

Consistent Life News

An international network for peace, justice and life



Issue #8

December 2007

20 Years of Consistent Life *by Carol Crossed*

Twenty years ago, March 1987, Consistent Life was born. Patti Narciso and Scott Rains, directors of ProLifers for Survival, affectionately called PS, were the spiritual parents of what was to become and is today, the consistent life ethic movement.

It began as The Seamless Garment Network. Former PS coordinator Mary Rider returned from graduate school to help Scott and Patti, and about 25 people were invited to Chapel Hill, North Carolina, compliments of a LifeWorks grant. The purpose of the gathering was to determine the fate of ProLifers for Survival, an organization that connected the issues of war and abortion. The inspiration for PS had grown out of the discord of single issue politics at a conference of Mobilization for Survival in Washington DC in 1980. MfS was an anti-nuclear war network of more than 65 organizations which was unable to agree on PS becoming a member group.

I still do not know who gave the LifeWorks grant. So being on the Chapel Hill invitation list was like being in an Agatha Christi novel. I heard that Rachel MacNair was invited and that's all it took for me to mark the 3 days on my calendar. She was an heretofore affinity mate, albeit an anonymous one, from my first experience with her writings about how feminism and abortion rights was a disconnect.

I discovered other luminaries in the peace and justice movement that weekend: Fr. Joseph Nangle, the missionary from Peru who had introduced me to liberation theology in the late 70's; Ken Maher, a Quaker and conscientious objector; Mary Meehan, anti-Vietnam War activist and author; Catherine Holderread Passmore, Mennonite and film producer; Andy Lipscomb, leader with the Committee of Southern Churchmen. Andy, in his thick Georgia drawl, kept saying profound things, like 'PS is a keeper'. Juli Loesch, founder of PS, kept us laughing with stories about how she hosted anti-war discussion groups which she called nuclear Tupperware® parties.

What began as an intimidating experience for me, ended as a bonding of brothers and sisters who reached down inside my soul and brought up a vision so powerful that my life would never be the same. I was not changed. It's just that they exposed for me who I was all along and said that was okay.

It wasn't until we were about ready to go home that The Seamless Garment Network was birthed. The 2 days of discussion were the labor pains necessary for us to realize that it wasn't enough to be only against the violence of war and abortion, but we needed to expand into the issues of economic injustice, capital punishment, the arms race, and euthanasia. Just like you can look at a child and know its name, we knew our name with not a vote, but with a burst of applause: The Seamless Garment Network. We wrapped ourselves into the cloak of seamlessness, embracing a holistic ethic without political fragmentation or ideological division.

We added racism to our mission in 1993, in response to Rodney King and racial violence. And in 2002, we changed our name to Consistent Life: a Network of Peace, Justice and Life. It was more than our not wanting to answer those numerous solicitations to the Garment Workers Union of America. The name change unraveled the complexities of maneuvering an explanation about symbolism to explain our identity.

We were not and are not a symbol. Today we are 200 organizations that live and breathe connectedness. We give groups and individuals permission to come out of the stereotypical shadow of partisanship. We allow them to come into the light of social wholeness.

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Opposing Torture

*By Rose Evans &
Rachel MacNair*



Consistent Life, an organization that exists to protect all human life, strongly opposes the use of torture by anyone, anywhere. This is currently a major aspect of the war in Iraq. It is in the same mindset as the death penalty, and the racism involved in the practice has been clear throughout recent history.

We note that our founding fathers here in the United States so loathed torture that they included in the Bill of Rights of our Constitution, Article VIII, "nor cruel or unusual punishments inflicted."

However, today torture is used by our government's military and intelligence organizations. Many persons high up in our government and in our universities support the use of torture. Our Vice-President, in a radio interview, said that subjecting prisoners to "a dunk in water" [waterboarding] was a "no-brainer" for him. The PENS Task Force of the American Psychological Association (APA) was

appointed to assess the ethics of psychologists' participation in these harsh techniques. Six of its 9 members were from military and intelligence agencies, and three of those were in the chain of command over the practices (see <http://tinyurl.com/2soayk>). The outcome of this task force has outraged many APA members, and Consistent Life helped publicize a rally by Psychologists for an Ethical APA on August 17. (As all violence is connected, we fear a similar white-washing outcome in the report of the Task Force on Mental Health and Abortion, due out in 2008).

The photos that came from Abu Ghraib prison would be no surprise to people familiar with the Stanford Prison Experiment (see <http://www.prisonexp.org>) which showed the psychology of how prison situations can disintegrate into such madhouses. The addition of prisons being in a war-time situation is bound to bring about such abuses.

The use and the justification of torture are a great evil.

We urge our friends and supporters to be active by contacting representatives and supporting the many fine organizations that have sprung up to oppose torture. A few of these are:

Torture Abolition and
Survivors Support Coalition
International (TASSC)
4121 Harewood Road NE,
Suite B
Washington, DC 20017
202-529-2991
info@tassc.org
www.tassc.org

Human Rights First
333 Seventh Ave., 13th Floor
New York, NY 10001-5108
212-845-5200
feedback@humanrightsfirst.org
www.humanrightsfirst.org

National Religious Campaign
Against Torture
c/o CCTPP
4500 Massachusetts Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20016
202-885-8648
campaign@nrca.org
<http://www.nrca.org/>

Friends Committee on National
Legislation
245 Second St., NE
Washington DC 20002-5795
202-547-6000
civil-liberties@fcn.org
<http://www.fcnl.org/torture>

International Federation of
Action by Christians for the
Abolition of Torture
27, rue de Maubeuge
75009 Paris - France
Phone: +33 (0)1 42 80 01 60
mj.cocher@fiacat.org
<http://www.fiacat.org/en/>



What Supporters Are Doing

Jubilee USA, with which several of our member groups are affiliated, held a Cancel Debt Fast September 7-October 15, followed by a Global Week of Action. The campaign is for debt cancellation for poor countries and an end to global poverty. People committed to fast for one day or more. Go to <http://www.canceldebtfast.org/> for more information.

Every year, there is a vigil and nonviolent direct action at Fort Benning, Georgia, calling for the closing of the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, originally called the School of the Americas. This school run by the American military has trained Latin Americans

responsible for much of the oppression, political murders and torture which has occurred in that region in recent decades. This year's action was November 16-18. There is also an action in Los Angeles on January 12, 2008. Go to <http://www.soaw.org/> for more information.

Supporters in the Society of Friends (Quakers) have crystallized their informal network into a loose organization called Friends Witness for a Prolife Peace Testimony (FWPPT). This group has joined Consistent Life and co-sponsored Consistent Life's ad series in *Friends Journal*. Contact FWPPT at 811 E. 47th St.,

Kansas City, MO 64110, 816-753-7741,
admin@prolifequakers.org,
<http://www.prolifequakers.org>

Our endorser Brian D. McLaren has a new book, *Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope*, released on October 2. This call for a radical change in society is not just a book, but an effort to organize people to explore their role in bringing about change. Small groups are asked to meet over the coming months in a FirstShift Experience. Then between February and May of 2008, regional events – the Everything Must Change Tour – will be held on weekends in 11 cities. See <http://deepshift.org/> for more information.

Time to Get a Little More Weighty

By Rachel MacNair

We've done many ad campaigns in the past, using our mission statement and a list of impressive endorsers, selecting whichever of our many signatories would be most notable to the readers of that specific publication. Now we're thinking it's time to put more substance into the ads – to do a three-part series in the same magazine, with full-page ads that explain the case for the consistent life ethic.

We'll do this in both directions – explaining pro-life principles to peace and justice people, and explaining peace principles in pro-life publications. The first set has now appeared in *Friends Journal*, a major Quaker magazine, with the co-sponsorship of Friends Witness for a Prolife Peace Testimony. The topics are:

Part 1 - Reflections on Abortion and Pacifist Principles

Part 2 - The Failed Experiment: Abortion and Women's Rights, Poverty, and Racism

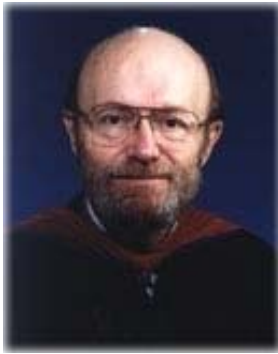
Part 3 - The Impact of the Abortion Debate on Peace Movement Goals

Placing all three full-page ads cost just under \$2,000. We welcome all contributions designated to go to this project. If contributions greater than the amount needed for *Friends Journal* come in, they will go toward the next magazine we select.

The text of the ads is available on our Web site.



Christian Ethicist Glen Stassen Endorses Consistent Life



Glen Howard Stassen recently endorsed the Mission Statement of Consistent Life. Stassen is Lewis B. Smedes Professor of Christian Ethics at Fuller Theological Seminary, and a well-known Baptist theologian.

Among the books he has written or edited are *Just*

Peacemaking: Ten Practices for Abolishing War, Capital Punishment: A Reader, Just Peacemaking: Transforming Initiatives for Justice and Peace, Journey into Peacemaking, and Authentic Transformation: A New Vision of Christ and Culture (with John Howard Yoder and Diane Yeager).

Stassen is a contributor to *Sojourners Magazine*. He also has written articles for many other publications, including the *Journal of Religious Ethics*, *The Christian Century*, *Christianity and Crisis*, *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*, and *Journal of Biblical*

Literature.

For Stassen, the consistent life ethic is both the embodiment of Christian ethics and a personal journey:

I am consistently pro-life. My son David is one witness. For my family, “pro-life” is personal. My wife caught rubella in the eighth week of her pregnancy. We decided not to terminate, to love and raise our baby. David is legally blind and severely handicapped; he also is a blessing to us and to the world.

Ross Heckmann Joins CL Board



Ross S. Heckmann was elected to the Consistent Life Board at the October Board Meeting. Ross is an attorney with his own practice in Arcadia, California. Ross has long been active in the pro-life movement. He has worked with pregnancy centers and to stop Planned Parenthood from starting a new facility in his area. He currently serves as President of both California Democrats for Life and Californians Against Planned Parenthood. More recently, Ross has also become active in peace work. He helped to start a monthly peace vigil in Monrovia, and is involved in the Foothills Peace Coalition.

At the same Board meeting, incumbent Board members Carol Crossed, Rose Evans and Rachel MacNair were re-elected to new three-year terms.

Speakers List

We have re-established a Consistent Life Speakers List. This includes a number of people committed to the consistent life ethic, including several Board members. Our goal is to have a list which includes people who appeal to different constituencies, come from a variety of perspectives, and are widely scattered geographically. The Speakers List can be found on the Web at <http://www.consistent-life.org/speakers.html>.

We would like to expand the list. If you feel you could do some speaking related to the consistent life ethic, email Bill Samuel at president@consistent-life.org with the same kind of information that is provided for current speakers, and some information about your commitment to the consistent life ethic. Also contact us if you know of other speakers we might invite to join the list.



FREE THE PRISONERS OF CARPENTER HALL!

By Rachel MacNair

It was the mid-1970s, and we peace activist students at my Quaker college (Earlham) contemplated this conundrum: for the community auction, the whole student body would vote on three organizations to divide the money raised, but because the votes for controversial social-justice groups were divided among so many groups, they never won. We decided we needed to select one such organization, and find some way to communicate it to people. We selected Amnesty International, and the activity was to announce that the main classroom building, Carpenter Hall, had political prisoners and we were holding a demonstration to free them. With announcements over the balcony into the cafeteria and signs all over to publicize it, we held a fine demonstration, and a fun one too, since the prisoners were fictitious and therefore not nearly as distressing as real ones. The plan worked. Amnesty International got its one-third share of the money raised. It was a very satisfying project.

So while AI records only showed my membership going back to 1985, my activities with them are clearly much older than that.

It was therefore a great sense of betrayal and disbelief when they started discussing a position on abortion that would treat it as something that government should ensure access to in some cases and decriminalize in all cases. I know people that are still struggling to believe that this has actually happened.

I went to the annual meeting of the U.S. chapter last March. I spoke at a town hall meeting with the Board of Directors, and hand-delivered the content of Consistent Life's petition to each one. I spoke at length to someone on the international committee making the decision. I attended the workshop on the policy, at which it was made clear that it really was a done deal and debating it was not to be allowed. When I tried leafleting at a plenary, a staff person told me I could not. When I asked her if I was being censored, she said, and I quote, "yes."

This was after Consistent Life also had a contingent at their Midwest conference. From this experience, we can report that not only has AI taken a position contrary to its advocacy for human rights, but its statement that there was widespread consultation was a fiction. It's not just the abortion position itself that's a problem; it's that the decision-making process was as elegant a case of railroading as I've personally witnessed.

The national membership office in the U.S. has, however, said that they are keeping track of how many members and supporters they are losing over this issue. Anyone who wishes to communicate to them can contact 212-807-8400, and ask for the membership department.

Meanwhile, there are other organizations (some of them listed in the Opposing Torture article in this issue) to which money can go so that it is still available for the cause. It would be a good idea for those who

choose to send them donations that used to go to AI to include a note saying why you're doing so. The more it's clear to these groups that they have a constituency who would be upset, the less likely they will be to drift into that slippery slope.

From our research arm -- Institute for Integrated Social Analysis

By Rachel MacNair, Director

◆ Praeger Publishers has accepted for publication the consistent life anthology co-edited by Stephen Zunes and me. They changed the title to *Consistently Opposing Killing: From Abortion to Assisted Suicide, the Death Penalty and War*. We do not have a publication date yet.

◆ We have a set of short pieces designed for an international audience that we want to get translated into various languages for our web page. In addition to translators, we have found several places on the web that will translate into an admirable array of languages – plug in the original, and instant translation comes out. These are terrible translations, of course, and would be embarrassing to use, but if someone who knows the language could just look them over and fix them to sound like people really talk, then that would still be easier than translating it from scratch. If you or anyone you know can help out on this, let me know – email drmacnair@hotmail.com, phone 816-753-2057, Central Time.



President's Corner

On June 20, Democrats for Life of America, a Consistent Life member group, held their annual conference. This year, their theme was the consistent life ethic. They asked me to make some introductory remarks. -Bill Samuel

I am completely convinced that life issues are inherently related to each other. And I believe this includes institutional violence represented by such things as racism and exploitative economic systems as well as abortion, war and the death penalty. Respect for human life and dignity needs to be across the board, not selective. The means we use to an ostensible end are critical. One can not achieve a good end by using evil means. One can only justify violence if one assumes, whether explicitly or implicitly, that violence is redemptive. But it is not. Remember that World War I was the "war to end all wars." The history of wars since reaffirms that violence produces more violence in an endless cycle unless societies are willing to learn from this history and change course.

You can not solve problems in a marriage by beating your spouse. You don't really address the problems of a pregnant woman in desperate circumstances by killing her unborn baby. You can't defeat terrorism by using terrorist-like tactics against terrorists. You can't show that killing is wrong by killing a murderer. Violence



will never address the roots of social problems.

Back in the 1960's, H. Rap Brown got a lot of attention with his statement that "Violence is as American as apple pie." His statement was absolutely correct. Unfortunately, he used that statement as a basis for those representing the oppressed using violence since the oppressors do. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. also understood the American habit of violence. But his response recognized that this needed to change and that means needed to be consistent with the desired ends. Therefore he used transformative nonviolence to achieve positive social change. Dr. King also understood the connections among issues, and refused to accept the criticism that his mission was civil rights, and he should not sully the issue by speaking out on such other life and dignity issues as poverty and war. Dr. King's insistence on connecting the issues may have been key in his martyrdom. We should honor his legacy by insisting on a consistent, life-affirming approach in dealing with all social issues.

The American history of addiction to violence includes many aspects. We have a two century history of wars of

aggression and oppression, seeking to extend our territory through military conquest and repeatedly intervening with American troops to thwart the will of the people in other countries when we thought American economic interests were threatened. We engaged in genocide against native Americans, and treated those from Africa as mere property. We have been one of the major users of the death penalty, which the record of knowingly prosecuting innocent people indicates is at least as much ritual sacrifice as a misguided attempt at justice. We have a high abortion rate, and fewer restrictions on abortion than most other countries. Despite being one of the world's wealthiest countries, we have an economic system which results in many being mired in the institutional violence of poverty.

Yes, there are good things about American history and society as well. But we must confess where we have gone wrong and are continuing to do so, and have the courage to move in a different direction. The United States is effectively an empire, with literally hundreds of major military bases scattered all across the globe. History demonstrates that all empires fall, and unless the U.S. changes course and voluntarily gives up the drive for world domination, it will fall too.

The bankruptcy of American politics is demonstrated by the



fact that the Democratic Presidential candidates in the so-called "top tier" all favor unlimited abortions, a larger standing military force, a larger military budget, a readiness to project American military power, and the death penalty. They sound better on poverty, but they are beholden to monied interests for their campaign dollars, and their support of a bloated military budget means the funds to really address social problems will not be available. Former President Eisenhower was right when he said over a half century ago,

Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who

hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed.

When you exclude entitlement programs, most of which have their own financing, you find that military spending is over half of the controllable portion of the United States budget. Further, the United States spends more on the military than all other nations combined. If we are to be truly pro-life, we must firmly reject the priority given to wars and preparations for wars.

The call to us remains as it was to the Israelites centuries ago,

This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against

you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live (Deuteronomy 30:19)

We need a transformative politics that turns America from its addiction to violence to policies that affirm human life and dignity. We need to stop killing not only the unborn, but also our alleged enemies, along with even more civilians who are "collateral damage," and criminal offenders. And we need to address the institutional violence represented by such social conditions as racism and poverty amidst plenty.

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Return Coupon

We rely on your donations to help fund the work we do, so please be generous.

Name: _____
(Organization and Contact Person or Individual member)

Address: _____

Phone Number(s): () _____ Fax: () _____

E-Mail Address _____

Organizational Member Dues

- \$50 Groups under 100 members
- \$100 Groups 100-500 Members
- \$200 Groups over 500 members
- \$ ____ For communities living in voluntary poverty (whatever can be given)

\$ ____ Additional donation for ads project.

\$ ____ Pledge in addition to Consistent Life Dues ____ monthly ____ quarterly ____ annually

Donations and membership fees to Consistent Life are tax deductible in the United States.

Individual Member Dues

- \$25 Individual Members
- \$40 Household Membership
- \$75 Supporter
- \$100 Patron
- \$15 Low income membership

\$ ____ Additional donation for general support.

Send to: **Consistent Life, P.O. Box 9295, Silver Spring MD 20919-9295**

Voice Mail (641) 985-5700, Access Code 631061# Fax (603) 908-0730

http://www.consistent-life.org/ E-mail: President@consistent-life.org



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Unfortunately, when public figures like Jesse Jackson and Dennis Kucinich who have stood for something at least close to the consistent life ethic decide to enter a Democratic Presidential race they generally feel that they can only get the funds needed to run a campaign by pandering to the “pro-choice” groups. Therefore they do a 180° turn on abortion. But experience shows that this replacement of principle with ambition has not brought political success for these politicians. I hope Democrats for Life can have the effect of strengthening the positions of politicians who favor life across the spectrum of issues.

Treasurer Needed

We currently have a vacancy in the position of Treasurer of Consistent Life. The Treasurer oversees all financial operations of the organization, and makes regular financial reports. Currently we contract out the day-to-day work of receiving and recording contributions, while at some points in our history that has been done by the Treasurer. We are flexible about how that is handled in the future, and it will depend in large part upon the time the new Treasurer is able to commit to this position.

The Treasurer is an officer of Consistent Life, and therefore serves on the Board and the Executive Committee. Officers and Board members serve without financial compensation, but the organization will pay for out-of-pocket expenses related to doing the organization’s work.

If interested in possibly serving as Treasurer, please contact President Bill Samuel at president@consistent-life.org, phone 301-946-7735 (home) or 301-943-6406 (cell).



**P.O. Box 9295
Silver Spring, MD 20916-9295**

Return Service Requested