

# Dove Tales

## Hospitality:

# Welcoming the Strangers Among Us

By Rebeca Jiménez Yoder

## Exploring the topic

Since September 11, 2001, we have become more aware of the gap that exists between our fears of being hospitable to strangers and our ideals as a country. Our ideals are exemplified by the Statue of Liberty that welcomed immigrants with the poem by Emma Lazarus, “The New Colossus”: “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free....” But our fear has caused us to give in to a selfish spirit of self-protection and self-preservation. Xenophobia, the fear of strangers, has increased in our country. Armed vigilantes have begun to patrol our borders compelled by a fear that government authorities will not do their jobs properly. The news media fuels xenophobic fears by bringing the “immigration problem” to our attention daily. Some code words and phrases we hear regularly about strangers are invasion, terrorists, illegal aliens, “they don’t want to be American,” “they’ll change our way of life,” etc.

John Koenig in *New Testament Hospitality* tells us that “rather than burdening or threatening us, the stranger comes to teach the deeper lessons of life and to enable ministry.” However, some of the most selfish behavior in our churches goes by the name of hospitality. We act as though hospitality were another word for “taking care of our own,” or an exercise in giving with the expectation of receiving in return. (If I invite you over to my house, you are obligated to invite me back to yours.) While we may not verbalize this definition

*(Continued on page 2)*



CAMPESINO CHRIST BY LEO HARTSHORN

## Mission Statement

The mission of Peace and Justice Support Network of Mennonite Church USA is to proclaim and promote God’s desire for justice (Micah 6:8), Christ’s call to peacemaking (Matthew 5:9), and the Spirit’s reconciling work (Ephesians 2:11-22).

**“What do we want the church to do? We ask for its presence with us, beside us, as Christ among us. We ask the church to sacrifice with the people for social change, for justice and for love of brother and sister. We don’t ask for words. We ask for deeds. We don’t ask for paternalism. We ask for servanthood.”**

— César Chávez

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of hospitality, our behavior does! It is something that is culturally understood and there is no need to explain our expectation. If for any reason your giving is not returned, it may be a signal that the other person does not want your friendship or hospitality.

Hospitality is more than fulfilling an obligation. We cannot limit our understanding of hospitality as though it were a legal obligation that must be fulfilled, an employment requirement to help keep us accountable or even our own self-imposed spiritual obligation to be “inclusive.”

Hospitality has everything to do with

treating and welcoming people the way that Jesus did. Like Jesus, we must love people, have compassion and freely give of ourselves for people without expecting anything in return. Treating people like Jesus did means offering hospitality even to those who do not deserve it, who seem to refuse it, who turn on you, and whom others would consider your enemies.

### True hospitality is given regardless of past experiences

In 2002, I participated in a delegation to Mexico City and to the State of Puebla in Mexico with the U.S. National Religious Leaders. The delegation was composed of leaders of various denominations such as

Methodists, Lutherans and others who are doing immigration work.

We visited a small town called Coyula. Coyula is what some people call a “sending community,” a community from which people have been coming to the United States since World War II. Men from this community came as farm workers with the Bracero program, so this community has a long history of people leaving for the United States to work outside Mexico.

There we met a family with members living in the United States. We visited Don Benito, a man in his 60s, who told us a little about his own story of going back and forth across the border to the United States over the last 10 years. He had had both good and bad experiences along the way.

## Resources on Immigration

*“The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God” (Leviticus 19:34).*

### Mennonite Church USA

- Statement on Immigration: [www.mennoniteusa.org/NewsItems/delegates/statement\\_immigration.pdf](http://www.mennoniteusa.org/NewsItems/delegates/statement_immigration.pdf)
- Strangers No More congregational resource: [www.mennoniteusa.org/NewsItems/StrangersNoMore.pdf](http://www.mennoniteusa.org/NewsItems/StrangersNoMore.pdf)
- Peace and Justice Support Network: <http://peace.mennolink.org/immigration.html>

### Mennonite Central Committee U.S.

- Immigration Education: [www.mcc.org/us/immigration](http://www.mcc.org/us/immigration)  
Washington Office: [www.mcc.org/us/washington/issues/immigration](http://www.mcc.org/us/washington/issues/immigration)
- Welcoming the Newcomer: Doing Advocacy with Immigrants: [www.mcc.org/catalog](http://www.mcc.org/catalog)
- Immigration links: [www.mcc.org/us/immigration/links.html](http://www.mcc.org/us/immigration/links.html)

### Third Way Café

- Immigration Issues: [www.thirdway.com/btn/immigraion](http://www.thirdway.com/btn/immigraion)

### Christian Peacemaker Teams

- Work along the Arizona/Sonora, Mexico border: <http://cpt.org/arizona/arizona.php>

### Border Working Group

- Las Posadas Packet; Religious Groups Statement on Immigration and Borders: [www.rtfcam/resources/packets/posadas/posadas\\_packets.htm](http://www.rtfcam/resources/packets/posadas/posadas_packets.htm)

### National Farm Worker Ministry

- Worship Resources in English and Spanish

### No More Deaths

- [www.nomoredeaths.org](http://www.nomoredeaths.org)

### World Relief

- Christian Hospitality devotional guide: [www.wr.org/media/pdf/hospitality.pdf](http://www.wr.org/media/pdf/hospitality.pdf)

### Pacific Northwest Regional Peace Gathering

co-sponsored by the Peace and Justice Support Network, Mennonite Church USA and the Pacific Northwest Mennonite Conference Peace and Justice Committee



*Dove Tales* is a bi-annual publication created by the Peace and Justice Support Network, Mennonite Church USA, to resource individuals and congregations in our collective peace and justice work. Ideas, articles and reports can be sent to the editor. **PJSN Leadership Team:** Leo Hartshorn, Valerie Weidman, Andy Peifer Nisley, Jorge Vielman, Yvonne Diaz, Melonie Buler, Titus Peachey, Roger Farmer, Matt Friesen and Erica Littlewolf. **Editor:** Leo Hartshorn, Minister of Peace and Justice, Mennonite Mission Network, 202 South Ann Street, Lancaster, PA 17602, 717-399-8353, [LeoH@MennoniteMission.net](mailto:LeoH@MennoniteMission.net). **Designer:** Cynthia Friesen Coyle, volunteer, Americus, Ga. **PJSN web site:** [www.MennoniteUSA.org/peace](http://www.MennoniteUSA.org/peace). **Opinions expressed in *Dove Tales* are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official positions of Mennonite Church USA or the Peace and Justice Support Network.**

This family was very hospitable. It was a warm day and they offered us something to drink. Most of the group did not respond initially to Don Benito's hospitality, but he kept insisting that he wanted to serve us something to drink. He told us he wanted to return to us foreigners the hospitality he had received from strangers whom he had met along the way to the United States.

I was interested in hearing more about some of his experiences. Don Benito admitted he had had some bad experiences but did not want to talk about them. He simply made general comments about being detained, being taken advantage of, being dehumanized and mistreated. He preferred to think about the good experiences. He had found people who were helpful to him along the way as well as people who had treated him badly. He held no grudges and wanted to return the hospitality he had received.

What a lesson! Could we become like Don Benito even when we are unfairly mistreated and taken advantage of? Do we choose to forgive and serve those who may look like those who mistreated us?

## Loving strangers means welcoming their hospitality

In the 1980s, I had the privilege to participate in a study tour to El Salvador during wartime. We were in a rural area and had to walk to visit a church that was expecting us. They wanted to share their struggles and help us understand the situation in which they were living.

On the way, we stopped at the house of a woman from the church whom I will call Maria. Her home had two rooms with the cleanest dirt floor I had ever seen. The family was poor and the children malnourished but they took very good care of the few resources they had.

Maria lived there with eight of her children; her husband had been killed in the war. She had two older daughters. The oldest daughter had left the village to travel to the United States to search for work and help support the rest of the family. Her daughter had a child, whom

she left behind in order to make the trip. Maria was very concerned because she had not heard anything from her daughter for several months.

Maria had a few chickens that she kept for eggs to feed the family. Maria would also pay the doctor with a chicken when any of the children were sick. On that day, she had collected four eggs.



Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

—Romans 15:7 (NRSV)

Maria was excited that we came to visit her and wanted to show her hospitality by giving us something. The only things she had to give us were the eggs. We looked around and did not see any other food in the kitchen. We told her that she should use the eggs to feed her family.

I felt awful because I knew that the children needed the protein in their diet. Maria insisted that we take the eggs. She wanted to give the best she had and we finally received her gift as graciously as we knew how. Her hospitality and generosity were overwhelming to me. We took the eggs and I cried on our way to church. Maria gave all she had! It is the same with God who gave his only son. Grace is the hospitality of God. The ultimate act of hospitality took place when Jesus died to make everyone who believes a member of God's family.

## What can I do?

You may be wondering: What can I do? How can I welcome or be hospitable to the strangers in my community and church? We need to build bridges to welcome the strangers in our churches, com-

munities and country. Let me make a few suggestions:

**Be a bridge builder in your home**—Interact with immigrants and invite them to your home. Your family and neighbors will see your interaction with strangers as a model and may feel more comfortable around strangers as a result.

**Be a bridge builder in your church**—Get to know the immigrants in your community. Attend a church service where members are newer immigrants, and also invite them to your church. Volunteer at a local organization that serves the strangers or immigrants in your town or city. Listen to and empathize with their stories.

**Be a bridge builder in your community**—Educate yourself about the laws and issues that negatively impact the stranger in our country. There is a lot of misinformation in the news media. Become aware and search for answers rather than assuming that what you hear in the media is correct.

**Be a bridge builder in your country**—Advocate on behalf of the stranger by writing or calling your political representatives to voice your opinion. Many laws affect immigrants negatively and should be changed.

## Prayer

*Lord, give us the eyes of Jesus to see our neighbors and the strangers we meet. Teach us what it means to love the stranger as we love ourselves. Forgive us for our selfishness, for our silence, for not caring enough for the strangers who come to our communities. Teach us to love and care for the stranger the way you do. Amen!*

To read the full article: Go to <http://peace.mennolink.org/articles/immigyoder.html> or get a copy of *Loving Strangers as Ourselves: Biblical Reflections at MCC U.S.*, 21 South 12 Street, PO Box 500, Akron, PA, 17501, ph. (717) 859-1151 or toll free (888) 563-4676.



Back row, left to right, Leo Hartshorn, Jorge Vielman, Valerie Weidman, Matt Friesen, Yvonne Diaz, Melonie Buller; front row, Andy Piefer Nisley, Roger Farmer, Titus Peachey, absent, Erica Littlewolf

## PJSN Sets Goals for 2006–2009

The newly-formed Leadership Team of the Peace and Justice Support Network gathered for the first time in Brownsville, Texas, February 9–11, 2006. The team discussed the state of the church and the world, heard of the work of Movimiento del Valle Por los Derechos Humanos (Valley Movement for Human Rights), visited a Iglesia La Nueva Jerusalem, Matamoros, Mexico and heard of their ministry of hospitality to traveling migrants, attended the MCC Relief Sale in Edinburg, Texas, and set some focal goals for the work of PJSN for 2006–2009.

### PJSN Goals:

- To strengthen the work and interconnections between peace, justice and spirituality within Mennonite Church USA.
- To provide education and resources to conferences, congregations and constituency on immigration and related issues.
- To provide education and resources to conferences, congregations and constituency on war and peacemaking.

### PJSN Leadership Team members:

PJSN Assistant, Lancaster, Pa; Titus Peachey, Peace Educator, MCC US, Lancaster, Pa; Mark Frey, Christian Peacemaker Teams, Chicago, Il; Yvonne Diaz, Director of MCC Great Lakes, Goshen, Ind; Jorge Vielman, Director for Hispanic Program, Center for Problem Resolution, Goshen, Ind; Andy Peifer, Philadelphia, Pa; Roger Farmer, Washington, Iowa; Matt Friesen, Pastor, Albany Mennonite Church, Albany, Ore; Melonie Buller, Treasurer, Columbus, Ohio; Erica Littlewolf, Busby, Mont.

## Your Contributions Support PJSN

By Melonie Buller, PJSN Treasurer

**T**hanks for your generous donations last year. Even though 277 people donated over \$59,000, we still ended the year with a deficit! Because all our reserves are gone, we have wondered just how risky we ought to be.

When the new Leadership Team for PJSN met this February 2006 in Brownsville, Texas, to make plans for the next few years, we decided you (and God) wouldn't want us to limit our planning to the money in the treasury. You (and God) would want us to listen to the leading of the Spirit.

So what plans did we make? Here are some of our dreams for this year and for the years to come:

- Gather peacemakers from the Pacific Northwest in Albany, Ore., October 26-28, 2006;
- Build our personal relationships with congregations and conferences;
- Shine the light on the connections between peace, justice and spirituality;
- Create new resources for worship and study on immigration and related issues such as economics and racism;
- Contribute money to at least three new local peace and justice projects every year; and
- Look for God's nudging us in new and unexpected directions through your suggestions and ideas.

PJSN hasn't made little plans. Many volunteers will give us valuable time and skills, but we truly need your donations to do God's reconciling work. Your gifts confirm that well-supported Mennonite peace and justice work matters in this broken world. Please use the envelope enclosed to send us your donation.

# On the Death of Peacebuilder Tom Fox

By Ron Kraybill

March 14th, 2006

**T**he killing of Tom Fox, Christian Peacemaker Team member in Iraq, reminds all who risk their lives for peace of our vulnerability.

I lived in that vulnerability in South Africa from 1989 to 1995, along with other peacebuilders in the tense years of political negotiations there. I remember in particular one long evening in 1993 when I stood in a blue National Peace Accord monitor's vest between hundreds of Mandela supporters at an ANC rally and a line of 75 angry white reactionaries from the AWB, the Afrikaaner Defense Brigade.

The AWB meant business. They had declared for days that they would disrupt the rally and they showed up in long Army coats lumpy over their weapons. By prior planning, the police had withdrawn several blocks so as not to provoke either side. That left us, a dozen unarmed peace monitors, to work the space between two hostile groups for the longest three hours of our lives.

Itching for a fight, every few minutes a handful of AWB members would sally forth towards the ANC group. We would move into their path and, ignoring their profanities, urge them to return.

At one point, I glanced up to see a group of 10 AWB members the size of American football players running directly towards us in a flying V formation. They tossed us aside like leaves, and pressed into the hall overflowing with ANC supporters.

With an angry crowd milling at the door, we blue vests stood impotent, expecting to hear gunfire at any moment. But a few seconds later, the doors flew open again. The ANC crowd parted like the Red Sea as the AWB ran back out, still in their flying V, and rejoined their colleagues across the street.

Soon after, a young ANC marshal ran up in a panic. "Come! There's a man with a gun and he just cocked it!" I was relieved that by the time I arrived, the gunman had disappeared in the crowd.

When the rally buses finally packed up and left with not one person injured, I said prayers of gratitude and returned to my home in Cape Town. I felt that we had all been shielded by invisible hands.

Last week Tom Fox came home, in a coffin. Where was his shield? His death raises haunting questions for all who risk their lives for peace.

In my 1993 journal, the night before the rally, I wrote: "Anything could happen. Can I in good conscience enter a situation which quite possibly could erupt into lethal confrontation when I have a wife and small children at home?"

"It is tempting to say I must be reasonable here and leave such risks to others with lesser responsibilities. But ... if I am teaching peace and calling others to a vocation of peacemaking, I must be willing to undertake the same risks as those who respond by force of arms."

"I come... to a deep sense of trust in God, our network of supporting family, friends and church, and the universe. I know that I am 'safe' regardless of what happens to my body tomorrow, and I trust also that my family will be sheltered and cared for even in my absence.... It is the very values which lead me to enter a dangerous situation now which led me to have children in the first place and which make me a worthy father. To turn back from the risk of death would be to begin turning away from life at its fullest."

At a different place in life today, I am not sure I would now take the same risks I took in 1993. But the calculus of risk and calling varies from person to person and



Tom Fox picture here in Iraq last year before he was captured.

peaceworkers on many continents wrestle with the ethics of our choices. When does taking risks for peace become futile heroics or denial of our own limitations?

Here is a relevant fact: The world knows that something amazing involving Nelson Mandela took place in South Africa in the 1990s; but what few know is that hundreds of peaceworkers risked their lives, repeatedly, to assist that "miraculous" political transition.

I can count on one hand the times my life was truly in danger. But I had friends who worked in mortal danger almost daily, advocating peace in embittered communities or standing between armed protesters during the long night of dithering political negotiations. The future of an angry nation hung for months on knife's edge. There would be no "new South Africa" today were it not for the many who stood unarmed in harm's way to stave off Armageddon.

We will debate the specific choices and risks peaceworkers face. But one thing we can say for certain: Peaceful change cannot take place unless we are prepared to risk a great deal for it.

Light overcomes darkness. But only as we act, generously, lovingly, creatively, courageously, in the face of fear.

*Ron Kraybill is professor in the Conflict Transformation Program at Eastern Mennonite University. Copyright 2006 by Ron Kraybill and Paxblog, a blog by the author on peacebuilding and sustainable approaches to national security, found at [www.RiverhouseEpress.com](http://www.RiverhouseEpress.com).*



## Walking the Path of Peace

October 26–28, 2006

Albany Mennonite  
Church  
Albany, Oregon

# Fall Peace Retreat

The keynote speaker will be Ched Meyers, theological animator for Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries and author of the landmark political reading of the gospel of Mark, *Binding the Strong Man*. Bible study leader will be Perry Yoder, professor of Old Testament, Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary and author of *Shalom: The Bible's Word for Salvation, Justice and Peace*. The event includes workshops on restorative justice, mediation, creation care, simplicity, youth and the military, immigration, starting a peace group, drumming for peace, peace and mission, and more. There will also be worship services, displays, youth and children's programs.

Future updates will be posted on the PJSN web site: [www.mennoniteusa.org/peace](http://www.mennoniteusa.org/peace). For more information contact: Leo Hartshorn, Minister of Peace and Justice, Mennonite Mission Network, 717-399-8353, [LeoH@MennoniteMission.net](mailto:LeoH@MennoniteMission.net).



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