

Peace and love

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—Jim Wallis

The March 16 Christian Peace Witness

BY DOUGLAS MORGAN

Unfazed by a “wintry mix” of Washington weather on March 16, 3,000 Christians dedicated to peace packed the National Cathedral for worship, and then proceeded to a 3.5 mile night-time march to Lafayette Park in front of the White House. I was able to verify the presence of fifteen Adventists in attendance; most likely more were present. Charles Sandefur, president of the Adventist Development and Relief Agency, took part in the soul-stirring service. He joined with Baptist, Catholic, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Pentecostal, Quaker, Reformed, and United Church of Christ clergy in “A Prayer for Peace With Iraq.”

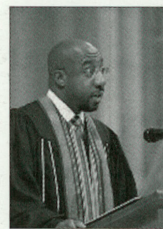
The Hollywood Vigil



Meanwhile, in balmy southern California, a group of thirty-five, including a contingent

from Adventist Women for Peace based at La Sierra University, braved busy freeways to gather for a vigil at Hollywood Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The Worship



The worship was wonderful all the way around—liturgy, songs, prayers, testimonies. The highlight, for me, though, was the preaching. Rafael Warnock, pastor of the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, issued a sober warning from the national pulpit: While we are caught up trying to figure out how not to lose the war, he said, the “real danger is that America will lose its soul.”

To the U.S. president, Rev. Warnock said: “Mr. Bush, my Christian brother, we do need a surge in troops. We need a surge in the nonviolent army of the Lord. We need a surge in conscience and a surge in activism and a surge in truth-telling.”

In his “call to action,” Jim Wallis of *Sojourners* nailed the point that the Iraq war “from a Christian point of view, is

morally wrong—and was from the very start. It cannot be justified with either the teaching of Jesus Christ or the criteria of St. Augustine’s just war. It simply doesn’t pass either test, and did not from its beginning.”

Then, Wallis got me jumping with words that rang deeply Adventist in my ears:

So as people of faith, let us say tonight to our brothers and sisters around the world, and as clearly as we can—America is not the hope of the earth and the light of the world, Jesus Christ is. And it is his way that we follow, and not the flawed path of our nation’s leaders who prosecute this war.

Why did I have to go to the National Cathedral, of all places, to hear that message?

The March



“Siyahamb’ Ekukhanyen’ Kwenkhos”—the Zulu hymn used for the recession sent us

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out singing into the night, "marching in the light of God." Wet snow was falling as we left the cathedral, for me a welcome change from the cold rain that had prevailed throughout the day, even though the latter, in the words of one of the event organizers, "reminds us of our baptismal vows." Soon the snow stopped, and it was simply cold.

Nonetheless, a celebratory spirit prevailed. A certain exhilaration comes with the sense that one is marching with the "nonviolent army of the Lord." I enjoyed stepping out of the line occasionally to marvel at how far the procession stretched in both directions. I was impressed with a very high proportion of young people who had devoted a Friday night to this kind of celebration.

After assembling at Lafayette Park, the marchers moved out to encircle the White House with light and song.

The Civil Disobedience



"You got arrested?"
Yes, I was one of the 222 CPWI participants arrested for "failure to obey a lawful order" to dis-

perse from a "no stopping zone" on the sidewalk in front of the White House.

In brief, the purpose for taking this step beyond the march in general, for which a legal permit had been obtained, was to sound an alarm. The hope is that the extraordinary spectacle of hundreds of peaceful, praying Christians being arrested will help draw attention to the urgency and magnitude of the situation we face.

Something has to be said or done to shake up any sense of normalcy or indifference regarding the nation's policies of messianic militarism that continue, day by day, to take precious

lives unnecessarily and up the cycle of violence, all the while enabled and cheered by millions who claim to be followers of Jesus. Peaceful refusal to obey a regulation for the normal flow of pedestrian traffic, while making no resistance to the officers arresting us to enforce the law, is an attempt to put our witness in bold-face type, and throw in a couple of exclamation points, so that attention might be gained and consciences stirred that otherwise would not have been.

What was it like? Susan Mark Landis, peace advocate of the Mennonite Church U.S.A. Executive Leadership, has described what I also experienced so succinctly and precisely that I will borrow her words: "Yes, I was handcuffed; no I didn't ride in a paddy wagon; yes I was thumb-printed; no, I didn't see the inside of a jail cell. I have no police record—our charge is legally similar to a parking ticket" ("Let Us Pray," *PeaceSigns*, Mar. 20, 2007).

Those arrested were placed on a bus and driven to a police station, where we remained until the paperwork was processed and we were released. I enjoyed being on the same bus as leaders such as Jim Wallis and Bob Edgar of the National Council of Churches, and probably some others I didn't recognize. I spotted Taylor Branch, the noted historian of the civil rights movement, at the cathedral and learned that he was among those arrested, as was the Rev. Marion Bascom of Baltimore, an eighty-two-year-old veteran of that struggle.

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World Church: Church Leaders "Healing Relationships" at the Heart of Retention, Reclamation

BY TAASHI ROWE/ANN

ACCEPTANCE IS AT THE heart of retaining and reclaiming members in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, church leaders agreed when they voted on a document called "Conserving Membership Gains—An Appeal." The document was born out of earlier reports at the church's Council on Evangelism and Witness (CEW) that stated that 28 percent of those who leave the Adventist church do not disagree with the church's teachings but felt an "absence of belonging and [a] lack of meaningful engagement in the local congregation and its mission."

The document, which will be circulated throughout the world church, brought attention to the fact that out of the 5 million people baptized into the church between 2000 and 2005, 1.4 million left.

In order to stop the flow of members out of the church, the document states that, "members and leaders everywhere are asked to give renewed emphasis to the matter of membership reclamation and retention. This involves understanding the reasons for membership loss in each local church and focusing on how to develop the capacity of the church to attract, reclaim, retain, and engage its members in the mission of the church."

The document also outlined some basic actions that—along with annual planning and budgeting for evangelism—church boards should implement. They include: assessing membership retention; providing repeated instructions of basic Bible teachings



Pastor Jan Paulsen, president of the Adventist world church, said reconnecting with those who have left the church is a "sacred ministry."

for all newly-baptized members; and ensuring that new members are integrated into the life of the church. This is accomplished as they form friendships, fellowship in small groups, and actively participate in witnessing. The document also urged churches to train members how to reconnect with those who have discontinued church fellowship.

One area in the document caught the attention of several attendees: "Careful attention is needed to facilitate the healing of relationships and the realization, between persons, of the reconciliation that flows from the forgiveness and acceptance received through Jesus Christ."

Pastor Jan Paulsen, president of the Adventist world church, said it is crucial that church members reconnect with friends and family that have left the church. "It's not that they need to be taught our doctrines—because they already know. They need to be brought back into a safe walk with Jesus. This is a very sacred part of ministry and we must make sure this document finds its way through all

parts of our church. The church has to be a healing community."

"We cannot ignore those who have left the church. We have to reach out to those who are hurting and bring them back into the ministry of the church," agreed Laurie Evans, president of the church's South Pacific region. "Forgiveness is important and we must be humble enough to recognize that we haven't always done things the right way."

The appeal also proposed tying in plans to stem retention while making plans for evangelism.

"I wish the answer was as simple as voting on this document," said Pastor Lowell Cooper, a vice president for the Adventist world church and CEW chair. "It's going to take more than one meeting of church leaders about this to improve retention. We invite you to consider making this part of deliberate planning for evangelism. It makes sense that, since we grow through evangelism efforts, we can through evangelism raise awareness and sensitivity to the issue of retention."

Peter Prime, an associate secretary for evangelism and church planting for the church's Ministerial Association, noted that the answer to strong retention and reclamation was included in the document. He pointed to the Bible text 1 Peter 4:8 to 10 where the apostle Peter urges "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another, without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in various forms."

"We have to love one another—not superficially, not casually," Prime said. "The key to building relationships is acceptance. The problem is

us. How far are we willing to fulfill the goal of oneness and unity?"

"The greatest discovery is that somebody loves you," said Pastor Paulsen, president of the Adventist world church. "Care and love for people in a genuine way—that is going to assist us in ministry more than anything else."

Dick Osborn, president of the church's Pacific Union College in California, commented on what he referred to as "the real problem" of young adults leaving the church primarily because following college they have no real church home.

"We do lots for children and those in high school but what about young adults?" he asked. Osborn pointed to a program called "Beyond Walla Walla" where new graduates [from Walla Walla College] are integrated into local congregations...the most important thing to them is not knowing doctrines but making new friends in the church."

While it may be difficult to reach out and chat with people you are not familiar with, Dr. Allan Handysides, director of the world church's Health Ministries Department, said reaching out is an outgrowth of a relationship with Christ.

"The power—the gasoline—that drives the engine of the church is the relationship with Christ," he said. "How can you make people love Jesus? By example, by a revival in the hearts and minds of every individual and leader." ■

Note: The text of "Conserving Membership Gains—An Appeal" can be found at www.adventist.org/beliefs/other_documents/conserving-gains.html.

Source: Adventist News Network