

LMPC Newsletter

Lombard Mennonite Peace Center

Spring, 2004

Vol. XXII, No. 1

Mediation Skills Training Institute Offers Hope

In the last four years, LMPC has presented its *Mediation Skills Training Institute for Church Leaders* forty-eight times. A total of 1,430 pastors, judicatory officials, and other church leaders have attended the institute over those four years.

The five-day training event, led by Richard Blackburn, is being presented another ten times during 2004. That means that, by the end of 2004, the LMPC Executive Director will have devoted fifty-eight weeks, more than a full year, to leading this event over the course of five years.

While the above numbers are in some ways astounding, the testimonies shared by those who have attended the *Mediation Skills Training Institute* are both gratifying and humbling. Often pastors who attend the institute are currently in the midst of a challenging conflict situation in their church.

Such pastors typically testify to the healing impact of the training event. Having experienced the pain of being in the overfocused position during a time of intense anxiety, finger-pointing, and blaming in the church, such pastors have said that the Christ-centered, transformational model of mediation being presented gives them new hope.

A Conference Minister from the United Church of Christ summarized the point when writing: "I saw in your carefully developed strategies the possibility of contributing to the church I have always dreamed of... a church that models for the world how the way of

Jesus Christ can transform destructive conflict into reconciliation."

That testimony is typical of those heard from judicatory leaders who attend the institute. A Lutheran Bishop noted that it is "the best and most thorough model for mediation with individuals and congregations that I have experienced in more than three decades of ordained ministry."

A Presbytery Executive wrote: "[It] provided a variety of opportunities to engage in self-reflection and learn new skills that I can use to assist congregations in seeking solutions to their conflict." An Episcopal Bishop succinctly said it's: "A must for leaders in the church, lay and ordained!"

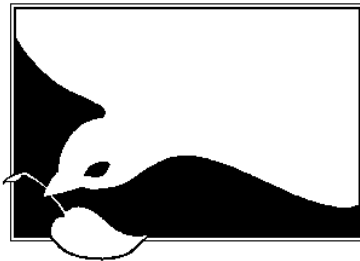
Many judicatory offices of various denominations have seen the value of hosting the *Mediation Skills Training Institute*, as a way of equipping a large group of pastors and lay leaders to provide

mediation and conflict transformation skills training services to churches in their region.

One such example is Shalom Zone Ministries of the Texas Annual Conference, United Methodist Church. They contracted with LMPC to present the *Mediation Skills Training Institute* in February, 2003. Working with two neighboring conferences, they invited us back in December, 2003, to train all of their District Superintendents. We've now been invited to return there to train another group of pastors and lay leaders in October, 2004. Thus, the Texas

Conference and Shalom Zone Ministries is to be applauded for their effort to infuse the conflict transformation vision throughout the churches of their region.

They can serve as a model for other judicatory offices to do the same. Judicatory leaders can contact LMPC, if interested in hosting an institute to train pastors and others to become agents of healing and hope in Christ's sacred ministry of reconciliation.



2004 Training Events

Mediation Skills Training Institute:

- May 17-21 - Prairie Village, KS
- Aug. 2-6 - Orland Park, IL
- Sept. 20-24 - Washington, DC area
- Nov. 15-19 - Winston-Salem, NC

Here I Stand:

- April 19-21 - Dallas, TX
- June 8-10 - Cleveland Heights, OH
- Aug. 17-19 - Hinsdale, IL
- Oct. 19-21 - Denver, CO

Healthy Congregations:

- March 26-27 - Cuyahoga Falls, OH
- April 23-24 - Souderton, PA
- Oct. 15-16 - San Francisco, CA

Facilitating Healthy Pastor-Congregation Relations:

- May 14-15 - Portland, OR
- Nov. 12-13 - Hinsdale, IL

God's Own Peace:

- March 30 - Denver, CO
- April 22 - Wheaton, IL
- May 19 - Bethesda, MD
- Nov. 3 - Bow, NH

Leadership & Anxiety in the Church:

- May 26 - Hicksville, NY
- Oct. 13 - Orland Park, IL

For registration brochures contact
LMPC at 630-627-0507.

LMPC Seeks to Hire Additional Program Staff

Due to the growing demand for our services, LMPC is seeking to hire an additional Assistant Director. The new staff person will assist in all aspects of the LMPC ministry, focusing particularly on providing educational programs and mediation services for churches and other organizations. Interested candidates can contact Richard Blackburn, LMPC Director, at 630-627-0507 to request a job description and application materials.

Commentary

Realizing God

by Bob Williamson

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory.

— John 1:14

When a nation goes to war, it's harder for its citizens to stand against violence. Those committed to non-violence are challenged to get in touch again with why they take that stance.

There can be many rationales for non-violence. In his book *Nevertheless*, John Howard Yoder identified at least twenty-four "varieties of religious pacifism."

I think the variety that best describes my thinking is what Yoder calls "the pacifism of proclamation."

Yoder thinks that the Protestant reformers of the 16th century left unfinished business. The Protestant Reformation placed the proclamation of the Word at the very center of the church's life and ministry. But, Yoder suggests, "it never succeeded in thinking of Christian behavior as proclamatory."

As a young pastor, I struggled long and hard with a common question: Where is God? Where can we point to God in the face of what the world too often offers – death and suffering through disease, accident, and war?

I found a satisfying conclusion to my questioning in the story of Maximillian Kolbe. Kolbe was a Polish priest who volunteered to take the place of a fellow prisoner in an Auschwitz starvation bunker.

I've imagined myself in Kolbe's place. I've imagined him asking the same question there: "Where is God?"

And I have imagined the thought coming to him that, in that moment, he

had a choice. He could keep quiet, stay in line, and march back to his barracks wondering all the more desperately: "Where is God?"

Or he could step forward and volunteer to take another's place.

If he came forward, a goodness would assert itself more real than the evil all around.

If Kolbe stepped forward, in that moment God would be present. God would be present for all who watched. And God, Kolbe must have known, would be present in a new way for him.

But he would die.

That was the choice. Kolbe could remain in the ordinary and be left with only questions. Or he could do the extraordinary. He could step forward, die, and "realize God."

Kolbe chose God.

The story of Kolbe isn't obviously about pacifism or nonviolence. But it is a story about proclamation.

The Gospel of John declares that "the Word became flesh." The Word became a living person in Jesus, not just a theory, an idea, a concept.

Reformation theology includes the notion that "the Word makes present what it proclaims." When the Word is preached, God isn't just talked about. God becomes present and active through the sharing of that Word.

Yoder's idea of "the pacifism of proclamation" points us to the power of a life, of an act, of a choice made in life's worst circumstance, to make God suddenly present – to realize God.

One of the tragedies of wartime is that so many who say they oppose war, even hate it, end up participating in it.

The pacifism of proclamation takes a stand against war, refuses to take part in it or support it, for a simple reason.

The reason is clear to me in the story of Lazar. A young soldier in the Serb-dominated Yugoslavian army, Lazar

served with a tank crew during the 1991 war in Croatia. C.O. status was not an option in Yugoslavia.

But when ordered to help shell a Croatian city, Lazar said "No." In front of stunned witnesses, he said: "I am a Christian, I don't want to kill anybody."

When a gun was pointed at his head, he said, pointing to heaven: "I know where I will live."

Lazar's commander called him crazy, and ordered him to kitchen duty. Fellow soldiers asked to hear more about Jesus.

At one more moment in human history when many were asking, "Where is God," Lazar's action occasioned an answer. His was the pacifism of proclamation.

The pacifism of proclamation stands against war in order to realize God.

The pacifism of proclamation says no to violence because it prefers risk to being left forever only with questions.

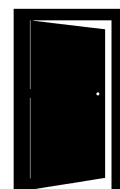
The pacifism of proclamation is a continuation of Jesus' own life and work – when the Word was made flesh, and we beheld its glory, full of grace and truth.



The Prayer Closet

We pray for the people of Colombia who are suffering through the longest civil war in the world. Peace talks have recently broken down. \$1.3 billion in aid sent by the U.S. has largely been used for military purposes, adding fuel to an already inflamed region.

We pray for the families of the more than 200,000 people who have died in this conflict. We pray for the many pastors and church leaders who have been killed, and for the multitude of others who have been intimidated through threats and kidnappings. As the armed conflict is intensifying, let us pray for all the people of Colombia, and for all of those who are working for justice and peace.



Lombard Mennonite Peace Center, 101 W. 22nd Street, Suite 206, Lombard, IL 60148-4987

The *LMPC Newsletter* is published four times a year by Lombard Mennonite Peace Center. A minimum subscription donation of \$10 per year is encouraged. LMPC bases its peacemaking in a biblical view of salvation and Christian discipleship as understood in the Anabaptist-Mennonite heritage. LMPC is a 501(c)(3) organization to which donations are tax deductible. LMPC Staff: Richard Blackburn, Executive Director; Bob Williamson, Associate Director; Marty Farahat, Assistant Director; Jay Wittmeyer, Assistant Director; Erin Dalian, Assistant for Communications; Oliver Lawrence, Administrative Assistant; Sheryl Reynolds Slack, Administrative Assistant.

Phone: 630-627-0507 Fax: 630-627-0519 E-mail: Admin@LMPeaceCenter.org Website: www.LMPeaceCenter.org

The Bookshelf

Radical Discipleship

by Erin Dalian

The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism by John Howard Yoder. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2003. 192 pp. \$19.00.

History testifies that revolution is a common course taken by those who want radical change when a nation is confronted by social problems. Often such revolutions replace one form of repressive power with another.

In this collection of essays, John Howard Yoder describes Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God as the "original revolution." Rejecting the option of repressive power, Jesus chose a new way that sought to create a voluntary community based on truly revolutionary values.

The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism, first published in 1971, includes seven essays – "The Original Revolution," "Political Axioms of the Sermon on the Mount," "If Christ Is Truly Lord," "If Abraham Is Our



Father," "Let the Church Be the Church," "Christ the Light of the World," and "Christ the Hope of the World."

In each of the essays, Yoder addresses a different aspect of discipleship. Yoder's deep and challenging essays provide insightful reflection on the typical questions raised by the pacifist ethic.

In one essay Yoder discusses Jesus' commandment of love, as found in the Sermon on the Mount. We should love our enemy not for some reward or, even, because Jesus tells us to do so, but because such unconditional love is how God loves.

Yoder then looks at the apparent contradictions between the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, there were holy wars and killing seemed to be justified. In the New Testament, Jesus proclaimed "You have heard that it was said... but I say to you..."

Yoder reviews the various schools of thought that seek to explain such contradictions, but notes that all have their shortcomings. His view is that, from the Old Testament holy wars through the later Hebrew prophets up to Jesus, there is a progressive movement of increasing dependence on God for

security and deliverance on the part of the covenant community. The nuances of his argument are brilliant and totally convincing. The essay must be read by all who seek to justify violence based on a cursory reading of the Old Testament.

Yoder then turns his attention to the role of the church. For much of the post-Constantinian era, the church was a controlling majority in society, but compromised its divine purpose. In this post-Christian era the church can now "be the church" and live out its radical call to be a covenant community, practicing faithful discipleship, with no need to cater to establishment norms.

Our loyalty is to God alone, and not to any cause, power, or nation. We are simply called to be obedient to God's will, trusting in God's transcendent power and grace as we follow Christ in the way of peace and loving service.

Each essay is thought-provoking and eye-opening. Each provides a solid basis for personal reflection and group discernment for exploring the Christian pacifist ethic under the tutelage of its most articulate spokesperson.

Until June 31, ***The Original Revolution*** may be purchased from LMPC for \$17.10 (10% off the regular price), plus \$3.00 shipping. Illinois residents please add 6.75% sales tax (\$1.16).

Previews

A Selection of LMPC Spring and Summer Events

Mediation Skills Training Institute:

- At Colonial United Church of Christ, Prairie Village, KS, May 17-21.
- For Presbytery of Great Rivers at First Presbyterian Church, Peoria, IL, June 7-11.
- For London Mennonite Centre at Scottish Churches House, Dunblane, Scotland, June 28-July 2.
- At Calvary Reformed Church, Orland Park, IL, August 2-6.

Healthy Congregations:

- For Pastoral Counseling and Education Center at Preston Hollow United Methodist Church, Dallas, TX, March 26-27.
- At Bethany United Church of Christ, Cuyahoga Falls, OH, March 26-27.
- For "Eyes Wide Open" at The Lodge, Buchanan, MI, April 20.
- At Zion Mennonite Church, Souderton, PA, April 23-24.
- For Shalom Zone Ministries, Texas Annual Conference, UMC, at Bethany United Methodist Church, Houston, TX, July 30-31.

Advanced Clergy Clinic:

- At Blanchard Road Alliance Church, Wheaton, IL, April 19-21.

Clergy Clinic:

- At Fox Valley Presbyterian Church, Geneva, IL, May 3-5.
- At LMPC, Lombard, IL, April 1, May 6.

Here I Stand:

- At King of Glory Lutheran Church, Dallas, TX, April 19-21.
- At Grace Lutheran Church, Cleveland Heights, OH, June 8-10.
- At St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Glen Ellyn, IL, August 17-19.

God's Own Peace:

- At First Mennonite Church, Denver, CO, March 30.
- At Redeemer Lutheran Church, Hinsdale, IL, April 22.
- At Bethesda Presbyterian Church, Bethesda, MD, May 19.

Facilitating Healthy Pastor-Congregation Relations:

- At Vermont Hills United Methodist Church, Portland, OR, May 14-15.

Leadership and Anxiety in the Church:

- For Northern Great Lakes Synod, ELCA, at First Lutheran Church, Iron Mountain, MI, April 27.
- At Hicksville United Methodist Church, Hicksville, NY, May 26.
- For Interim Ministry Network at Pheasant Run Conference Center, St. Charles, IL, June 12.

Other:

- "Conflict Transformation Skills: Entrusted with the Message of Reconciliation" for Northern Great Lakes Synod, ELCA, at First Lutheran Church, Iron Mountain, MI, April 26.
- "Here I Stand Clinic for Church Leaders" at LMPC, Lombard, IL, May 25.
- "Leadership in Anxious Churches: A Family Systems View" for Interim Ministry Network at Pheasant Run Conference Center, St. Charles, IL, June 17.

The A-V Shelf

Truth – The First Casualty

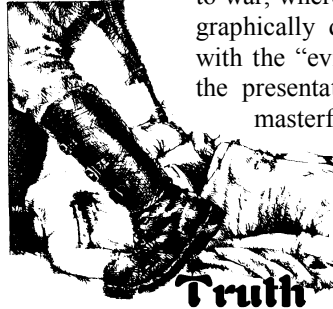
by Richard Blackburn

Uncovered: The Whole Truth About the Iraq War. Carolina Productions, Inc., 56 minutes, 2003. VHS.

On March 19, 2003 the United States launched a unilateral, preemptive war against Iraq. The build-up to the war, characterized by a constant drumbeat of demonizing rhetoric and predictions of imminent destruction, was a textbook case of wartime propaganda.

Uncovered: The Whole Truth About the Iraq War captures the tenor of the months leading up to the war, as U.S. government officials make their case in the starkest of terms for taking unilateral action. All the familiar themes are presented – “weapons of mass destruction,” “longstanding ties to terrorists” – all leaving the impression in the eyes of a largely uninformed and frightened public that Iraq was at the root of 9/11 and was planning even more horrific attacks.

However, the video also contrasts such saber-rattling rhetoric with the views of one expert after another who refute the views of U.S. Administration officials. The documentary presents interviews with more than twenty such experts, representing former CIA officers and U.N. weapons inspectors, as well as former Pentagon and State Department officials.



They outline the lies, misstatements, and exaggerations that served as the pretext for going to war. The unsettling distortion of intelligence and use of selective information was all designed to mislead the public in order to turn opinion in favor of “regime change” in Iraq. It was a classic case of intellectual dishonesty – so transparent that it’s hard to believe that the public actually swallowed it.

For example, the video takes an in-depth look at the U.S. Secretary of State’s presentation at the U.N. on the eve of going to war, where “hard evidence” of Iraq’s weapons programs was graphically displayed. The documented facts are contrasted with the “evidence” presented to the U.N. In commenting on the presentation, one of those interviewed noted, “It was a masterful performance; but none of it was true.”

Although **Uncovered** does not specifically discuss Christian perspectives on war and peace, it does raise questions for Christians who place a high premium on truth and honesty. What does it mean to be a Christian of conscience living in a nation where governmental deception is so blatant that it leads to preemptive war and the resulting death of untold numbers of innocent civilians?

Uncovered would be an excellent resource to be shown in small groups and adult Sunday school classes as a way of inviting discussion on that critical question, as well as others related to Christ’s call to peacemaking.

To borrow this video, call LMPC at 630-627-0507.

Return Service Requested

Nonprofit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Lombard, IL 60148
Permit No. 218

LOMBARD MENNONITE PEACE CENTER
1263 S. HIGHLAND AVE. SUITE 1N
LOMBARD, IL 60148-4527

