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Called to Witness

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“Through your work, we have expressed the witness of the Church of the Brethren that our federal budget should reflect investments in life and livelihood, rather than in a sense of security based on violence.”

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With a Brethren Voice

By Jordan Blevins

I want to thank you for bringing a Brethren voice to Washington, D.C, and our priorities as a country over the last year and a half through partnering with the work of Peace Witness Ministries. Through your work, we have expressed the witness of the Church of the Brethren that our federal budget should reflect investments in life and livelihood, rather than in a sense of security based on violence. We have called for a peaceful transition for the people of Afghanistan, and spoken out against the rising specter of

war with Iran. We have called for the United States to show leadership in combating global climate change, and spoken out against mountaintop removal mining. We have stood alongside those on the margins of society, and advocated for a government that cares for those who are struggling to survive. Throughout the last year and a half you have contacted your members of Congress and the Obama Administration more than 700 times, and brought a Brethren voice to the public policy of our nation.

You have also acted in your communities. Many of you par-

ticipated in the Food Stamp Challenge this fall, bringing attention to the plight of those forced to survive on nothing but that. As the conversation heated up around the federal budget, I felt your support as I knelt in prayer in the Capitol Rotunda, ultimately resulting in my arrest, and watched you act yourselves, as you hosted prayer vigils across the country. I got to experience your passion as you came to DC for Christian Citizenship Seminar, Ecumenical Advocacy Days, Bread for the World’s conference, CARE’s gathering, and other opportu-

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Welcoming Nate Hosler

By Nate Hosler

After finishing undergraduate and graduate studies in Bible and International Relations, my wife, Jenn and I went to work for two years with the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria (Ekklesiyar Yan’uwa a Nigeria). We were “peace and reconciliation workers and teachers.” Recently, after hearing about this work, an Australian fellow whom we met in Thailand asked, “So what is your profession?”—While peace is again my work, I firmly believe that the work of

peace cannot be left to those who have “peace” in their job title but that it is the call of all those who follow the way of Jesus. I hope to help the church be the church in its call to witness to the peace of Christ. This call to live peace means that we seek to live and work together as Christians and that we engage the world in order to bring peace in the world.



Other than peacework and Jenn, my wife of almost six years, my strongest interests are reading and running. For

Advocating for Justice with Native Americans

By Jonathan Stauffer

Native Americans are a proud and perplexed people. They hold deep cultural understandings and traditions that shape their worldview. They also faced struggles from displacement, economic hardship, and strained government relations. In America today, 4.3 million people identify themselves as American Indian or Alaskan Native which represents 1.5% of the U.S. population. There are 565 federally-recognized American Indian tribes which interact with our federal government and some tribal members are also considered U.S. citizens for their service to our country.

On January 31, the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) held a [policy briefing](#) on American Indian affairs. FCNL seeks to honor William Penn's commitment to live peaceably with Native Americans by maintaining a policy office for issues that affect tribal communities. Three presentations were offered:

“Energy Development in Indian Territory” with Chris Fluer, House National Resources Committee

“Native American Religious Freedom” with Josh Petre, Senate Commission on Indian Affairs

“Poverty and Economic Development in Indian Country” with Amber Ebarb and Leslie Wheelock, National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) Policy Research Center

Chris Fluer from the National Resources Committee spoke on obstacles apparent in energy development on tribal lands. The U.S. government holds around 56 million acres in trust for exclusive use of many federally-recognized tribes, but requires federal approval to be developed. When these communities decide to build a development project they must apply first through the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) before going to other federal departments that states would normally apply to directly. According to Fluer, the majority of problems occur in BIA because they are concerned more with protecting American taxpayers from risk than economic development that benefits the local tribe.

Fluer says one solution being considered is changing laws that allow more tribal sovereignty in obtaining and regulating the land trust for development uses. Some tribes, like the Navajo, are subject to trust regulations that require development proposals through the federal government process. Other tribes, such as the Seneca, do not have trust agreements with the federal government and have more sovereignty over their land use.

Over rising concerns from many tribal groups, NRC Chairman Rep. Don Young (AK) introduced in November H.R. 3532, American Indian Empowerment Act of 2011. The bill would allow feder-

ally recognized tribes to take land out of federal jurisdiction and be regulated under tribal laws. There are still some minor details to be worked out, but the general idea is helping both Indian tribes and the federal government work toward regulations that better serve both groups.

Another obstacle occurs from issues on cultural identity and religious freedom. Josh Petre spoke about several actions that the Senate Commission on Indian Affairs has taken to improve U.S.A and American Indian relations. First, a hearing brought together American Indian leaders, actors, professionals, and athletes who shared how their youth are being affected by negative cultural stereotypes. A second hearing dealt with the religious freedom of native cultures by addressing enforcement of two standing pieces of legislation: the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) and the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI). Both NAGPRA and NAMI set rules for returning possession of artifacts and sacred lands to the original tribes. An ongoing discussion is how to appropriately expand and enforce the definition of “Native American” to best serve federally-recognized tribal groups. You can follow these and other issues at the [Senate Commission for Indian Affairs](#) website.

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Our 1994 Annual Conference Statement [Community: A tribe of many feathers](#) reads:

“In relating to Native Americans and to other indigenous people who are not members of the church, we are to extend the same respect and love that Christians offer to all people. We must seek ways to be in relationship with these individuals and communities, with a willingness to serve and be served, as well as to speak the truth as we understand it while respecting their understanding of the truth.

The scriptures also call us to work alongside indigenous people to seek justice and peace on their behalf, as they are among those on our planet whose lives and cultures are most in jeopardy. The church has an obligation to join with them to protect their human and political rights, their cultural expressions, their claims to land, and their religious freedom, at any point that such efforts are in keeping with the purposes of God for human life.”

Church of the Brethren and Native Americans



- Colonial Times: Brethren in Colonial America. Donald F. Durnbaugh
- Western Migration: Brethren in A New Nation. Roger Sappington
- 1952: Lybrook Navajo Mission in New Mexico established. Members of the Tok'ahookaadi' fellowship have participated in denominational youth programming and in Annual Conference
- 1994: Annual Conference Statement "Community: A tribe of many feathers"
- 2009: Lybrook Community Ministries, Inc. formed out of the Lybrook Navajo mission to improve operations and works with Tókàhookaadi' Church of the Brethren to carry the vision forward.

More on the Lybrook Community and Tókàhookaadi' congregation can be found online at <http://lybrookcommunity.org>



Ecumenical Advocacy Days

For Global Peace With Justice



March 23-26 2012

“Is this the Fast I Seek?” The Federal Budget, Livelihood, and Our National Priorities

Isaiah 58:1-12

Plan to join hundreds of other Christians in DC for a weekend of education, worship, and advocacy.

[Register now!](#)

Navigating The Corridors Of Power

By Rev. Paul Munday

'Potomac fever' is intoxicating, very much alive in Washington, D.C. Frankly, I enjoy it, since my notion of a great time is surfing three channels of C-Span! And so, when an opportunity to attend the National Prayer Breakfast (NPB) materialized about 10 years ago, I grabbed it; I've been attending, yearly, ever since.

Ironically, the initial invitation to attend such a rarified event came from Rickey Bolden, a Brethren Church pastor, 'starting up' an outreach ('859'), to poverty stricken youth in Washington, D.C. Wanting my support, and the support of the Frederick Church of the Brethren, Rickey invited me to meet others from the International Foundation, the parent group for '859' -- and -- the National Prayer Breakfast. Seems the National Prayer Breakfast is the International Foundation's 'annual conference' -- gathering thousands yearly, to support their 300+ social service/justice ministries around the world.

But not without controversy. Commonly referred to as 'The Family,' the International Foundation has been the subject of at least two books calling into question its motives, ethics and credibility. The validity of those critiques is a subject for another essay but whatever its shortcomings, the International Foundation has attempted much good, in a most unique fashion. For starters, it is a largely a lay movement, striving to cut-through ecclesiastical bureaucracy, returning to the simple message of Jesus. Secondly, it intentionally seeks out the rich and powerful, calling them to serve the poor and power-less. Thirdly, it speaks truth to power, attempting to disturb the established equilibrium of influential people.



Photo: whitehouse.gov

Now in all candor, 'The Family' appears to be a largely 'Republican,' conservative movement. But there are notable exceptions such as the counter-cultural voice of Tony Hall, a former democratic representative from Ohio, challenging the rich and powerful to give more to world hunger initiatives. Or the prophetic voice of Barbara Skinner Williams, challenging 'Potomac fever' folk to relate to the inner-city and the poor.

The 'challenge' of 'The Family' is most visible each year at the National Prayer Breakfast itself -- as the organizers of the breakfast, intentionally 'mix-up' the seating around each table. Every other event in the main ballroom of the Washington Hilton (the location of the NPB) is carefully orchestrated to match the established protocol and 'pecking order' of Washington, D.C. The National Prayer Breakfast punctures the 'pecking order' intentionally seating inner city youth (yes, they're at the NPB) beside congressmen; 'poor in wealth' internationals (a major emphasis of the NPB is

global outreach) beside ambassadors.

And so, 'all and all,' the National Prayer Breakfast is a powerful event, filled with powerful people, challenged to use their power, for the betterment of the power-less. Sure the NPB looks contrary to that intent, but my decade-long experience of attending the NPB confirms that intent. Whether it was Bono, NPB's 2006 speaker, challenging the powerful to support tithing 10% of the federal budget to the poor -- or Eric Metaxas NPB's 2012 speaker, challenging the powerful to leave 'dead religion' and pursue courageous faith-acts, such as those of Bonhoeffer and Wilberforce -- there's prophetic intent at the National Prayer Breakfast. Yes, many who attend are never convinced; they continue their lives of consumption and privilege. But many who attend go beyond 'Potomac fever' toward a new passion and purpose -- rooted in Jesus.



The People's Prayer Breakfast

By Jordan Blevins

For decades in Washington, DC, there has been an event called the National Prayer Breakfast – where clergy, government officials, celebrities, and many other people of faith come together to share in a time of fellowship and prayer for the work that they do. However, there was a sense this year that there was an important population that may not be represented at the National Prayer Breakfast, and that it was important to join in praying with them and in their voice as well.

It was out of this spirit, building off of the Occupy movement, that the Peoples Prayer Breakfast was launched – praying that we would recognize and work so that there is enough for all. Sweet Honey In the Rock's Dr. Ysaye Barnwell sang, "I woke up this morning with my mind set on justice...", and it was this message that united all the people in that room – from members of the Occupy movement, to DC area clergy, to staff of denominational offices, to members of Congress, to folks struggling with hunger, homelessness, and poverty. In so many ways, this breakfast was an extension of the work we have been doing together – from prayer vigils on the lawn of the United Methodist Building, to action alerts supporting a just and moral budget process, to the work we do in our churches – supporting soup kitchens and homeless shelters, to my arrest this summer, kneeling to pray in the Capitol Rotunda.

"We thought prayer shouldn't be used for access to power or to move forward people's

agendas," said Brian Merritt, an organizer of the alternative breakfast who is pastor of the city's Palisades Community Church. "Prayer connects us to something greater than ourselves, but also moves us in action for those around us. It challenges us to confront others' needs ... Prayer is something people agonize over, people cry over. But it's not always something that makes those who have power feel comfortable."

The goal of the Peoples Prayer Breakfast was not to offset, or disqualify, the voices of prayer coming from the National Prayer Breakfast. But to remember that when we are praying for our nation, for our priorities, for the work that we do together, that there are more voices that must be lifted up. The call was simply that we must ensure there is "enough for all." The room was decorated with artwork and placards calling for basic dignities for all, reminding us of the things that "everybody needs" — a warm bed, a decent education, clean water, a roof over one's head.

These are prayers that are not the exclusive domain of the Peoples Prayer Breakfast – it would be my prayer that it is also what is being lifted up at the National Prayer Breakfast. And it is amazing to think what we might do when we are all praying together.

For Brethren interested in EAD, the Offering of Letters or wishing to apply for the full scholarships available, contact Jordan Blevins in the Peace Witness office at JBlevins@brethren.org



[Hunger Justice Leaders 2012: From the Pulpit to the Public Square](#)

June 9-12, 2012
Washington, DC

Participants will explore the biblical foundations of anti-hunger advocacy, gain skills in advocacy and community organizing, connect with like-minded ministers from across the United States, speak out on Capitol Hill, and lead advocacy efforts back home.

The registration deadline is March 15. Visit the [applications and scholarships](#) page to apply.

Please send any questions to hjl2012@bread.org.



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Dominican Republic: July 12-22

Denali/Kenai Fjords: August 2-9

Arctic Village: August 9-17

The 2011 Annual Conference in Grand Rapids, Michigan adopted a Query "Guidance for Responding to the Changing of Earth's Climate".

The Peace Witness Ministries office of the Church of the Brethren is conducting a Listening Session at Annual Conference on what members feel about two points the Query raises:

- The position of Annual Conference on Climate Change
- How we as individuals, congregations, and a denomination are taking concrete actions to live more responsibly and offer leadership in our communities and nation.

We want to hear your thoughts on the query. Please send your comments to: jstauffer@brethren.org

(Continued from page 2)

Amber Ebarb and Leslie Wheelock from the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) Policy Research Center spoke on various bills that seek to improve economic development and justice for American Indians. This final presentation of the FNCL briefing highlighted that tribal communities experience poverty at a higher proportion than most other populations in our country. Ebarb explains this has been due to "lack of respect of tribal sovereignty by federal government, lack of promises of trust funds, lack of resources to take care of their people, and attacks on tribal identity."

With impoverished conditions often comes social injustice. For example, FCNL cites that more than 1/3 of Native American women will be raped in their lifetime. Wheelock spoke on a particular section of the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act

(VAWA), called SAVE Native Women Act, which includes legislation that would help protect women on tribal lands by extending grants to victim support programs and giving further jurisdiction to tribal governments. VAWA (S.1925) was slated on the Senate Legislative Calendar February 7, 2012. While American Indians have more representation and opportunities than in the past, there still remain barriers within our federal government for tribes to receive justice and better themselves.

As the Church of the Brethren is seeking to expand its body multiculturally, we need to keep the needs of Native American and other indigenous cultures in our prayers before God. We also need to be open to learning more about American Indian cultures and building trust so that we can be as Christ in advocating for their needs.

More information on Native American issues from FCNL can be found online at <http://fcnl.org/issues/nativeam/>

nities for you to visit Washington, D.C., bringing your Brethren voice with you. *Jordan continued*

Over the last year and a half I have been incredibly blessed to watch you, as the church, embody the spirit of our 1977 Annual Conference statement "Justice and Nonviolence", when it reads, "We cannot retreat from the world. We are to move from where we are to where God's power and purpose have begun to define new possibilities and new necessities. We must become aware of the rampant injustice and subtle hidden violence in today's world, examine our own involvement, and identify non-violently with the oppressed and suffering." And you have made a difference. We have kept the Obama Administration to its timetable of a 2013 withdrawal from Afghanistan, and held them to the promise of ending the war in Iraq. We have blocked the Keystone Pipeline from being built, and pushed our country toward a more sustainable future. And we have helped inject our national conversation with the ideal of standing with those who are the most vulnerable, living in poverty and on the margins of our society.

And I can't wait to see the work that you will continue to do with Peace Witness Ministries, and the different ways you will find to bring a Brethren voice to the conversations we are having together as a nation. I hope to see many of you in Washington next month at Ecumenical Advocacy Days, but also know the coming year will provide many, many opportunities for you to bring the values of the Church of the Brethren as we engage in a national conversation around our priorities. I cannot wait to see how you, as the church, continue to embody the spirit of our tagline, and call people toward a vision of a world existing "peacefully, simply, together", and seeking "another way of living."

Nate continued...

running I prefer that the distances be long. For the reading I prefer that it be something that I find interesting, which at any point may include a fair number of topics. In the way that running long takes patience and reading shows connections between topics not typically connected, I pray that we will have the patience to do the slow work of peace and the curiosity and creativity to find the way of peace.



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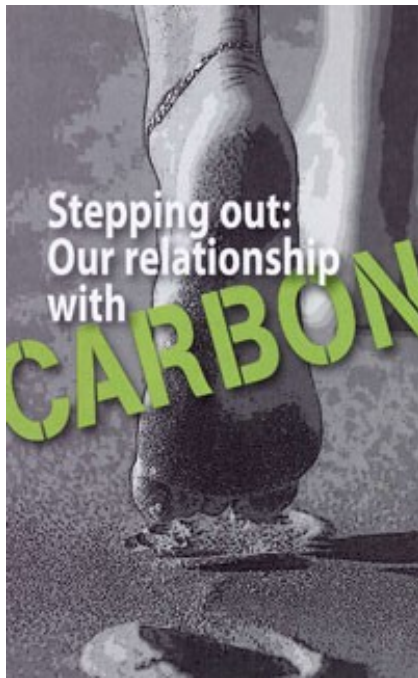
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