

# Olive Branches

July 23, 2003

## CPT leader honored for lifelong peace and justice work

by Tony Krabill

ATLANTA (MC USA)—A few days after arriving in Vietnam in 1963 to work with International Voluntary Services, Gene Stoltzfus heard the sound of helicopters and followed them to an athletic field.

“The helicopters were landing there and they were disgorging Vietnamese soldiers who were killed and wounded in a battle about 25 kilometers away,” Stoltzfus told a group gathered for a Peace and Justice Support Network “Shindig” on the final night of the Mennonite Church USA biennial gathering in Atlanta.

CPT leader honored Dick Davis (right), pastor of Peace Mennonite Church, Dallas, and chair of the Peace and Justice Support Network Reference Committee, presents Gene Stoltzfus, director of Christian Peacemaker Teams, with a pitcher made by Goshen potter Dick Lehman in recognition for Stoltzfus’ lifelong commitment to peace and justice work. (Photographer: Stan Harder, PJSN) “This was my introduction to war, and this was the beginning of a journey for me to understand being a person of peace in the midst of war—and it’s lasted forty years.”

In those 40 years, Stoltzfus has worked in capacities such as director of Mennonite Voluntary Service for the Commission on Home Ministries (a predecessor agency of Mennonite Mission Network), country co-director with Mennonite Central Committee in the Philippines with his wife, Dorothy Friesen; co-founder of Synapses, a grassroots, interfaith network linking domestic and international concerns for justice and spirituality; and director of the Urban Life Center in Chicago.

In 1988, Stoltzfus became director of Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT), an organization now consisting primarily of Mennonites, Brethren in Christ, Church of the Brethren and Quakers, as

well other Christians working for peace.

“The central idea we eventually assembled was that disciplined and trained teams of people could be put together into highly charged, critical situations and they could make a difference,” Stoltzfus said.

Since its beginnings, CPT members have been engaged in such situations in Chiapas, Mexico; Haiti; and other locations in North America and around the world. Current CPT locations include Colombia, the West Bank and Iraq.

The Peace and Justice Support Network (PJSN) of Mennonite Church USA, which seeks to keep peace and justice central to the mission of the church in the world, recognized Stoltzfus

for his lifelong commitment to peace work with a pitcher from Goshen potter Dick Lehman.

“(The pitcher) represents a life poured out for Jesus, our nonviolent Lord,” said Dick Davis, pastor of Peace Mennonite Church in Dallas and chair of PJSN’s Reference Committee, as he presented the pitcher to Stoltzfus.

The Reference Committee includes staff from Mennonite Church USA Executive Board and Mennonite Mission Network, as well as appointees from agencies, including CPT and MCC.

Davis said it was very clear to the committee that Stoltzfus should be the one to receive the honor. He recalled the early years of CPT, when a handful of people would show up for workshops and others would ask, “When are you going to give up this fool idea?”

Remember to  
observe  
Peace Sunday,  
November 9, 2003



Dick Davis presents Gene Stoltzfus with PJSN peace pitcher award.

“Gene’s spirit has prevailed and brought CPT to where it is today,” Davis said.

The belief that transformation always comes when people are most discouraged has sustained this prevailing spirit.

“When we began CPT 15 years ago. I believed

that perhaps 20 percent of our people could be convinced or would have some sense that this might be a good idea to try, or could be tapped for some support,” Stoltzfus said. “That was about right, I think.

“Our language is not full of ‘shoulds’ and ‘oughts’ and ‘musts’ and ‘have-to’s.’ Our language is a language of invitation. When you look out in the church, you can say, ‘Oh, woe is us. Our church doesn’t work hard enough for peace.’ Or you can say, ‘Praise God for all the thousands of people who are working!’”

Those thousands “have more power than George Bush,” Stoltzfus said.

“We have more power,” he said. “We have got to organize it. And we’ve gotta discipline ourselves to stick with it day after day, month after month, year after year. And this century can put a stop to the smart bombs, to the future Iraqs (wars), and put the guns back in the smelters, where they belong.”

Audio and a complete transcript of Stoltzfus’ remarks in Atlanta is available on the PJSN web site, <http://peace.mennolink.org>

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## New Peace Takes Guts t-shirt and brochure

Due to the popularity of the first Peace Takes Guts t-shirt, Peace and Justice Support Network has produced a new Peace Takes Guts II t-shirt and brochure. The t-shirt features graphic images of six people/groups who have modeled peace and justice through their lives: 1) Lawrence Hart, Cheyenne Peace Chief and Mennonite pastor; 2) Women in Black, an international women’s peace organization; 3) Maekyn Wens, a sixteenth-century Anabaptist martyr; 4) Philip Berrigan, Catholic priest and peace activist; 5) Caesar Chavez, Mexican-American nonviolent activist for migrant workers; and 6) Sojourner Truth, an African-American preacher, abolitionist, and women’s suffragist. The brochure contains the graphic image, quotation, and brief biographical sketch of each person. \$15.00 for all sizes. Price includes brochure. Brochure only for \$.50. Order t-shirt and brochure from: Mennonite Media, 1251 Virginia Avenue, Harrisonburg, VA, 228022-2497, E-mail: [LoisH@MennoMedia.org](mailto:LoisH@MennoMedia.org), 1-800-999-3543, fax:540-434-5556 (Attn. LoisH).



## Peace Gathering looks at social transformation

*Participants call church to “break the culture of violence.”*

by Sarah Phend

Mennonites should change their vocabulary from the limiting label Civil Rights Movement to a broader phrase, Southern Freedom Movement, according to participants in a peace conference held July 1-3 before Atlanta 2003. About 80 people attended Peace Gathering 2003 at the Georgia Baptist Conference Center in Toccoa, where they embraced the phrase adopted from the teachings of Martin Luther King Jr. The Southern Freedom Movement represents the idea that “we are working together so that our community is a better place,” said Susan Mark Landis, peace advocate for Mennonite Church USA.

The theme for the gathering was “When the Saints Go Marchin’: the Civil Rights Movement as a Model of Social Transformation.” Several long-time activists, Vincent Harding, Rosemarie Freney Harding and Ruby Sales, addressed issues of peace and justice in

the Mennonite church within the context of the Southern Freedom Movement.

A statement of reflections and challenges from the gathering encourages Mennonites to “hear God’s call to break the culture of violence.” It laments the division between congregations that evolved from the Southern Freedom Movement and other controversial issues in the church. Leo Hartshorn, minister of peace and justice for Mennonite Mission Network, said that Sales showed how the Exodus story is “a lesson on how to resist a culture of violence”—a lesson that can still be implemented today. We are encouraged to learn to see the story as God forming a new community, free of violence, “for the Israelites.

*Sarah Phend is a student at Goshen (Ind.) College. Reprinted from mPress by permission of the writer.*



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