

**SEPTEMBER 2011****Eloise Cranke, MFSA Iowa Coordinator****BALANCED BUDGET /  
MILITARY BUDGET:**

This will be the theme of the Fall Regional Gatherings. Dates and locations are set as follows:

- **CORNING UMC**  
**Sunday, Sept. 25 at 2:00**  
Host: Heecheon Jeon;  
Devotions: Josh Steward
- **POLK CITY UMC - Sunday,**  
**Oct. 2 at 2:00 PM;**  
Host: Hugh Stone; Devotions: Shari Miller
- **ST. TIMOTHY'S UMC - CEDAR FALLS**  
**Sunday, Oct. 16 at 2:30 PM**  
Host: Linda Butler; Devotions: Abraham Funchess
- **MILFORD UMC - Sunday, Oct. 30 at 2:00 PM**  
Host: JoAnn Heerd; Devotions: Jessica DeVega
- **Musserville/San Pablo/Alive@Five Worship Centers  
for Fellowship UMC, in MUSCATINE**  
**Saturday, November 12 at 10:00 AM**  
Host: Mike Biklen; Devotions: Nate Nims

**The Balanced Budget and Military Spending**

By the Rev. Bob Crandall

The debate about balancing the budget centers on the question: Whose services should be cut? This question serves as political theatre, designed to cover the real issue: Who is going to control the wealth and power? That hidden agenda is no more apparent than in the total lack of discussion about the military budget. CNN reported on September 11, 2011, that the total cost of the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan now totals 3.5 Trillion dollars! Deeper analysis indicates that this doesn't come near figuring the total cost of the maintenance and deployment of the US military for these wars. The fact of the matter is that no one really knows.

The insistence of the Political and Religious right that we balance the budget before dealing with the issue of jobs, social security, universal health care, etc., is really farcical. It is a ploy to continue the systematic thievery of the middle class, working class, and poor for the benefit of the rich.

Progressive Christians must do two things to challenge this robbery. First, we must take back the Bible and insist there is another tradition that is totally ignored by Right Wing Christians as they hammer away at their only issues: Abortion and Homosexuality. We need to insist that the church, and its preachers, address the utter indefensibility of these costly invasions. Even the Vatican refuses to allow the use of the Just War Theory for either of them.

Second, progressive Christians need to remember that the prophetic demand for justice and caring for the poor does not end with the church, but in the streets. Jesus sided with laborers, the elderly, the poor, the sick, and people of color whenever he healed and ate with those society cast aside. The systemic violence toward the middle class and poor is deliberate, unbiblical, and will continue without end unless the military budget is cut and America's imperial ambitions are curtailed.

**JIM WINKLER: "THE PERPETUAL WAR" – OCT. 22**

**MFSA's Fall Regional Gathering**

**Saturday, October 22 - 10:00 AM**

**Walnut Hills UMC-12321 Hickman, Urbandale 50323**

Jim Winkler, General Secretary of the General Board of Church and Society and a keen observer of world and national issues is the keynote speaker. . Also welcome Steve Clunn, Coalition Coordinator from MFSA's National Office. Anna Blaedel leads devotions, and *Las Americas* caters the meal. Mark your calendars and be there for this special opportunity to hear our denomination's outstanding spokesperson for justice and peace.

**PERPETUAL WAR**

**By Jim Winkler, General Secretary of the  
General Board of Church and Society**

Violence surrounds us. It is ingrained into and embraced by U.S. society.

More than 60 years ago, George Orwell wrote of "perpetual war," a situation in which war operates as a means of controlling the population by constantly rallying them against a common enemy.

More than 50 years ago, President Dwight Eisenhower warned of the growth of the military-industrial complex. He cautioned us about the need to guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, "whether sought or unsought," by the military industrial complex. "The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist," he said.

I am excited that ordinary people are rising up across the Middle East to cast off autocrats, tyrants, kings and dictators, not to mention the secret police who harass the citizenry daily. People want peace and justice, not war and violence.

In the United States, many leaders and members of The United Methodist Church constantly, loudly lament its shortage of money. They fail to realize that vast sums of the incomes of our members are being drained off for war, death and destruction.

Given the near silence of our pulpits in the face of the violence and war that surrounds us, the exertions of our theologians in justifying war, the devotion of our denomination's members to the myth of redemptive violence, it is certain that future historians will view the church as a slave to the vast war machine that engulfs us.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. prophesied, "A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death."

Will we rise up against the madness of violence or are we dead already?

(Excerpted and printed with permission from the March 29, 2011 *Word from Winkler – the entire essay is linked on the mfsaiowa.org website*)

SEPTEMBER 2011

Eloise Cranke, MFSA Iowa Coordinator

**“SING A NEW SONG” CONFERENCE IN OHIO**

By Ruth Anne Petrak, member, Grace UMC, Des Moines

What a joy and privilege it was to join 700 United Methodists from across the US at “Sing a New Song”, a joint gathering of MFSA (Methodist Federation for Social Action), RMN (Reconciling Ministries Network) and Affirmation (United Methodists for LGBTQ Concerns) in Huron, OH, in late August.

Together we experienced mind-expanding Bible study, challenging preaching, praise-and-music-filled worship, personal stories of struggle and witness, and opportunities for friendship and fellowship. Nearly 20 lowans/former lowans/persons with Iowa connections attended.

Retired Bishop Joseph Sprague of Ohio reminded us that our task as United Methodist Christians includes Peacemaking, elimination of Poverty, advocacy for People’s rights, and combining our faith values into Progressive action.

The Rev. Amy DeLong, a member of the Wisconsin Conference, told the story of the judicial complaint filed against her for performing a Holy Union and for being a “self-avowed, practicing homosexual”. The latter charge was dropped for lack of a clear definition of “practicing”, and her sentence on the first charge is basically--as she describes it--“to study and teach.”

One of our tasks at the gathering was to help further the “Common Witness Coalition” at 2012 United Methodist General Conference. Common Witness seeks to remove from the UM Book of Discipline the language of exclusion of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) persons from full participation in the mission and ministry of the UMC. This effort began in 2000 and has grown dramatically in organizing, strategizing and enlisting broad support. The goal is to make personal contact with every delegate to the 2012 General Conference, urging them to support full inclusion of all persons.

An Iowa-specific action event is scheduled for December 3 – see Love Your Neighbor below.

**LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR! SAVE THE DATE**

**Saturday, December 3 from 9:30 –2:30**

**Collegiate UMC & Wesley Foundation**

**2622 Lincoln Way - Ames, IA 50014**

RMN Jurisdictional Organizers Kristian Clauser and Cody Nielsen will lead this informative and engaging workshop about:

- The Common Witness Coalition and General Conference 2012
- Storytelling as an approach to Holy Conversations
- Strategies to encourage friends or delegates to share their stories !
- One-to-One meetings that facilitate dialogue and relationship building
- Drawing upon shared values and Gospel grounded theology
- Making concrete plans for building an inclusive church, and more



**MFSA Banquet Invocation, 2011**

by Anna Blaedel

Creator of all that is good, and beautiful, and just,  
Keeper of all that is messy, and real, and true,  
Redeemer of all that is off the mark,  
not yet, and not quite,

We give you thanks for this opportunity to gather in body and spirit—

to share in the breaking of bread,  
the passing of peace,  
the communion of saints.

Tonight we especially lift up and celebrate the prophetic visions, passions, and lives of Marian Solomon, Darrell Mitchell, and Mark Braverman.

We give thanks for their presence tonight, and  
in our lives, and  
in your world.

May they speak to us your Word of hope, and  
bear witness to the power of Your love in action.

Stir in us an impatient expectation for the in-breaking of your peace, with justice

the building of your reign.

Give us the courage and strength to hold up hard mirrors;  
Convict us of our complicities

our apathies  
our privileged distancing from daily realities  
of occupation and violence.

Forgive us when we turn lives—human, sacred lives—  
into issues and subjects for debate.

Fill us with the fire of love in our flesh and in our bone—  
Soften our hearts.

Open our eyes.

Sharpen our attentiveness to you, and your people.

Hold us. Comfort us. Inspire us. Recreate us.  
Unsettle us. Enliven us.

Encourage us. Embolden us.

Abide with us, as we partner with you and  
each other in the work of *Tikkun Olam*—

the mending of the world—until  
we are whole, and holy thine.

In the mystery of your many names we pray.  
Amen.



Co-sponsored by  
Affirmation, the Methodist  
Federation for Social Action  
(MFSA) and the Reconciling  
Ministries Network (RMN).

To register, put "Love Your Neighbor" in the subject line of an e-mail, include your name, address, and phone number and send it to [register@cwames.org](mailto:register@cwames.org).

Questions? Call C. Kristian Clauser, RMN Jurisdictional Organizer, 612-220-2502.

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The Inside-Out Gospel

**REHABILITATING OUR CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM**

By the Rev. Michael F. Blevins, J.D., M.Div., LL.M.

Executive Director of the NE Iowa Peace & Justice Center, Inc., Decorah, IA <http://neipic.org>

The landmark **National Criminal Justice Commission Act** was reintroduced by **Senator Jim Webb** on February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011. The bill would create a blue-ribbon, bipartisan commission of stakeholders charged with undertaking an 18-month top-to-bottom review of the nation's criminal justice system and offering concrete recommendations for reform. The bipartisan legislation was drafted with input and support from more than 100 organizations from every political and philosophical perspective, including denominations and other faith-based social justice organizations (with leadership from our own **Bill Mefford** and **Laura Markle Downton** of the General Board of Church & Society).

As **Michelle Alexander** (*"The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness"*, 2010) reminds us, over three-quarters (76%) of federal prisoners are racial or ethnic minorities. Including state prisons, the statistic remains at more than 60% from racial and ethnic minorities. For Black males in their twenties, **1 in every 8** is in prison or jail on any given day, due in great measure to the egregiously disproportionate impact of the increasingly vilified "war on drugs". This is the case even though *studies consistently show that people of all colors use and sell illegal drugs at similar rates (below 10%)*.

**The United States is the world's leader in incarceration** with **2.3 million** people currently in the nation's prisons or jails—an astounding **500% increase** over the past thirty years. These trends have resulted in inhumane prison overcrowding and state governments being overwhelmed by the crushing burden of funding an exponentially expanding penal system, despite increasing evidence that large-scale incarceration is not the most effective means of achieving public safety.

This past June, I joined two dozen inter-faith leaders invited by Bill Mefford to meet in Washington with key legislators and administration officials in support of rapid passage of the National Criminal Justice Commission Act. And as this goes to print, a similar delegation is in Washington appealing for funding appropriations for, and follow-up legislation to, the recently passed "**Second Chance Act**".

Our **Social Principles ¶ 164 (H): "Criminal and Restorative Justice"**, declare in part:

*"...We urge the creation of a genuinely new system for the care and restoration of victims, offenders, criminal justice officials, and the community as a whole....retributive justice systems profess to hold the offender accountable to the state and use punishment as the equalizing tool...In contrast, **restorative justice** seeks to hold the offender accountable to the victimized person, and to the disrupted community...restorative justice seeks to [the extent possible] repair the damage, right the wrong, and bring healing..." [emphasis added].*

So as people of faith, specifically working for social holiness and the redemption of all people and peoples, let us--as a **high priority**:

- **Support and multiply Jail , Detention Center, and Prison Visitation Programs.**
- **Support and multiply "Second Chance" Rehabilitation & Transition Programs.**
- **Advocate for State and Federal legislative and policy reform:**
  - Contact your congressional delegation, especially Senator Grassley (who is the ranking Republican member of the Judiciary Committee) in support of the legislation calling for a National Criminal Justice Reform Commission and for funding of Second Chance programs.
  - Oppose so-called "Secure Communities" DHS polices (we oppose unnecessary, indeterminate detention by local law enforcement--working in conjunction with ICE, of those alleged to not have civil authorization to be in the US).
  - Oppose "contracting out" to for-profit companies the public responsibility of community safety and corrections.
  - Educate congregations, communities, and elected representatives regarding the common sense principles and efficacy of "Restorative Justice".
  - Write Letters to the Editor and use social media to educate and advocate.

If we act boldly, and smartly, we can and shall see the **Spirit of God** turn significant portions of our prisons *inside out*, even as we see lives lifted up and the principalities and powers who rejoice in the failures and suffering of the oppressed, turned *upside down*. Thanks be to God. The Scriptures say that the Son of Man, who was not given a fair trial, advocates on our behalf—can we who still stumble in our journeys do any less for others? The "Spirit of the Lord is upon...**us!**" (Luke 4: 16-18).

**MANDELA'S WAY**  
**Fifteen Lessons on Life, Love and Courage**  
by **Richard Stengel**  
Reviewed by **Inez Dawes**

From author Walter Isaacson, "Here is the wisdom of the world's greatest moral leader brilliantly distilled by a wonderful writer", the editor of *Time*.

If you are a leader, want to be a better one, or know someone who could learn a few things from this secular saint, this book is a must read.

"In **MANDELA'S WAY**, Stengel recounts the moments in which the grandfather of South Africa was tested and shares the wisdom he learned....Woven into these life lessons are remarkable stories--of Mandela's childhood as the protégé of a tribal king, of his early days as a freedom fighter, of twenty-seven-year imprisonment that could not break him, and of his new and fulfilling marriage at the age of eighty."

A profoundly inspiring, compact book!

