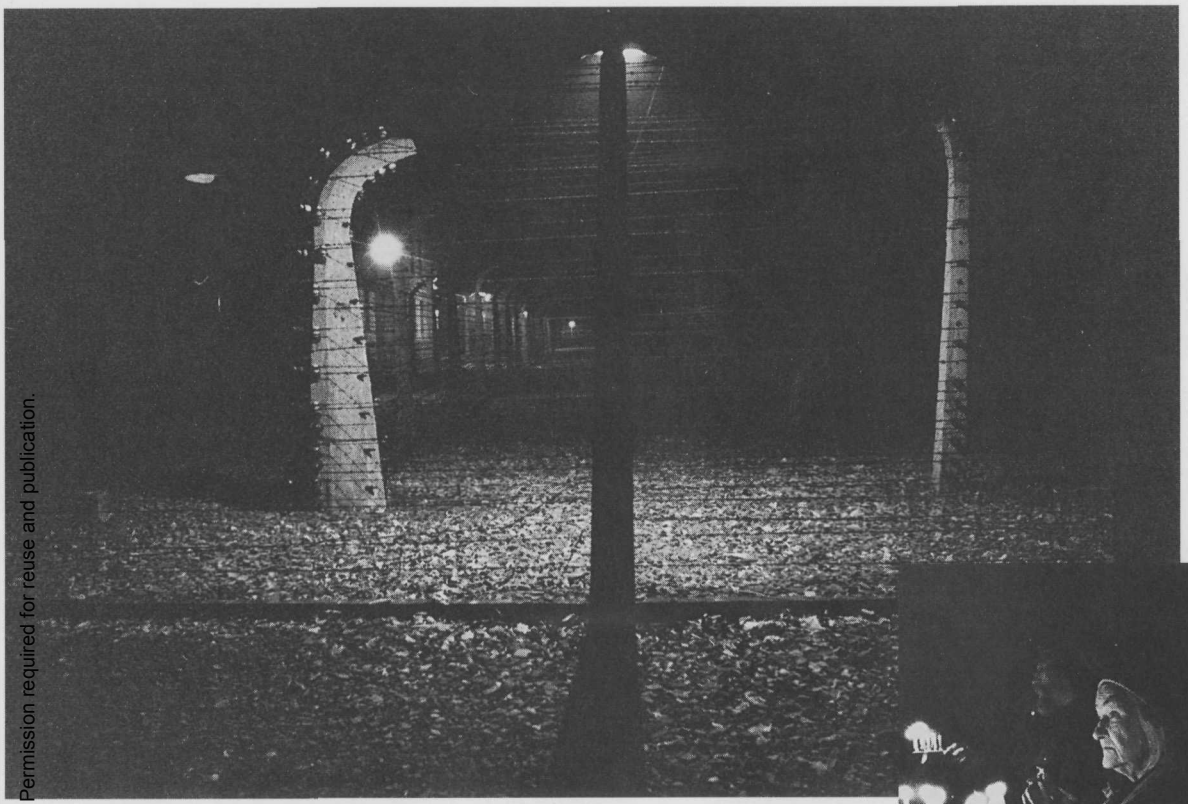
The Celtic custom is that the daughter is buried on top of the father and the son is buried on top of the mother. So two people went in and they cleared the underbrush and found the grave of her father, the shepherd.

They signalled to the people waiting to shove the box in to follow. They came in and the priest was foremost, as he told me. When they tried to justify the box of the daughter, the boards of the father's box broke apart and he was revealed. They could see that his hands were incorrupt; they were folded as on the day of his funeral. The priest said that they were just as fresh as his own hands.

So there was great tumult. The word passed back about this miracle.

Patrick O'Brien, a new priest, was confronted with this incredible dilemma: What do we do now? Everybody was looking at him. And he said in a kind of quasi-panic, "Close it down!" And so they did. They replaced the boards and they shoved the daughter's box on top of the father's box and they repaired back to the house for the funeral feast.

As he was listening to the conversation that was going around during the meal, my friend realized that these people were not really amazed that the hands were incorrupt. He heard that the shepherd had healed people and sheep. But their understanding of the incorruption finally came clear, when he heard them say, "Well, no wonder. He never took any money. He was poor like us." TW



Auschwitz to Hiroshima

Chanaka at Auschwitz

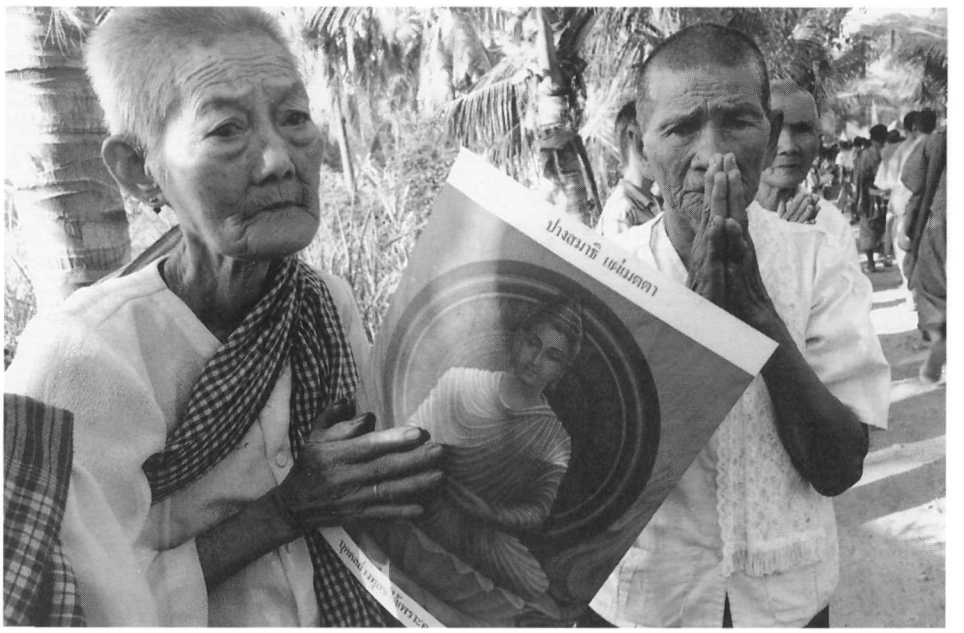
Bombed church, Mostar, Bosnia

Interfaith pilgrimage for peace and life

Lipic, Croatia

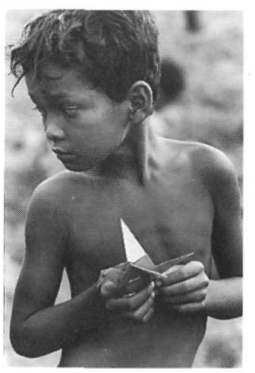
Chanting in Czechoslovakia

Photographer Skip Schiel, of Cambridge, Mass., joined the Interfaith Walk For Peace, sleeping in churches and temples, praying and always walking from December, 1994 until August, 1995.



Praying for reconciliation in Cambodia

The walk was organized by a Japanese Buddhist order, Nipponzan Myohoji, to mark the 50th anniversary of World War II.



Cambodian boy with peace crane

Lotus, Hiroshima Peace Park

Caring for your own dead

by Camille Colatosti

"We do a passable job of teaching our kids about money, politics, maybe even sex," says Lisa Carlson, executive director of the Funeral and Memorial Societies of America (FAMSA). "But we don't teach anything about death and dying."

According to Carlson, more than half of the population gets funeral information from funeral directors, which leaves the survivors vulnerable to hard-sell tactics. The funeral industry, she explains, is concerned about the funeral industry, not about families who are suffering a loss.

Carlson is a consumer advocate who has been monitoring the funeral industry for more than 15 years. The non-profit and non-sectarian FAMSA represents 147 memorial societies in the U.S. Their goal is to provide consumers with information about simpler and less expensive alternatives to traditional funerals. Often, these alternatives are more meaningful for families than those services promoted by the funeral industry, says Carlson.

Founded in the 1930s, societies provide educational information to individual members, who pay a one-time fee of about $25. Most memorial societies conduct price surveys of the funeral homes in their area and some negotiate discounts for members. All offer a wide range of funeral planning information so that people will understand the alternatives available to them.

While funerals provide closure to those suffering the death of a loved one, they also leave people in unnecessary debt. For, as Carlson explains, directors try to sell the most expensive funeral possible. Often homes will hide the inexpensive caskets or refer to them as "welfare coffins."

When Carlson's husband died, the funeral director told her quite clearly, "I'm in business to make money."

Carlson speaks of others with similar experiences. A widower whose wife recently died of cancer was disappointed to learn that he could have obtained a cheaper monument for his wife's grave. A grieving widow felt taken advantage of when she learned that the funeral director hadn't told her about free grave markers available for U.S. veterans from the Veterans Administration.

"Industry magazines encourage funeral directors to use subtle pressure to sell more expensive services than families may initially seek," Carlson says.

"We do a passable job of teaching our kids about money, politics, maybe even sex. But we don't teach anything about death."

— Lisa Carlson

Too many funeral homes

"There is a glut of funeral homes in this country," says Carlson. "Competition is fierce and the sales tactics of funeral homes can be very aggressive." And the costs keep increasing. According to the National Funeral Directors Association, the average funeral cost $4,500 in 1994, the last year for which figures are available. This figure does not include the cost of the burial vault, fees for opening and closing the grave, the cost of the grave site itself, nor the monument. Together, these add an average of $3,500, bringing the total to $8,000 for most families.

Henry Wasielewski, a retired Catholic priest who founded the Interfaith Funeral Information Committee, believes that there are "five to ten times more mortuaries than are needed. As a result, consumers overpay for services."

The American Cemetery Association notes that there are 22,500 funeral homes and 100,000 cemeteries in the U.S. Each home averages 100 to 150 funerals a year. Yet, averages can be deceptive. Larger, chain funeral service corporations might provide as many as 1,000 funerals a year, while privately owned homes host fewer.

In the past decade, an influx of chains to the funeral market has increased costs significantly. "Usually funeral prices double after a corporate acquisition," notes Wasielewski. Chains acquire funeral homes, cemeteries, florist shops and product manufacturers. In this way, the funeral home controls every aspect of the death industry. Service Corporation International, a $1.2 billion company, the largest of the funeral home chains, owns over 1,494 mortuaries, 275 cemeteries and 102 crematoriums.

In some markets, chains attain a near monopoly and set prices as they choose. According to Karen Leonard of the Redwood Memorial Society, "After SCI bought funeral homes in Dallas, prices on traditional funerals and minimum services doubled. In Houston, where SCI performs some 7,000 funerals per year, the cost of a funeral ranges from $8,000 to $14,000."

Wasielewski argues that a complete funeral and burial should cost no more

Camille Colatosti teaches English at the Detroit College of Business. Artist **Dierdre Luzwick** lives in Cambridge, Wis.

than $2,200. Many funeral homes present services that are optional as if they are essential. For instance, embalming — removing the blood and body fluid and replacing them with a preservative — is not required by law in most states, except for death by certain communicable diseases and shipment of the body by common carrier — airlines, bus lines, and trains. In fact, embalming is practically non-existent outside of the U.S. and Canada. Additionally, many cemeteries charge for a vault to encase the coffin below ground. While some manufacturers claim that vaults — made of concrete, steel or fiberglass — offer permanent protection for the body, there exists no evidence of this and vaults are not required by law.

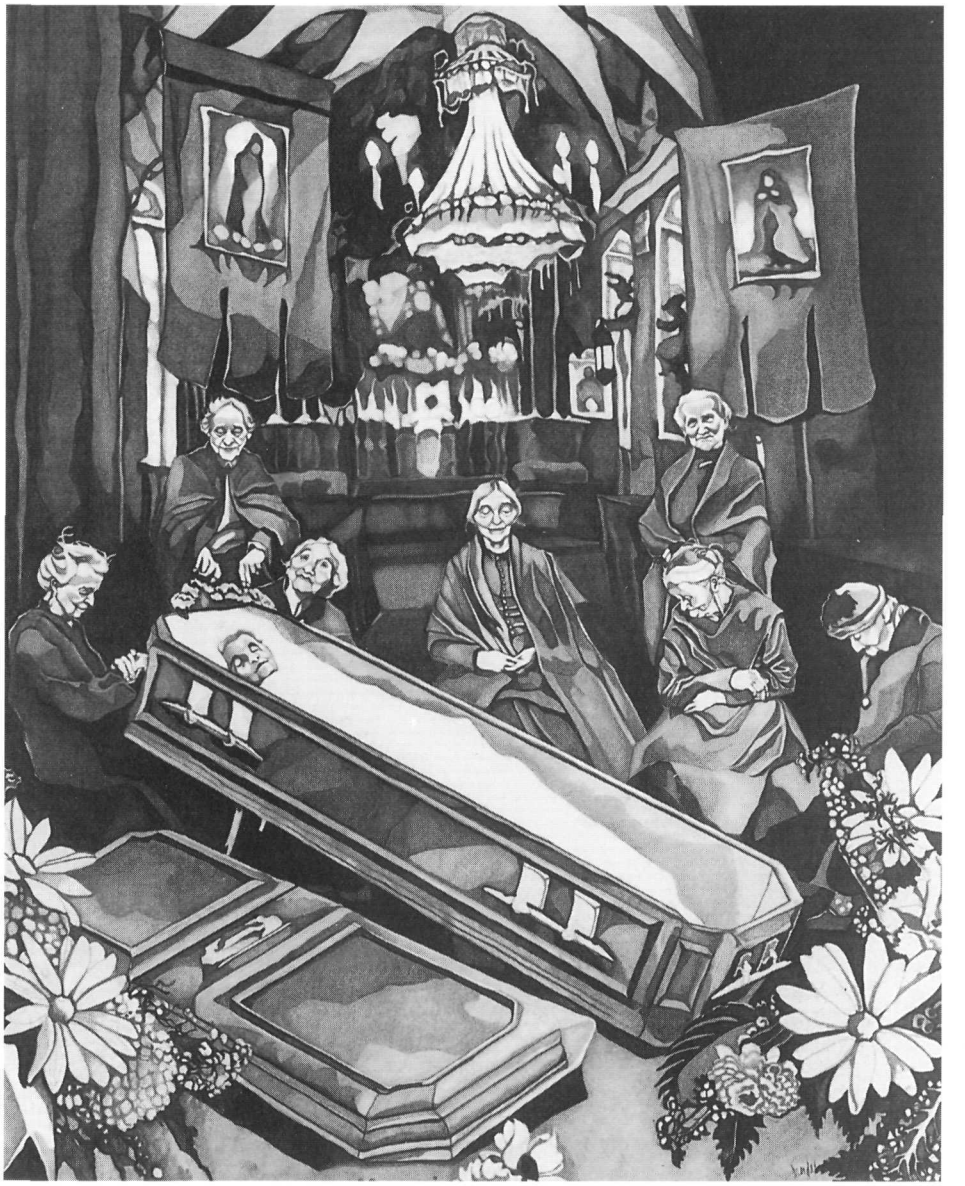
To educate consumers on ways to avoid high costs, Wasielewski helps to maintain a detailed website titled "Funerals and Ripoffs" (http://www.xroads.com/~funerals/). Other groups warning of funeral ripoffs maintain similar sites. The Funeral and Memorial Societies of America has its own web page (http://www.funerals.org/famsa), as does the Alzheimer's Association (http://dragonet.com/funeral/a.html). Originally intended exclusively for Alzheimer's families, and now accessible to all, The Funeral Help! Page offers practical suggestions for each major step in the funeral arrangement process.

Non-declinable fees

Consumer advocates point to two areas in which the industry exercises a particularly heavy hand: caskets and non-declinable fees.

Caskets are often one of the most expensive products for a funeral. They can cost up to $33,000. Often, caskets are marked 300 to 900 percent over wholesale.

Wasielewski notes that "metal caskets should cost $350 to $900." He urges anyone who is being charged more than this "to obtain a casket from a casket store or a national distributor."



Dierdre Luzwick

Wasielewski also warns against protective seal caskets. These are, he explains, "destructive and fraudulent." While the gasket used to make the seal costs about $8, it can add several hundred dollars to the cost of a casket. Worse, the seals can damage the body by trapping active anaerobic bacteria which produce enormous amounts of gas. The gas can bloat the body and actually burst the seal.

Lisa Carlson objects to the industry's non-declinable fee. "This is a fee for which the consumer gets no tangible benefit. It is a cover charge."

Ironically, the non-declinable fee resulted from a consumer victory, the Funeral Rule of 1984. Passed after 10 years of public pressure on the Federal Trade Commission, the Funeral Rule requires funeral directors to disclose prices over

the telephone, something many hesitated to do. It also requires directors to give a general price list to anyone who asks for it. It makes it illegal for funeral homes to tie fees for their services to requirements that a casket be purchased from them. It also prevents homes from charging a handling fee for a casket bought elsewhere. In addition, the Funeral Rule prohibits directors from making claims about the preservative nature of certain caskets; no casket stops the natural deterioration of the body. Funeral directors must also provide families with a statement of services purchased. In this way, directors are prevented from charging families for services they did not request.

Unfortunately, the Funeral Rule also allows directors to charge a non-declinable fee for staff services. Carlson explains, "When the FTC wanted funeral directors to put together a general price list itemizing the services that they provide, the directors argued that some services couldn't be itemized—planning the funeral, obtaining the permits and death certificate, and writing the obituary. The FTC decided to allow funeral directors to charge for these services by including a non-declinable fee for staff.

"The old practice, before the Funeral Rule was instituted, was to wrap the cost of labor into markup on caskets. Well, they still mark up caskets and now they also charge a fee."

Nationally, the non-declinable fee averages $125 per funeral. Among the industry chains, however, the fee averages $2,365.

Carlson is currently working with a coalition of consumer groups to petition the FTC to prohibit this fee. The coalition will propose charges tied to actual transactions, such as an hourly fee that clarifies consumer services.

Consumer advocates point to one other abuse of the funeral industry: pre-need plans. Pre-need plans sell consumers a funeral years before it is necessary. While consumers believe they are set for death, prices are frequently not guaranteed. The family may end up paying additional money to the funeral home.

According to the Interfaith Funeral Information Committee, "Consumers spend two to five times more when buying funerals on a pre-need basis, resulting in $5 billion worth of overcharging."

"Caring for your own dead takes away the sense of helplessness."

— Lisa Carlson

Worse, sometimes the industry simply sells plans that are not honored when death occurs. According to Christy Heady of *Consumers' Digest,* "The FTC has yet to provide any restitution for the more than $50 million lost by pre-need consumers over the last five years." Currently, $20 billion is invested in pre-need funeral and cemetery plans. The potential for abuse is enormous.

"You can do just as well if you set aside the money in your own bank account," says Lee Norrgard, senior investor analyst for the American Association of Retired Persons. "To make sure that money doesn't go through probate at your death, set up an account as payable on death to the funeral home or set up a joint account with a family member who has a right of survivorship." In this way, you control your funds.

Alternatives

Consumer advocates urge people not only to plan ahead, but to consider a wide range of alternatives. Jack Springer, executive director of the Cremation Association of North America, reminds consumers that more and more Americans are opting for cremation—over 20 percent. Caskets are not required. Boxes made from corrugated fiber or hard cardboard are often used and cost as little as $10. Ashes can be kept in an urn or scattered in a desired location.

Carlson suggests a radical alternative: organizing funerals without a director. A second edition of her now out of print *Caring for Your Own Dead* will be available this spring. In it, she describes her experience of her husband's funeral. When the funeral director tried to charge her a $350 service charge for his help, she told him to go home; she would handle the arrangements herself. She bought a simple box for cremation and transported it herself to the crematory.

"I knew I needed to stay involved," she explains. "This helped me say good-bye."

A pediatric nurse in California reports "that the parents who handle the funeral arrangements for their children have a dramatic improvement in healing from grief," adds Carlson.

While many states allow family members to handle funerals, some do impose restrictions. For example, in Connecticut, a funeral director must sign the death certificate. In Illinois and Indiana a funeral director must also obtain all the necessary permits. And in Michigan, a funeral director is required for all aspects of the arrangements. Memorial societies can supply families with the particular requirements of their state.

"Caring for your own dead takes away the sense of helplessness by having something physical to do," Carlson concluded. "And in most states, it is possible for everyone to do this." TW

For more information: The Funeral and Memorial Societies of America, PO Box 10, Hinesburg, VT 05461; 800-765-0107. The Cremation Society of North America, 401 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60611; 312-644-6610. The Interfaith Funeral Information Committee, Phoenix, AR; 602/253-6814. Consumer Caskets USA, 2335 West 38th St., Erie, PA 16505; 800/611-8778.

Seventh woman joins bishops at controversial moment in ordination debate

by Herb Gunn

The Diocese of Indianapolis elected Catherine Waynick bishop-coadjutor on January 11, making her the seventh woman elected to the episcopate in the U.S. church and the ninth woman to be elected bishop in the worldwide Anglican communion. Waynick, 48, is rector of All Saints' Episcopal Church in Pontiac, Mich. Pending the required support of her election across the Episcopal Church, she will be consecrated in June.

Waynick will be joining the ranks of the Episcopal Church's bishops barely 40 days before the denomination's 1997 General Convention, which will be struggling with divisive ordination issues — specifically, whether all dioceses will be required to accept the ordination of women and whether dioceses may continue to ordain homosexual men and women.

"I realize that I have not always been in the same place with many of my sisters on some of these issues," said Waynick. "I find myself in a real place of tension over actions like insisting that the remaining four dioceses [who do not allow women to be ordained] bring themselves up to speed *right now* over [the ordination of women]."

Cate Waynick

Waynick explained that she would prefer to "see the church pray daily for the conversion of people" who oppose women's ordination than to pass a rule and end the discussion.

Waynick said she would likely oppose a resolution in her own diocese making women's access to ordination mandatory.

"I think the most powerful witness about all kinds of issues that trouble us, like the ordination of women and the sexuality issue, is not to figure out exactly what the right answer is and try to force everybody to do the same thing. I think maybe our most powerful witness is to acknowledge that we have this tension — that some of us are going to do one thing and some of us are going to do another — and we are going to keep talking with each other and we will, *by God*, love each other.

"If anybody thinks that there's been a time when we have not had homosexual clergy in the church — they are dreaming." Waynick explained. "I think it is silly to say, 'Here is a category of people whom God simply cannot possibly call to ordination.'"

But with equal passion, Waynick opposes any move to resolve the controversy through an action of the General Convention. "I have real difficulty thinking that any individual person's conscience, or even the conscience of the majority, should automatically become the conscience of the church. Things are not that easy.

"I can't see that it would be effective to have legislation at this point mandating the ordination of homosexual persons. I think it would be counter-productive because it would have the effect of shutting down at least some of the folks in that discussion from wanting to talk anymore.

"If we refrain from making that kind of decision, we can keep the conversation going — *if* we are willing to tolerate what some of us do and what some of us will not do.

"Eventually, every diocese in this church is going to ordain women — gladly," Waynick added. "It is going to happen. I have absolutely no fear that the ordination of women is going to be a footnote in the history of the church. But I want us to do it because people have a change of heart, not because they have been beaten over the head."

***Herb Gunn** is editor of* The Record, *the newspaper of the Diocese of Michigan.*

Malcolm Boyd to preach at Pasadena conference

Malcolm Boyd, author of *Are You Running with Me, Jesus?*, will be the featured preacher during the "Beyond Inclusion" conference at All Saints' Church in Pasadena, Calif., April 11-13. Boyd is poet-in-residence at the Los Angeles Cathedral Center and chaplain of the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles' AIDS ministry. His memoir after coming out as a gay man and priest, *Take Off the Masks*, was published in 1978.

"Beyond Inclusion: Celebrating Gay and Lesbian Commitments and Ministries within the Episcopal Church," is a national conference being held to explore the full participation of gay and lesbian church members. Keynote speaker will be Andrew Sullivan of *The New Republic*. Among the theologians, ethicists and other church leaders who will be exploring the history, theology and practice of church inclusion are Marilyn McCord Adams, Michael Battle, and William Countryman.

Call Louis Fleming at 818-583-2752 for more information.

Vital Signs

'Humma, humma, humma': remembering Gloria Brown

by Betty A. Coats

Longtime economic justice activist and former Episcopal Church Publishing Company board member, Gloria Ann Humphrey Brown, died this past Christmas after a long illness. She will be sorely missed by the many folks around the Episcopal Church with whom she made common cause, both for her valuable insight and for her steadfast good humor. We asked one of Brown's close friends and colleagues, Betty Coats, to prepare this tribute.

Gloria Brown

Sister Gloria *in excelsis Deo*. You lived our Episcopal liturgy: respect the peace and dignity of every human being; pray for the sick, the friendless and the needy; let not the hope of the poor be taken away. Like the followers of the North Star to freedom, this liturgy was your guiding light. You had passion and compassion for each child of God. The Episcopal Church in the U.S. owes you a debt of thanks. You were our queen of economic justice.

Over the years you travelled the highways and tributaries of our great land, cajoling, nudging, advocating for parishes and dioceses to become more socially responsible with the great resources under their stewardship.

You saw "The Michigan Plan" for economic justice passed by the 1988 General Convention in Detroit as a challenge for us as a church to be what the Lord was calling us to be. How fitting that you, a Detroiter by birth, should have been the one appointed to help see that the plan was implemented.

You had been "in training" for this role for at least two decades. Armed with a master's of social work degree from Detroit's Wayne State University, you worked for the city of San Francisco and in Washington, D.C. at the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. You then served on the faculties of three Califronia universities. In honor of your academic contributions, the University of Southern California at Los Angeles awarded you an honorary doctorate in psychology.

In 1987 you were hired as staff officer for the Coalition for Human Need at the Episcopal Church Center in New York. A year later you began your tenure as staff liaison to the church's Economic Justice Implementation Committee and the pioneering work which eventually led to a consultation on economic justice with the Archbishop of Canterbury in London.

Other involvements included your participation as a founding member of ABIL, the church's organization of Asian, Black, Indigenous Indian and Latina women, and serving as a delegate to the World Council of Churches meeting in Seoul, Korea.

In 1992, in response to the Los Angeles uprising, the national church "loaned" you to the Diocese of Los Angeles — your home since marrying Willard Burdette Brown in 1968. There you focused your full-time energies on making one of your dreams a reality by helping to found the Episcopal Church's first diocesan credit union [*TW* 3/96]. This past fall its assets totaled more than $2 million. Your commitment to this project remained strong even as your health began to fail.

We in the congregation at your memorial service last December broke into laughter as we were reminded of one of your classic invocations, "Humma, humma, humma." We remembered your laughter, your joy of singing in the pick-up choir at meetings of the Union of Black Episcopalians, your invitation to friends to "caravan" with you at church gatherings, meaning to stop and chat with most any and everybody as you all swayed together through a room.

Each of us who was blessed to know you will treasure our own special memories. You were a beautiful Christian Sister Sojourner too briefly by our side.

Gloria Brown's family has requested that contributions in her honor be made to the recently established Gloria Brown Scholarship Fund at the Episcopal Community Federal Credit Union, 840 Echo Park Avenue, Los Angeles, Calif. 90026.

C of E endorses Jubilee 2000

The Church of England Synod has unanimously endorsed the Jubilee 2000 campaign to persuade the world's banks and governments to remit the unpayable debts of 40 of the globes's poorest countries. The Synod's action, taken in recognition of the millenium, came last November. It followed upon the heels of an appeal from George Carey, the Archbishop of Canterbury, that Western nations lift the burden of Mozambique's debt. Mozambique, after Rwanda, is the poorest country in the world. Carey noted, however, that Mozambique's debt crisis cannot wait for the millenium. "Mozambique's problem is now," the primate said.

— Anglican Communion News Service

Boundary wars

by Debra Trakel

***Boundary Wars: Intimacy and Distance in Healing Relationships,* edited by Katherine Hancock Ragsdale, Pilgrim Press, 1996.**

Perhaps it is just that I am from the Heartland, but I find the title *Boundary Wars: Intimacy and Distance in Healing Relationships*, to be a bit of an over-statement. Maybe there have been a few border skirmishes of disagreement between and among feminists, neo-feminists and non-feminists about boundary issues in pastoral and therapeutic relationships. Or perhaps there have been some inquiring salvos fired from one position or another to get discourse started. But "war"? Conceivably it is a well-hidden guerilla war, but I don't see it. I think maybe it is an East Coast phenomenon (those of us from the Midwest are always convinced there are such things as "East Coast phenomena.")

Taking in the intriguing title I opened the book and found it to be equally provocative and alternately irritating, tantalizing, insightful and outrageous. In short, this is a book that is guaranteed to chafe everyone who reads it somewhere. It's a must -read for all of us in the healing professions, ecclesiastical or secular.

Katherine Ragsdale has edited a book that occasionally calls into question what most healing professionals of whatever stripe would call unquestionable. Several of the authors, notably Carter Heyward, Beverly Harrison, Miriam Greenspan and Ragsdale herself, raise questions (e.g., Should there be sexual intimacy between clients/parishioners and the helping professional?) that I believe have been asked before and definitively answered.

Looking at the law in my own home state of Wisconsin and perusing the codes of ethics of all the organizations that represent various kinds of helping professionals, I find no ambiguity. And, frankly, I think that some of the authors in *Boundary Wars* have gone so far to the left that they have met the right. To suggest, as Harrison and Heyward do, that those who are vulnerable are victimized by protection, sounds suspiciously similar to the old Republican saw that the poor are held in poverty by welfare.

But as I read the book, paying special attention to those authors whose positions push my own, who question that which is generally accepted among professionals, and with whom I generally disagree, I am reminded that the Pope was adamant in his refusal to believe Galileo's suggestion that the sun did not orbit the earth. And the Pope was wrong.

Boundary Wars allows me to read the arguments of the "other side" in the privacy of my own room so that I can, at least, hear them.

I spend a fair amount of my time these days working with clergy perpetrators, survivors and the parishes that are devastated by clergy abuse. I have heard all of the self-serving arguments. To a recent divorcee one perpetrator said: "What you really need to heal is sexual intimacy — with me." To a woman in trouble in her marriage: "Let yourself experience the joy of real love — with me." To a single woman concerned that maybe sexual intimacy with her priest was wrong, "Yes, there are rules against this but this is pure love, a gift from God, so it's ok for us."

I heard strong echoes of these rationalizations from some of the authors in *Boundary Wars*; Heyward and Harrison certainly, but even Fredricka Thompsett gives voice to the whine I hear from so many priests: "If I can't be free to be as intimate as I wish to be (read in romantic or sexual for 'intimate'), then there can be no intimacy in ministry." NOT!

I'll grant the point that it is sure possible for any helping professional who has not done their own work to hide behind "boundaries" and "rules" so they don't have to deal with their own intimacy issues. I don't think that Marie Fortune, Karen Lebacqz and Ronald Barton, among others, are suggesting that helping professionals become disembodied automatons ruled solely by professional codes of ethics and/or insurance companies.

But the best clergy and therapists I know are able to be authentic, genuine and even intimate with their clients and still understand that there are always some pre-defined boundaries. As 12-steppers say, "It's not either/or, it's both/and."

Boundary Wars is a well-edited attempt to, with pun intended, walk the boundaries and even push out the ends a bit on issues of intimacy and distance within helping relationships. I found myself internally cheering and jeering as I read the book. I rarely find myself quite so stimulated by non-fiction. I'd highly recommend it to anyone who would either like to raise their blood pressure or their consciousness about critical issues that face helping professionals.

Debra Trakel is a priest and licensed psychotherapist. She serves as priest-in-charge at Holy Cross Episcopal Church in Wisconsin Dells, Wis., and as the Bishop's Assistant for Pastoral Care for the Diocese of Milwaukee.

LI priest arrested on drug charges

As the investigation of charges in *Penthouse* magazine that priests in the Diocese of Long Island engaged in homosexual rituals in a Brooklyn church continues, the diocese is being forced to face up to another clergy scandal — this time centering on a priest accused of dealing drugs.

Chester LaRue, rector of St. John's Episcopal Church in the Bay Ridge section of Brooklyn, was arrested along with three other church employees for the criminal sale and possession of cocaine on January 17. The arrest came three weeks after LaRue was hailed as a hero for fighting off two bandits at the church. Police now say that the fight apparently resulted because LaRue was protecting his supply of drugs. — *ENS*

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Calling death a 'sister'

by Nancy Hastings Sehested

***The Spiritual Care of Dying and Bereaved People*, by Penelope Wilcock, Morehouse Publishing, 1997.**

St. Francis welcomed death, calling this inescapable visitor a "sister." Cardinal Joseph Bernardin echoed this same sentiment in his dying by greeting death as friend. Even for those of us who are among the faithful believers in life everlasting, death often barges into our lives more as intruder than welcome guest. Emily Dickinson poetically described our sense of death as interruption: "Because I could not stop for Death, He kindly stopped for me." Becoming more hospitable to death is difficult in a society that usually quarantines this visitor to hidden away hospital rooms. Penelope Wilcock invites us to accompany Sister Death as she walks beside dying and bereaved people. Wilcock is certain that this journey will bring us closer to life, to a sense of awe and wonder in the deep mysteries of God. She invites us to take off our protective shoes and go with the dying onto holy ground.

Drawing from years of experience as a hospice chaplain in England, Wilcock offers a detailed and thorough book for anyone who by profession, choice or circumstance finds themselves in a position to be a spiritual care-giver to a bereaved or dying person. She begins this guide by speaking directly to us about our resistance to making this journey with the dying. To offer spiritual care to another requires reflection on our own spirits. Confronting our helplessness, Wilcock calls us to "no longer act to save them," to keep clear that this dying is "theirs, not ours," and to lay down our "achieving" to make way for "accepting." For a Christian, she says, seeing the dying person in a state of vulnerability opens the way to seeing the suffering God who loves us.

A caring team comprised of medical personnel, social workers, chaplains, therapists and volunteers all working in concert to create an environment of care, healing and comfort is the ideal in Wilcock's experience. She encourages team members to see themselves as clearing "the road along which God may come." This is possible through an integrated awareness of the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of each individual patient.

In creating a hospitable space, Wilcock leaves nothing to chance or even to common sense. She boldly charges through every aspect of sight, sound, smell, and feel to the environment: the cleanliless and the beauty of the room is addressed, the color and texture of the caregivers' clothes, the body language and smells for carer and patient alike. She knows well that the spiritual is mediated through the physical and hopes that a "gentle, healing and accepting environment" will be created.

As a pastor who has little access to a working team of caregivers, I found the minute detailing of ways to attend to the room environment the least beneficial. However, I found Wilcock's examination of the interplay of communication through word, silence and touch to be most helpful. Wilcock offers ancedotes, practical suggestions and theological reflection on the many paths of conversing with people who are dying and grieving. She invites us to practice the art of listening, to dance between the human and the divine, developing our skills of sensitivity to what is needed in a particular moment. She encourages the use of a variety of forms of prayer and ritual, including litanies, candles, special symbols of meaning and music. Sharpening our "spiritual linguistics" skills is crucial to understanding the pastoral care needs of another. Intuition and flexibility are required to be a loving presence and companion of spirit life.

Wilcock has respect for all paths to God. She looks for ways to connect to our common humanity, especially as she describes the aspects of grief and the loss of self identity that often accompanies dying. She upholds the uniqueness of each person as the guide for the specific ways we find to offer the healing presence of spiritual care.

"Spirituality is all about who one is, and that is found only in reationship and with other people, the ones who make up our world, and with that foundational reality that belivers call God." She emphasizes careful discernment to know when to discuss sensitive concerns like reconciling and forgiving others, handling financial matters, and talking about ongoing medical needs.

This book will probably appeal most to those who are hospice chaplains, especially those working with a team. Yet even those of us who are not part of a structured team can benefit from the stronger emphasis on keeping the needs of the dying and the bereaved person uppermost in our actions. Pastors, counselors, friends and family members will find much to encourage them. TW

review

Nancy Hastings Sehested is a Baptist pastor, teacher, and retreat leader in Clyde, N.C.

The church can't even take charge of the funeral liturgy. The funeral director has to tell you when the ritual is over because you don't know!

Jeff Dietrich

Keeping the experts at arm's length

by Marianne Arbogast

A quiet ritual takes place when someone dies in the hospice room at the Ammon Hennacy Catholic Worker House in Los Angeles. Community members, summoned by the one who has been keeping vigil with a dying guest, gather to read Scripture and offer prayers. When the liturgy is completed, they wrap the body in a sheet and carry it out of the hospice room. It is important to them to take part directly in this ancient work of mercy, rather than surrender to the undertaker all contact with the dead.

"It's a sense of empowerment," explains long-time community member Jeff Dietrich. "Our desire is to keep experts and professionals — morticians, doctors and police — at arm's length as much as possible. We need to be able to face this essential experience of life which is death."

For the past four years, Dietrich's community has offered hospice care to AIDS patients and others who come there to die. Some have been soup kitchen patrons; others have come from the AIDS clinic where Kieran Prather — a Worker community member who died of AIDS two years ago — received treatment, and where Catherine Morris, Dietrich's wife, continues an ongoing ministry. A current guest is a long-time friend of the community dying of Lou Gehrig's disease.

Community members give baths and change diapers, keep night vigil and pray with their dying friends. They have created their own wake and funeral rituals, and have buried the cremated ashes of Prather and several others in the gardens surrounding the house and nearby soup kitchen.

Some of the homeless people in their neighborhood have taken to calling their home a "death house," Dietrich reports. "When even the down-and-out begin to reject your dinner invitations, you have to wonder," he wrote in *The Catholic Agitator*, the Worker newspaper he edits. "I guess it doesn't help that we live in an old, three-story Victorian that could easily pass for the Addams Family mansion."

But he quotes Ivan Illich's assertion that because our homes have become inhospitable to death, they are inhospitable to life as well.

"The things that used to be done by communities and households are now done *for* us, and we feel like we don't have the resources to deal with these experiences ourselves," Dietrich says. "We're alienated from our own lives — and then we need to seek out professional counseling to help us integrate experiences that should have been mediated by faith and community."

Dietrich speaks from experience. When his brother committed suicide in 1973, he felt the collusion of inner and outer forces preventing him from facing his grief.

"I just wanted him in the ground, thinking that his burial somehow would end the pain," Dietrich says. "Of course, the funeral industry was most obliging in helping me avoid any contact with the experience of my brother's death. I felt like a sleepwalker, unconsciously going through the motions. It took many years before I could wake up."

In contrast, when a child who had lived with the Worker community died of cancer, Dietrich saw people respond to death in a way that was direct and pro-

Witnesses, the quick and the dead

Marianne Arbogast is assistant editor of *The Witness*.

found. The body was brought back to their home, which was soon filled with Latina women from the neighborhood.

"They prayed their rosaries, chanted their litanies, and sang songs," Dietrich says. "They were familiar with death and unafraid. By their very presence, these women created a sense of intimacy and reverence."

A nephew's death confirmed his belief in the value of hands-on participation in funeral and burial rites. At Dietrich's urging, permission was obtained to bury his nephew at a family cabin in the mountains of Oregon. His other nephews stayed up through the night to dig their brother's grave, sharing tears, stories and a bottle of Jack Daniels. The body was brought home, and neighbors and friends were invited to vigil with the family and help with the burial.

"We had a big party and a big bonfire around the grave," Dietrich says. "People stayed up all night talking about John and warming themselves around the fire and having a few drinks, and it was an incredibly cathartic experience."

The church has abdicated its responsibility to help people face death, Dietrich believes.

"The church can't even take charge of the funeral liturgy," he says. "The mortician is in charge, arranging people around the casket, telling you how to carry it. Nobody lowers the coffin into the ground. The funeral director has to tell you when the ritual is over because you don't know! You *should* know when that coffin goes into the ground that the liturgy is over. That should be the most profound kind of ending experience you can have."

At Hennacy House, community members maintain personal, direct involvement with those in their care — before, during and after death.

"Some people are more attuned to washing people and changing diapers, caring for people in that intimate way, while some of us pray it doesn't happen on our watch," Dietrich admits. "But I think everyone is open to being challenged in that area."

Throughout the dying process, community members meet regularly to pray in the hospice room. Sometimes, family members of the dying person have joined them.

"There have been profound reconciliations," Dietrich says. "Families that have been separated for years over someone being gay have come together. We have had families come and live with us, and be there around the deathbed."

In every death you encounter, you're preparing yourself for your own death. When we see ourselves in the context of a life that has a beginning and an end, we begin to reflect on why we're here.

The core of their deathbed liturgy is a personalized version of the rosary, which recalls significant events of the person's life in place of the traditional joyful, sorrowful and glorious mysteries.

"When Kieran died, we recalled his time as a Benedictine novice; we recalled his struggle for integrity to be both gay and Catholic; we remembered his commitment to justice in El Salvador and how he first met the Catholic Worker while in jail for a civil disobedience protest," Dietrich says.

He sees the liturgy as a way to confess faith and combat fear.

"When you have had a relationship with a person, you want to be with them at the point of death and after death — there's a kind of transition period. You develop rituals so that you don't feel frightened and can feel somewhat comfortable with this experience of being with the dead."

Although an undertaker prepares the body for burial, it is returned to Hennacy House for the wake, which usually begins with evening Mass and dinner. The community keeps vigil through the night, then holds a funeral in the morning. Whenever possible, they transport the body to the church themselves.

Hospice work has deepened community, Dietrich says.

"Sometimes it is grueling, and you're exhausted physically and emotionally. It forces you to be more intimate with one another, to appreciate each other more, and to be more gentle with each other. You have to constantly remind one another: This is the force of death, and it's going to take its toll.

"But it brings you into a deeper contact with life. In every death you encounter, you're preparing yourself for your own death. When we see ourselves in the context of a life that has a beginning and an end, we begin to reflect on why we're here."

For Dietrich, who joined the Catholic Worker as a Vietnam draft resister 26 years ago, ministry to the dying and the dead is a natural outgrowth of a vocation to resistance.

"We see our work of opposing nuclear weapons and caring for the poor and caring for the dying as all of a piece," he explains. "We are very influenced by William Stringfellow, who believes that death has its place, but we become so fearful of death that it becomes a principality and a power itself. If we can become more intimate with that experience and less fearful, we can become more profound signs of life." TW

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Hamlet: What man dost thou dig it for?
Grave-digger: For no man, sir.
Hamlet: What woman then?
Grave-digger: For non neither.
Hamlet: Who is to be buried in't?
Grave-digger: One that was a woman, sir;
but rest her soul, she's dead.

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