

Ecumenews

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September, 2006



How are Christians to Respond to Radical Evil in our World?

By Peter Bakken



One form of this question will face Wisconsin voters in an advisory referendum on November's ballot. The question on the ballot reads, "Should the death penalty be enacted in the State of Wisconsin for cases involving a person who is convicted of first-degree intentional homicide, if the conviction is supported by DNA evidence?"

The referendum vote, although it only "advises" the legislature of voter opinion on capital punishment, could be a watershed moment in the history of Wisconsin. Wisconsin has not had the death penalty since 1853. Many bills to restore the death penalty in Wisconsin have been introduced in the legislature over the years, but most of them never reached the floor for a vote. A "yes" vote on the referendum could encourage the legislature to finally restore capital punishment in Wisconsin.

The member denominations of the Wisconsin Council of Churches are in strong agreement in rejecting the death penalty, and the Council itself adopted a policy statement in 1995 opposing capital punishment. At the same time, there are members of those denominations on both sides of the issue.

Both supporters and opponents of the death penalty strongly affirm the value of human life. Both regard murder

as a heinous evil. But they disagree on whether capital punishment is the right response to those who have taken the life of another human being. Capital punishment is an emotionally-charged and often polarizing topic.

The Council has developed an educational booklet as a tool for congregations to learn and reflect on this issue in the light of their faith. The booklet, which has been mailed to every member congregation in the Council, and available at www.wichurches.org, includes:

- Guides for discussion on capital punishment;
- A Bible study on capital punishment;
- Information and a quiz about the death penalty;
- A summary of arguments for and against capital punishment;
- A pastoral letter from Wisconsin religious leaders on the death penalty;
- Sample sermons;
- A list of websites for finding denominational statements on the death penalty; and
- A list of websites with resources for further study.

A hard copy of the booklet can be ordered from the Council for \$3.00.

We urge you to study and carefully and prayerfully reflect on this issue together, seeking to discern the mind of Christ – and vote as your conscience directs you. ●

Dr. Peter Bakken is Public Policy Coordinator for Wisconsin Council of Churches

Supporting Peacemaking in Particular War-Torn Countries

On Sept. 9, the Wisconsin Council of Churches and the United States Institute of Peace sponsored a one-day forum called "Supporting Peacemaking in Particular Countries" at Marshall United Methodist Church, Marshall, WI. Fifty-five people gathered to hear the experiences of five Wisconsinites who have put their faith into action by supporting peacemaking in five war-torn countries, and to strategize ways Wisconsin people of faith may continue supporting peacemaking in these and other countries. The presenters were Cecilia Zarate Laun – Colombia, Doug Madsen – Rwanda, Bruce Burnside – Israel / Palestine, Patrick Augustine – Sudan, Michele Naar Obed – Iraq.

Log on to www.usip.org to find out more about the agency that has made possible one of WCC's 2006 peace projects, and www.cctpp.org/SupportingPeacemaking/index.htm to download the following excellent resources for congregations seeking to support peacemaking in particular countries: "Living as Peacemakers in a Broken World," "Supporting Peacemaking: How US Local and Regional Religious Bodies Provide Support to Those Engaged in Peacemaking in Particular Countries," and "The Role of U.S. Regional and Local Religious Bodies in Supporting Peacemaking Efforts in Other Countries."





Scott D. Anderson

Executive, Director's Corner

Wisconsin's Spiritual Crisis

As I travel the state these days, there's one issue that I hear discussed more than any other in church basements and social halls—our nation's chronic health care crisis. While most Wisconsinites have some form of health insurance, an increasing number—at least one in ten of our fellow citizens—do not.

Historically, lower income families have suffered the worst under our current system, particularly those who make too much to qualify for government health care programs but do not earn enough to afford insurance on their own.

In recent years, middle income folks have joined the ranks of the uninsured as an

increasing number of employers have opted out of company-provided insurance plans because of annual insurance premium increases of 10-25%.

The consequences of having no health insurance are daunting. A catastrophic illness can force an uninsured family to assume a mountain of debt. Tragically, unpaid major medical expenses are one of the leading causes of bankruptcy in our state.

Children from uninsured families are 70% less likely to be treated for common childhood diseases such as asthma, ear infections, and sore throats. Left alone, these diseases worsen, often leading to more severe consequences.

Uninsured adults are sicker and die sooner. Adults who are uninsured are more reluctant to see the doctor, receive fewer diagnostic services, and lack regular access to medications.

It's no surprise that recent polls reveal that over 90 percent of Americans believe that our health care system is fundamentally broken, but see no viable policy solution in sight.

As people of faith who believe health and wholeness for every human life is the intention of our Creator God, America's health care debacle is more than a social and economic crisis. *It is fundamentally a spiritual crisis.*

Early in 2007, as the new state legislature convenes, I believe that health care reform can be at the top of the policy agenda for our state lawmakers if the religious community demands it. Currently, there are several laudable proposals in the mix to create a universal health care system for our state—a system that will provide health insurance for nearly every Wisconsin resident. Two of these proposals already have bi-partisan support.

The Wisconsin Council of Churches plans to take the lead in advocating for fundamental reform in Wisconsin's health care system next year, and we hope you and your congregation will join us in this effort.

As a beginning, we are looking for at least 150 congregations which will commit to study the issues facing our health care system from our Christian perspective in the first quarter of 2007, using adult education resources produced by the Council. Community forums, hosted by the WCC and other faith based groups over the next 9 months, will also help raise the visibility of this issue. If you're interested in being a part of this effort, or want more information, send me an e-mail at sanderson@wichurches.org. More details will be forthcoming soon.

There will be no change in our broken health care system unless ordinary people at the grassroots level demand it of our elected leaders. Speaking out of our faith convictions, such a demand is more than politics; it is a part of our Christian vocation. ●

Preaching and Teaching the Gospel of Luke

Dr. Barbara Reid, O.P.



9:00 a.m. – 3:15 p.m.

Friday, November 10

First Presbyterian Church
200 Church Street, Neenah, WI

Saturday, November 11

Holy Cross Lutheran Church
Pilgrim Rd., Menomonee Falls, WI

Barbara Reid is Professor of New Testament Studies at Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, IL. Dr. Reid has an M.A. from Aquinas College and a Ph.D. in biblical studies from Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. As a Dominican biblical scholar, she has a keen interest in relating the study of the scriptures with the ministry of preaching. Her work on the parables and on women in the Gospel of Luke makes current feminist biblical scholarship available to preachers, teachers, and pastoral ministers. She is the author of *Choosing the Better Part?*, *Women in the Gospel of Luke* and *Parables for Preachers*. ●

What Does Love Have To Do With It?

A Day of Theological Reflection
on Paul's Epistle to the Philippians

Rev. Dr. David E. Fredrickson



9:00 a.m. – 3:15 p.m.

Wednesday, October 18

First United Church of Christ, Green Bay

Thursday, October 19

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Wausau, WI

Friday, October 20

Community United Methodist Church, Elm Grove, WI

Saturday, October 21

Saint Dunstan's Episcopal Church, Middleton, WI

- Why is it significant that we read Paul against the background of ancient love poetry?
- How do ancient rituals and rites of passage inform Paul's theology and our understanding of Philippians?
- How do ancient notions of yearning, longing, melting, emptying help us make sense of the Christ hymn in Philippians 2?
- How does Paul promote the ministry of marginalized people?
- How does suffering of the Christian community open up the communion of God with the world? ●

REGISTRATION

Yes! - Register me for **The Gospel of Luke**

Nov. 10 - Neenah Nov. 11 - Menomonie Falls

Name: _____ Title (optional): _____

Street: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Email: _____

Phone: (_____) _____ at my Home Office Cell

Religious Affiliation: _____ (optional)

Event Fees: \$60 Advance Registration and Lunch (by November 2)

\$53 Registration without lunch (by November 2)

\$75 Registration and Lunch (after November 2)

\$68 Registration without Lunch (after November 2)

Send this form with a check payable to "WCC" to:

Wisconsin Council of Churches 750 Windsor Street, Suite 301 Sun Prairie, WI, 53590

Register online and pay by credit card or check at: www.wichurches.org under "Events"

REGISTRATION

Yes! - Register me for **What Does Love Have to Do With It?**

Oct. 18-Green Bay Oct. 19-Wausau Oct. 20-Elm Grove Oct. 21-Middleton

Name: _____ Title (optional): _____

Street: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Email: _____

Phone: (_____) _____ at my Home Office Cell

Religious Affiliation: _____ (optional)

Event Fees: \$60 Advance Registration and Lunch (by October 10)

\$53 Registration without lunch (by October 10)

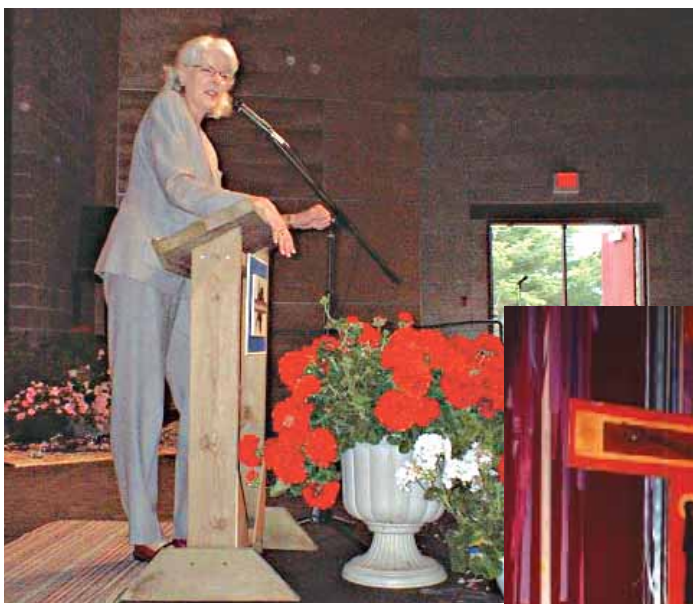
\$75 Registration and Lunch (after October 10)

\$68 Registration without Lunch (after October 10)

Send this form with a check payable to "WCC" to:

Wisconsin Council of Churches 750 Windsor Street, Suite 301 Sun Prairie, WI, 53590

Register online and pay by credit card or check at: www.wichurches.org under "Events"



Exceeding Our Expectations

The Rev. Barbara Brown Taylor Delivers at the 2006 Washington Island Forum

By Sara Smith and Lee Ann Bryce

From twenty-one states, several denominations, and a multitude of congregations and ministries, we came - trekking like spiritual pilgrims to beautiful Washington Island, off the tip of the Door County Peninsula. True, we undertook our July pilgrimage to the 2006 Washington Island Forum to seek renewal and quiet respite in one of God's summer homes. But if many in the record breaking crowd of 250 are honest, we mostly came to see HER - The Rev. Barbara Brown Taylor - Episcopal priest, sought-after speaker and popular writer, parish minister, college professor, and last but not least, preaching goddess.

Of course, like anyone whose books have been devoured and sermons quoted as oft as BBT (as those of us who depend upon her as a staple resource in our work refer to her), we questioned if anyone could live up to the adoration-laden expectations we had placed upon her for this event. O ye of little faith.

During her daily morning presentations, we lapped up her engaging, profound and deeply insightful message centered on the topic: "What the Body Knows: Christian Faith in Practice." Our frenzied note-



scribbling would only be broken by the collective "ahhh" when she would find in each of us a home for yet another rich spiritual nugget, or when we would find our ecumenical commonality as her humor sparked laughter across the breadth of the Trueblood Performing Arts Center's auditorium. Her warmth, authenticity - and sometimes, holy irreverence - made her challenge to regard our bodies as vehicles of a more genuine spiritual life, more accessible to those of us trapped in the anti-body theology bequeathed to us by our Christian forebears.

Peppered with her trademark stories, her prophetic remarks wove together the relationship between belief and practice - the centrality of our bodies to who we are as Christians; the practice of incarnation - how to inhabit our own flesh as fully as Jesus did, both individually and as the Body of Christ, the Church; and the necessary connection between honoring our own

bodies and those of others. It was apparent that BBT was diving into something new here, something about which she felt extremely passionate, and yet where she was still open to further insights, innovative practices, continuing revelations.

Yet BBT's sharing of her gifts did not stop with her prepared lectures, but continued through "Q&A" sessions where we had the opportunity to learn more about her - her professional life post-parish, her home life on the farm caring for her animals, and her deep and evolving spiritual life. From her favorite poets to her daily writing/reading practices to her keen observations about the future of the Church to her personal commitment to the practice of Sabbath, BBT opened a window into that which clarifies and confounds her very human life, and let us peek in.

During the Forum's meals and social events, BBT also shared with us individually. She faithfully signed our books and answered our endless questions, even when we approached her awkwardly and tongue-tied, as groupies often do.

Since hugging our new friends of the Washington Forum good-bye, our lives have



returned to the typical hectic pace of parish ministry. Yet throughout our days, we find ourselves still engaged by Barbara Brown Taylor. Her wisdom has worked its way into our sermons and spiritual practices, even as the preaching goddess worked her way into our hearts. ●



Rev. Lee Ann Bryce (left) is pastor of Community Christian Church UCC/DOC, Rochester, NY. Rev. Sara D. Smith (right) is pastor of Kenilworth United Church of Christ, Buffalo, NY.

2006 Voter Education Guide is now available at www.wichurches.org!

Mark Your Calendar!

October 7: An Ecumenical Dialogue with Michael Kinnamon - Discouragements and Hopes in Ecumenism Today. Co-sponsored by the Wisconsin Council of Churches and the Benedictine Women of Madison. At Holy Wisdom Monastery (formerly the St. Benedict Center), 4200 County M, Middleton, WI, 9:30 am - 1:00 pm. Register by Sept. 27 (\$20 including morning refreshments & lunch). Walk-ins invited at \$15, no lunch included. Register at www.wichurches.org, or phone 608-837-3108.

October 18-21: A Day of Theological Reflection on Paul's Epistle to the Philippians - What Does Love Have To Do With It? with Dr. David Fredrickson. See page 2.

November 10-11: Preaching & Teaching the Gospel of Luke, with Dr. Barbara Reid, O.P. See page 2.

November 10-11: Renewal Through Prayer and Righteous Action - In Celebration of the One Hundredth Birthday of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, German Theologian, Pastor, Pacifist, Nazi Resister and Martyr. At Luther Memorial Church, 1021 University Avenue, Madison, 53715, 608-258-3160. Speakers: Larry L. Rasmussen, Reinhold Niebuhr Professor Emeritus of Social Ethics, Union Theological Seminary, New York City & Dirk G. Lange, Assistant Professor of Christian Assembly, Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia (LTSP), registration: \$65; students: \$40. Please make checks payable to: Luther Memorial Church. Mail to: Conference, Luther Memorial Church, 1021 University Avenue, Madison, WI 53715.

December 11-12: WCC Annual Meeting, featuring Dr. Craig Van Gelder, Professor of Congregational Mission and Leadership at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN; the Rev. Michael Livingston, President of the National Council of Churches; and Rev. Dr. Lucille Rupe, Executive Presbyter, Winnebago Presbytery, PCUSA. For more information, visit www.wichurches.org, phone 608-837-3108.

January 18-25: Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Order resources at www.geii.org. ●

Called to Common Mission: Lutherans and Episcopalians in Full Communion

By Steven Kuhl

In many ways, April 16, 2006, was a typical Easter Sunday at St. Thomas of Canterbury Episcopal Church in Greendale, WI. The procession entered the assembly to the robust singing of "Jesus Christ is Risen Today." *The Book of Common Prayer* established the pattern of the people's worship. The Easter greeting was exchanged, the Easter readings were read, the Easter gospel proclaimed, the Easter faith professed, the Easter hope prayed, the Easter peace shared, the Easter Eucharist celebrated, and the Easter people sent.

Yet, Easter at St Thomas was also revolutionary. For the celebrant was not an Episcopal priest, but a Lutheran pastor—helping out in a time of pastoral vacancy. Nevertheless, this revolutionary event is but one example of how "Called to Common Mission" (CCM) is regularizing relations between Lutherans and Episcopalians in the Milwaukee Area and beyond.

CCM is the "full communion" agreement entered into by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Episcopal Church, USA (ECUSA) in 2000. After thirty-plus years of dialogue and selective ministry ventures together, the ELCA and ECUSA have come to "recognize in one another the essentials of the one catholic

and apostolic faith as it is witnessed to" in their historic documents and present ministries (CCM § 4). Taking to heart Jesus' prayer that his disciples be one (John 17), CCM charts a way for Lutherans and Episcopalians to publicly express that unity today.

The heart of CCM is its evangelical approach to unity-in-diversity. Diversity does not mean "anything goes" and unity does not mean "uniformity." Asserting the notion of the "primacy of the Word," unity means unity "in the gospel" and diversity means appreciating the "variety of expressions" of that gospel.

This evangelical concept of unity shapes CCM's understanding of "episcopal" or "oversight" ministry in the church. If the "ultimate authority" in the church is the "gospel itself," then "the historic catholic episcopate under the Word of God must always serve the gospel." Since oversight arrangements are not definitive of the church—the gospel is—then they must always be subject to "evaluation, adaptation, improvement, and continual reform in the service of the gospel" (CCM § 17).

Seeing that this one ministry of the gospel undergirds their respective and autonomous life as churches, Episcopalians and Lutherans



St. Thomas of Canterbury: Pentecost Sunday, June 4, 2006
Pictured from left to right: Peter Leszczynski (Senior Warden), Steven Kuhl, Wayne Riggs (Worship Committee)

agree to bear public witness to this fact 1) by sharing their tables and clergy with each other and 2) by having each other's bishops participate in the ordinations/installations of each other's new bishops. Indeed, they see the ancient concept of the "historic episcopate" as a valuable *sign* of a fellowship in the gospel that already exists between them and *not* as a necessary element or prerequisite to full communion.

Institutionally, this means that Lutherans and Episcopalians share "one ordained ministry"—already—even as they maintain their distinctive institutional and constitutional frameworks (CCM § 8). Unity does not mean merging into one denominational structure, it means sharing in the one ministry of the gospel.

Practically, when a Lutheran pastor is invited into an Episcopal context or an Episcopal priest into a Lutheran context,

he/she is expected to respect and follow the ministry pattern of the church in which he/she is serving *because* both are faithful ways of ordering life under the gospel. This is exactly what happened at St. Thomas.

CCM is a *quiet* revolution because it's about serving the *common* mission of the church—the sharing of the gospel. But it is not a *secret* revolution. Lutherans and Episcopalians humbly "offer this Concordat and growth toward full communion for serious consideration among the churches of the Reformation as well as among the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches" (CCM § 24). To that end, St. Thomas offers its experience as well. ●

Rev. Dr. Steven Kuhl is assistant professor of historical theology at Saint Francis Seminary, St. Francis, WI, and is a member of WCC's Unity and Relationships Committee

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