

March 2007



LENTEN THOUGHTS: A LIVING SACRIFICE



"I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present yourselves as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." – Romans 12:1

mans 12:1

This Lenten season I've been thinking about sacrifice and soldiers. As I write this I've learned that five soldiers and one marine were killed today in Iraq. When extrapolating the number of wounded in relation to

killed, based on reporter Bob Woodruff's observation, one hundred and twenty soldiers were likely wounded today—twenty times the number killed. The majority of the wounded likely suffered brain injuries. Soldiers are making a huge sacrifice.

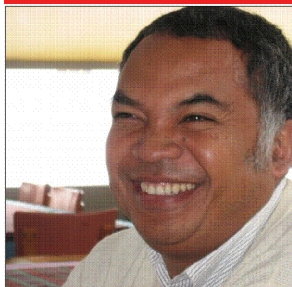
I think respectfully of the soldiers' families – spouses, parents, children. Add *them* to the total injured and the number of Americans who have been harmed by war today grows larger. They have been asked to make a holy sacrifice too, and most are proud to have done so.

I think of the unreported Iraqi families that have been injured or killed, who have been sacrificed on the altar of our administration's policy to fight terrorism in *their* back yard so that we don't have to fight it (do we really believe this?) in ours.

Are these soldiers' lives not holy and acceptable to God? Of course they are. Mostly ignored, some of our wisest leaders observed in the bipartisan *Iraqi Study Group Report*, that we have asked our soldiers to do with tanks and guns a mission that will be accomplished only by

See Lenten on Page 2

THE SYNOD OF THE NORTHEAST HOSTS PRESIDENT & TREASURER FROM CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST IN MADAGASCAR



Traveling from their East African island home, the Rev.

Lala Rasendrasahina, President of the FJKM (Church of Jesus Christ in

Madagascar) and René Olivier Andrianarivelo, treasurer of the denomination, along with their spouses Mrs. Zoé Ramisarivelo and Mrs. Claudine Ramenjanahary, have been welcomed by the Synod of the Northeast for face-to-face renegotiation of the partnership agreement between the two governing bodies. The guests arrived late in the evening on Tuesday, March 13 and have an itinerary that will take them

through March 28. Read more at www.synodne.org.

The visitors from the FJKM will be guests at Bloomfield College in Bloomfield, NJ, where President Richard Levao and several faculty members will meet together with our guests to explore what leadership development opportunities might be pursued through a relationship with Bloomfield College.

See Madagascar on Page 2

PC(USA)'S NATIONAL STEWARDSHIP CONFERENCE—MARCH 2007



Here are a couple Stewardship Tidbits picked up at this year's PC(USA)

National Stewardship Conference:

Hand Deliver Thank You Letters. After your annual campaign to seek funds in support of your church's ministry, instead of sending a letter of thanks to those who pledged, hand deliver the thank you letter. In one case we learned of a pastor who *hand-delivered* thirty-seven letters thank you letters to congregation

members, to express thanks for their generosity. Those who opened their doors to the pastor felt appreciated in a new way, and the door was opened to more than conversation about money. Personalize your thank you.

Hold a church "Thank-a-Thon." Have your church youth group gather together and call people who have pledged to the church, saying thank to them. It is a three-legged stool: 1) By being involved in a ministry of appreciation, young people experience how important it is that people commit themselves to the whole ministry of the church,

including its financial support; 2) the young engage church members directly, personalizing the gratitude of the congregation; 3) the people who pledge and support the church receive the thanks they have not sought, but always appreciate hearing, leaving them with a good feeling about the church and its future.

If you are interested in attending next year's national stewardship conference, scholarships are available through the synod of the Northeast. Call the synod office requesting information about individual grants.

5811 Heritage Landing Drive
East Syracuse, NY 13057-9360

Phone: 315-446-5990/800-585-5881

E-mail: synodoffice@synodne.org

Website: www.synodne.org

Presbyteries of: ALBANY * BOSTON * CAYUGA-SYRACUSE * EASTERN KOREAN * ELIZABETH * GENESEE VALLEY * GENEVA * HUDSON RIVER * LONG ISLAND * MONMOUTH * NEW BRUNSWICK * NEW YORK CITY * NEWARK * NEWTON * NORTHERN NEW ENGLAND * NORTHERN NEW YORK * PALISADES * SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND * SUSQUEHANNA VALLEY * UTICA * WEST JERSEY * WESTERN NEW YORK

ECUMENICAL ADVOCACY DAYS: RESOURCES FOR THIS YEAR & NEXT

The organization for the 5th annual Ecumenical Advocacy Days in Washington D.C. was intricate and fabulous. Close to one thousand people gathered the weekend of March 9-11 to be briefed on a host of important domestic and international issues, and to mobilize to take their concerns to their Senators and Congressional Representatives on Monday. A few people took advantage of scholarships of up to \$500 per person made available from the synod's Public Policy Advocacy Network (PPAN).

Topics this year were organized into eight tracks, with several workshops spread over two

days in each category:

Africa
Asia
Eco-Justice
Global Security
Jubilee/Economic Justice
Latin American
Middle East
USA: Justice for Children

PC (USA) Stated Clerk Rev. Cliff Kirkpatrick preached a stirring opening sermon on Friday night. On Sunday morning an inspiring mes-

sage from Marian Wright Edelman, founder and Executive Director of the Children's Defense Fund, brought the topic of the ecumenical gathering – *And How Are the Children?* – into marvelous focus. Presbyterians were gathered for dinner on Saturday evening by Rev. Elenora Giddings-Ivory of the Presbyterian Washington Office.

More information about the conference, including a litany for worship, may be found at the synod's web site: www.synodne.org/article.php/20070309205636205

PRESBYTERIES CONSIDER NEW PERCEPT CONTRACT FOR DEMOGRAPHIC AND LEADERSHIP DISCERNMENT SERVICES

On March 7, 2007 representatives from six presbyteries and Executive for Partnerships Clint McCoy met in Newark, NJ with Percept's Director of Client Relations, Diane Christy, anticipating a new contract between the synod and Percept that will take effect this spring. Percept provides demographic information to presbyteries and their congregations, in addition to information about leadership style, change



increasing church health and vitality, and locating and starting new congregations. The cur-

agency, and conferences for clients to help congregations and governing bodies improve their efforts at

rent contract, which includes fifteen presbyteries, expires on May 31, 2007.

Presbyteries were represented by Kevin Yoho (Newark), Joyce Emery (NB), Bruce Tischler (Palisades and HR), Dennis Piermont (LI), and Agnes Blackmon (NYC).

For more details, go to www.synodne.org

MASSACHUSETTS COUNCIL OF CHURCHES ANNOUNCES NEW LEADERSHIP THE REV. JACK JOHNSON

The Rev. Jack Johnson, an ordained minister in the Greater New Jersey Area Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, has been called by the Board of Directors of the Massachusetts Council of Churches to become its ninth

executive director, effective in mid-June. The 105 year old ecumenical body, headquartered in Boston, is the state-wide partnership of seventeen Orthodox and Protestant denominations in the Commonwealth, whose members

include over 1700 congregations. The Board also includes representatives from the four Roman Catholic dioceses in the Commonwealth. The purposes of the Council are to break down barriers and build bridges among Christian

churches, to promote healthy inter-faith relations, and to support the common good.

To read the press release, go to www.masscouncilofchurches.org and click Press Release.

Madagascar continued

The guests from Madagascar will meet at the Stony Point Center from March 17-20 for partnership conversations and to explore the ministry of Living Waters of the World and Marion Medical Mission shallow well project. During

that time the group will be joined by the Rev. Douglas Welch, General Assembly staff for Africa. On Sunday March 18 members of the ad hoc committee and our Madagascar partners will worship at the First Presbyterian Church of Forest Hills, NY in Queens; and Rev.

Rasendrasahina will bring greetings on March 25 to the Fifth Avenue Presb. Ch. in New York City.

Elder Jacky Radifera from the Fifth Avenue. congregation, himself a Malagasy national who is a diplomat at the United Nations and ac-

tive in the congregation, has arranged a meaningful itinerary in New York City between March 21 and 28 for our Malagasy guests, including conversations and presentations with groups at Fifth Ave. PC., a visit to the U.N., & time spent at the Presb. of NYC.

Lenten continued

reconciliation and diplomacy within the Iraqi community itself.

Our government will not announce a date of withdrawal from Iraq for fear of allowing the enemy to sit back and wait for us to leave. Following this argument to its logical conclusion, our armies will never leave because whenever they do leave, our enemies will rejoice;

they will see our army's departure as their victory and our defeat. No matter when our troops leave Iraq, Iraqis will rejoice.

With the current plan, there is no end to the dying. It is a holy and awful sacrifice we are asking young men and women in uniform to make, while virtually no sacrifice is being asked of the rest of us at all.

And where is God in all of this? Is this sacrifice we are asking soldiers to make a kind of spiritual worship, holy and acceptable to God? Their work would be a noble calling if it led our country and the world to a better place. But God help us: through a dark glass, we can see the truth of Iraq. There is no easy option. No good solution. What do we do?

"I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present yourselves as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."

In what way will you present yourself to God as a living sacrifice, knowing that it is the peacemakers whom Jesus called blessed?

Clint McCoy
Synod Executive for Partnerships