

days since Sept. 11 that it seemed daring, almost radical. And very comforting, to me at least.

Returning home after sundown, we passed the church again, and the sign was lit up from within. It seemed even more remarkable in the gathering darkness.

This morning I did some surfing and found the church's e-mail address, and sent them a note of thanks and encouragement.

For the record, it was the Moler Avenue Church of the Brethren. The Brethren are one of the so-called "peace churches," which includes Friends. Moler Avenue lived up to its heritage this week. I hope Friends can do as well.

—Chuck Fager

### Must we propose an alternative?

*Soon after the events of Sept. 11, the Church of the Brethren General Board's Washington Office sent out an appeal urging Brethren to ask the President to refrain from a violent military response. Washington Office coordinator Greg Laszakovits received a letter from a church member complaining that the appeal lacked a "nonviolent alternative" to military action, and asked: "What act will we as Brethren perform to help end the scourge of terrorism? I will not forward a hollow demand for a nonviolent response that carries with it no specific meaningful alternative." Here is part of the letter Laszakovits wrote in reply:*

Responding to your larger point that any plea to the President must have an alternative or else it will be "hollow," I respectfully disagree biblically, theologically, and strategically.

Asking the President not to strike back violently is worthy in and of itself. Jesus did not say, "...turn the other cheek—unless another strategic option is available." Our New Testament and Brethren traditions outline a history full of pain brought on because of our faith and suffered through without turning to violence.

Jesus and the disciples were the first to suffer the anger of other religious groups and governments, and we know well what happened to Paul, Peter, and other early Christians. I don't believe there is one instance of them fighting back or seeking revenge for the wrongs committed against them—they viewed suffering as a part of being true to their faith, and even Christ-like. Additionally, Brethren have been tarred and feathered, beaten, had their homes, businesses, possessions taken from them, and even been killed in order to uphold their position of nonresistance. Though this tragic event tests our pacifism, we can look to the example of our Christian and Brethren forerunners for guidance and inspiration. I won't intimate that this is an easy response, for it certainly is not. I do believe though that it is an ongoing test of faith and love.

Strategically, I am opposed to a violent reaction as well. It will only hurl us further into the cycle of retaliation and the myth of redemptive violence. When we strike bin Laden, Afghanistan, or whomever, do we really think we will eliminate everyone involved and that will be the end of it? Unlikely. Rather, we will create new converts to anti-Americanism, and rejuvenate the hatred in those who already scorn us.

I want be clear that I do not disagree with you that we need to be thinking about reasonable nonviolent responses. We should be thinking about these more than ever before. Part of our nonviolent response includes all of the things we are currently doing as a nation: seeking capture and eventual justice for those who have participated in these terrible acts, tightening security, and questioning why a group or groups would harbor such hate toward us.

While it is not clear everything that we should be doing immediately, it is clear that we need to respond in a Jesus-like manner in calling to attention the inhumanity of these acts against us. This is the tradition of Matthew 5—responding

to the unjust action taken against you, but in an always-nonviolent manner, never degrading ourselves or others to defile the image of God in one another.

—Greg Laszakovits

### Seeing through an eye for an eye

*This is an abridged version of the sermon delivered Sept. 16 by Sharon Nearhoof May, pastor of the recently renamed Papago Buttes Church of the Brethren (formerly First Church of the Brethren, Phoenix). The text is Matthew 5:38-48.*

There were no blockbuster action films in Jesus' day to teach children the lessons Hollywood teaches ours.

There were no televisions to broadcast the murders and the reactions, but the people passed down the ancient religion anyway—

and I'm not talking about the ancient religion of Judaism. I refer to an older and deeper religion that tells us we can count on violence to save us from trouble. It is a pagan religion as old as humanity and as current as the live pictures on our color TVs.

It is called the myth of redemptive violence. The easiest way to see it clearly is to watch an action movie or certain television shows and pay attention to the moral of the story. It usually starts with a hero who is attacked or beaten in some way by a bad guy. For most of the show, this good hero battles the villain bravely even though it looks like he can never win. Only at the last minute does the hero finally kill or destroy his enemy, usually in one great show of violence which leads to peace and order (and in Hollywood the hero gets the girl).

The scary part, of course, is that the myth of redemptive violence does not just play out on the silver screen. It plays out in our own lives and in our

