

RPECnews

The newsletter of the Richmond Peace Education Center

September-October 2015



Alice Rothchild

Jewish Advocate Stirring Dialog On Palestine

For three days, October 18-20, Dr. Alice Rothchild, a Jewish advocate for the rights of Palestinians in the Holy Land, will be in Richmond for a series of appearances organized by Richmonders for Peace in Israel and Palestine (RPIP). The events are also sponsored by the Richmond Peace Education Center (RPEC).

Dr. Rothchild will address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from the vantage points of her triple career as physician, author and filmmaker.

On Sunday, Oct. 18, she will show her documentary film, "Voices Across the Divide," telling the stories of Palestinians as told to her. The showing will be at 6 p.m. at the

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RPEC Speaks Up For Iran Nuclear Pact

By Rob Gabriele

"The issue of our generation" is the term given by many commentators as well as ordinary citizens to the agreement negotiated between Iran and five world powers led by the United States to delay if not deny Iran's quest for nuclear weapons. And it may well be that, coming as it has after eight years of unilateral – and failed – use by the Bush Administration of military force as the only way to solve international problems.

Although President Obama has been quite disappointing in his continuance of many Bush "war on ter-

ror" policies, he has at least had the good sense and moral compass to negotiate a deal with a problematic state labelled as our "enemy" to limit the spread of nuclear weapons.

RPEC has been very active in advocating for the deal's acceptance. A letter supporting the deal signed by 130 RPEC members was delivered to our Senators and Congressmen. And a delegation of RPEC members met in person with a member of Senator Warner's staff to urge the Senator to support the deal – which he did after

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John Moeser — Provocative Peacemaker

For someone hailed as a peacemaker, "I've made a lot of people angry, particularly those in high places," John Moeser told RPEC



John Moeser

members as he accepted the Center's award of Peacemaker of the Year for 2015.

"So much of what I've said, written, and done over the course of my life since Sharon and I moved to Richmond in 1971 has led to anything but peacemaking," Moeser said in his remarks at RPEC's annual meeting and dinner on June 4.

"I've been in the audience during two public forums when the same high ranking county official lamented the awful job we do welcoming new corporate executives to Richmond, illustrating it by how one speaker at a program for new business leaders talked about racial conflict and the lack of cooperation between the city and the counties.

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Reflection

Adria Scharf
RPEC Executive Director

Strategic Plans

The Peace Center board and staff have just completed a strategic planning process. We worked with consultant Sarah Milston of Sparkmill and received support for the process from Flashpoint Fund and The Wonder Fund of The Community Foundation. Our goal was to create a cohesive view of RPEC's future. We wanted the staff and board to have a shared understanding of the Center's direction, and a roadmap for how to get there, as well as some prioritization of programs.

Through this year's Strategic Planning process, the staff and board have clarified a vision for the Peace Center for the next four years: through 2019.

The Strategic Plan is a "living document," and the Peace Center will always remain responsive to urgent developments and community needs. The plan, however, will ensure that we are all moving together toward shared goals and that we make traction in our efforts at community change. Over the next four years, our four strategic goals are as follows:

Empowering Individuals through Education -- Expand programming to equip individuals with knowledge, skills, and abilities so they can build justice and peace in their own communities.

Advocacy and Action -- Increase collective action in Richmond for justice and peace.

Partner Strategically -- Form and enhance alliances strategically with partners to effect change.

Operational Excellence -- Continue on a path of operational excellence by investing in resources, skill development and technology to support the Center's capacity to fulfill its mission; strengthen fundraising, communications, storytelling, staff and board development, and office infrastructure.

Within each of these strategic goals we've laid out numerous specific goals, tactics, and actions, with deadlines. The plan establishes youth as our top program priority for this coming year (2016): "Empower teenagers to teach other youth healthy ways to resolve conflict and work for a more peaceful community (through the planned 2016 RYPP expansion)."

Key audiences for RPEC programs and communications over the next four years include: Those who share our values of peace, justice and inclusion who are not yet aligned with RPEC; Youth and those who work with them; Those who are already involved with RPEC.

This exciting strategic plan will necessitate some reorganization over the course of the next year...in addition we plan to seek capacity-building funding to enable us to better support and staff our strategic direction. We will continue to require the support of our members and volunteers. We believe this plan will enable the Peace Center to deepen and strengthen its work to build just, peaceful and inclusive communities in the Richmond region.

The full strategic plan is available upon request.

RPEC Auction Opens 'Gateway to Adventure'

RPEC's "Gateway to Adventure," otherwise known as the annual auction, is fast approaching. There's no better way that I know of to perk up our workaday lives with unique experiences, adventures, art, learning, and fun, while at the same time supporting RPEC's work for peace, non-violence, and justice.

Remember, ticket sales cover the costs of the auction so every dollar raised by bidding goes directly to support RPEC's programs. Put November 7 on your calendar now, come ready to spend some dough for a great cause, and go home with an adventure or a treasure you can't get anywhere else...at least not while supporting RPEC at the same time. What a deal! Here's just a sample of what will be up for bid.

1 week at a "camp" on a private lake in the Adirondack Mountains.

Don't let that word "camp" fool you. That's what they call cabins up there. The Adirondacks is America's largest preserved wilderness area and it needs to be on everyone's bucket list. It's an indescribably beautiful northern wilderness area of mountains, forests, lakes, meadows, and wildlife. Just getting there is half the fun; but being there is the experience of a lifetime.

3 nights on the Northern Outer Banks

A favorite of the auction every year is this cottage close to the beach in Duck, NC that can sleep up to 8 people.

1 week in Spring at a condo in the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia

Also a perennial auction favorite. Close to home yet another world. Watching Spring blossom in the mountains will cure whatever ails you.

A 2 hour introductory session on scuba diving

OK, you've gone pretty much everywhere? Umm, no you haven't. Over 2/3 of this planet of ours is water and here's your chance to begin to learn how to experience that mysterious and beautiful world.

Experience Richmond from new perspectives

Adventures don't always have to be far from home. We have tickets for a 2 hour segway tour and a 2 hour historic trolley tour of our own beautiful and historic city.

Eat your way around the world

You can really do this thanks to the auction. We have culinary experiences on offer from around the world. There is a **Sudanese** dinner for 4, an **Italian** dinner, a **Persian** dinner (celebrate the passage of the Iran nuclear agreement in a unique way), an **Indian** dinner, a **Thai** dinner, and a dinner at the home with one of the best **wine cellars** in the area.

2 Spots on a James River Paddleboarding Trip

Richmond was named one of the 10 best cities in the country for outside adventure last year by Outside Magazine. And the reason is the James River. America's most historic river is right here. Don't just drive over it on bridges, float down it on a paddleboard. You'll never see Richmond the same way again.

2 hour drumming session

Have you experienced "drums not guns" at any RPEC youth event or elsewhere? It transports you somewhere you want to be more often. Our own board member, the wonderful Ram Bhagat is offering this for 10 people.

A private art tour

Join a retired associate curator of American art at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts for a private tour of American art for 6 people.

There are many more treasures that await your bid at the auction: an exquisite piece of **stained glass** hand crafted by our own Dave Depp, **2 autographed books** by the wonderful Ed Ayers, recently retired President of the University of Richmond, for you gardeners a **truckload of mulch** delivered to your home, an **acupuncture consult**, and much, much more.

When: Saturday, November 7 from 5:30-9:00

Where: The Crowne Plaza Hotel at 5th and Canal Streets in Downtown Richmond

How Much: \$45 per person or \$360 for a table of 8 which includes hors d'oeuvres, a free drink, and dinner.

Go to the RPEC website to buy your tickets. There is an auction page on the website where you can buy tickets and see what's new at the auction. Even if you can't attend you can help RPEC youth attend by buying a ticket and donating it back to RPEC. We will give donated tickets to the youth. And remember, every dollar raised from bidding goes directly to RPEC's programs.

— Rob Gabriele

Iran nuclear pact — A Victory for Diplomacy and Peace

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it was clear the measure had enough support even without his vote. A number of you wrote letters to the editor, and our Executive Director was part of a major conference call organized by the White House and USAction to rally support.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this victory of diplomacy over war. The most surprising thing about this campaign is how difficult it has been. Have we, as a country, after 15 years of unsuccessful and endless war in the Middle East, forgotten how to use diplomacy as a tool for resolving such conflicts?

Many RPEC members grew up and spent much of our lives during the Cold War — that generations-long conflict between the US and the USSR. In many ways, that conflict was an “existential” one — a word that Israeli PM Netanyahu has grown quite fond of. It was existential in the sense that two opposing ways of organizing society were in potentially deadly conflict over world domination. Soviet Premier Krushchev famously said, “we will bury you,” referring to the liberal democracies — not so different than what the Iranian leaders say of Isra-

el. Yet we used diplomacy to negotiate a number of arms control deals with that mortal enemy that made the world more safe and secure. These deals were negotiated by both Democratic and Republican presidents and approved by Congress. None of these agreements was perfect or cheat-proof; yet they succeeded in their limited goals. They didn't end the Cold War but they constrained the spread and use of nuclear weapons.

In what significant ways is the situation with Iran different? What lessons in the use of diplomacy have we forgotten?

We at RPEC hold as one of our central beliefs that non-violent means of resolving conflicts, which includes diplomacy and negotiated agreements, are always better than war. We are suffering through an age of extremism in this country in which rigid ideologues, mostly of the right, seem to think that negotiation and the compromise that is necessarily part of negotiation equals defeat. This is a very dangerous trend. So a victory for negotiated agreements over war is a true victory for peace.

You are part of this. Thanks for all you do for the cause of peace and non-violent conflict resolution.

Alice Rothchild — Seeking Justice Through Dialog

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First Unitarian Universalist Church,
1000 Blanton Avenue

Earlier that day, at 1 p.m., Dr. Rothchild will speak at the Richmond Friends Meeting about her trip to Gaza in March 2015.

On Monday, Oct. 19, at 7 p.m., Dr. Rothchild will speak at VCU's Academic Learning Commons, 1000 Floyd Ave., describing her personal journey and the origins and history of the current conflict. She will also speak in a number of classes in the VCU Religious Studies Program in the School of World Studies.

Throughout her stay in Richmond, Dr. Rothchild will share insights drawn from recent trips to the region, which she has described in her documentary film and two recent books, “Broken Promises, Broken Dreams: Stories of Jewish and Palestinian Trauma and Resilience,” and

“On the Brink: Israel and Palestine on the Eve of the 2014 Gaza Invasion.”

Raised in a conservative Jewish family, Dr. Rothchild grew up understanding the importance of Israel to Jewish people. Her mother, Sylvia, wrote “Voices from the Holocaust,” one of the first oral histories of Holocaust survivors. Later, as a physician specializing in obstetrics and gynecology, working in major Boston hospitals, Dr. Rothchild combined a commitment to feminism and health reform, to which she later joined a commitment to a just peace in Palestine and Israel.

Dr. Rothchild was a co-founder of American Jews for a Just Peace Boston, which in 2003 launched a “Health and Human Rights Project,” which sends yearly delegations of clinicians, students, teachers and others to visit and work in Palestine and Israel.

“Sixty plus years after the [first Arab-Israeli War],” she writes, “I feel it is my personal responsibility, as my mother's daughter and as a Jewish American who has grappled with the multiple narratives in this region, to listen and document the tragedy that was created by my own people's tragedy.”

Dr. Rothchild invites members of Richmond's Jewish community who are grappling with these painful and challenging issues to join her in a community conversation. She also invites members of Richmond's non-Jewish community to join this conversation, analyzing on-the-ground realities, the difference between criticism of the Israeli government and anti-semitism, and how the two communities can stand together in the search for justice.

To learn more, visit Dr. Rothchild's website, www.alicerothchild.com.

RPEC happenings

Richmond Youth Peace Project News

2015 Youth Leadership Trainings Set

Thanks to a grant from the Robins Foundation, the Peace Center will double the number of teens trained as conflict resolution workshop leaders this year. The grant will also enable us to support requests from more local schools, congregations and community centers for additional free or reduced cost workshops led by our RYPP trainers and their experienced adult mentors.

Organizations interested in scheduling workshops for children or teens should contact conflict resolution coordinator Santa Sorenson at santaredhawk@aol.com

Our 2015 Richmond Youth Peace Project leadership trainings will be held October 3-4 and again on October 17-18. The free training involves

a full weekend workshop in nonviolent conflict resolution and group facilitation skills, for teens in grade 8 and above.

More than 60 teens have applied for the program, once again exceeding the number we can accommodate.

We believe this reflects the desire for many young people to seek nonviolent alternatives to solving the disputes and disagreements they may find themselves in at home, in school and in their communities; and to take a more active role in social action that works to make our community a safer and more just place to live. Applicants who are placed on the waiting list will be invited to participate in other RYPP events and next year's training.

RYPPE Seeks Performers for 2016 Educoncerts

The Richmond Youth Peace Project is once again looking for talented young people who want to take part in our annual Educoncert honoring the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. We need youth who would like to dance, sing, play musical instruments or perform spoken word poetry or drama. All performances must in some way reflect upon Dr. King's message of peace, nonviolence and social justice. To schedule an audition, email rypp@rpec.org. We want to complete the audition process by the end of November. We hope to present this year's show at three different venues, including the downtown Richmond Public Library.

'Moral Injury' Workshop on Oct. 24

"Moral injury," the new term defining an effect of warfare seen as a soldier's sense of violation of his moral identity, will be explored at a workshop on Saturday, October 24, from 10 a.m. to noon at the Richmond Friends Meeting House, on Commonwealth Avenue at Kensington Avenue, West Richmond.

The workshop will be led by Lynn and Steve Newsom, directors of Quaker House near Fort Bragg, in Fayetteville, NC. The free workshop is sponsored by RPEC, the Alliance for Unitive Justice and the Friends Meeting.

(See article on Page 8 for more information on the effects of Moral Injury.)

RPEC Trains New RPS Teachers For the Sixth Year

In August, 20 Peace Center facilitators offered a 3 1/2 hour workshop in conflict resolution to 200 newly-hired Richmond teachers, focusing on communication, how to handle a student's anger, and how to help kids settle disputes by empowering them to find their own solutions.

What facilitators said:

* "Participants were so receptive to everything and I think that they got a lot of valuable information."

* "They really responded to the discussion on handling anger and I was able to facilitate a discussion where the more experienced teachers helped the newer ones with it."

* "They said they expected to be bored and were surprised how interesting and engaging the workshop was. They learned new classroom management skills."

What teachers said:

* "We received resources to look back on. We were doing activities that helped us realize and understand hard concepts. Loved the group activities, I am definitely aware of more effective strategies for handling conflict in the classroom."

* "Amazing useful info and demonstrations"

* "We were able to put ourselves in other people's shoes to see issues from a different view."

* "Wonderful group exercises, wonderful workshop!"

A big thank you to all our facilitators. We are all looking forward to offering this session again next year.

Grad Student Alison Wilson Helps Expand RPEC Workshop Offerings

Over the past six months, Alison Wilson has been developing a two-hour workshop offering on gun violence prevention to offer to middle and high school age youth. Alison, who has extensive work experience in the health care field, is currently finishing her master's degree in public health through Des Moines University. As her final capstone project, Alison chose to work with the Peace Center to plan and offer a new, informative workshop for teens on this critical public health issue.

Working with guidance from RPEC staff, Alison thoroughly researched the national and local impacts of youth gun violence, and incorporated that information into a two-hour interactive session for teens. The workshop was then pilot tested at the 2015 Youth Peace Summit, refined and revised, and then



presented two additional times this summer. All sessions were co-facilitated by RYPP youth. One session was presented to a group of teens from Engage The Foundation, who created a public service announcement that they later recorded at the iHeart radio station with Kat Simons. The second was offered to youth at the Lincoln Mews community center. Those teens wrote letters about youth gun violence to their legislators and newspaper editors. Several of their letters were published in the Richmond Free Press.

Alison also took time this summer to participate in our adult conflict resolution and HROC training, and has joined our CR training team. The Peace Center thanks her for her substantial contribution to our curriculum.

If you're interested in scheduling a 2-3 hour workshop for a group of young people, contact Santa Sorenson at santaredhawk@aol.com.

RPEC Trainers Offer 3-Day HROC Workshop

RPEC's Healing And Rebuilding Our Communities [HROC] program will offer a 3-day Basic workshop for adults at the Fan Free Clinic, 1010 North Thompson Street, Richmond. The sessions, led by RPEC trainers Santa Sorenson and Ram Bhagat, will be Friday, Nov. 20, from 6 to 9 pm, and Saturday and Sunday, Nov. 21-22, from 9-5 each day. The fee is \$175. Partial scholarships are available. To register, email name, address and phone number to rpec@rpec.org. Please mail your check in advance to RPEC, 3500 Patterson Avenue, Richmond, VA 23221 with HROC Basic in the memo line.

Two-Day CR Training for Adults & Educators

RPEC's basic two-day training in conflict resolution will be given Jan. 16-17, 2016, at the Fan Free Clinic. This training is the foundation for all

of RPEC's conflict resolution programs and is open to adults and educators who can earn points toward recertification of their certificates.

Tuition for the workshop is \$175, which includes the cost of a 200+ page training manual. Partial scholarship are provided if needed. Email your name, address and phone number to rpec@rpec.org to pre-register. Please mail your check in advance to RPEC, 3500 Patterson Avenue, Richmond, VA 23221 with T4T in the memo line.

Workshops Completed

We have completed workshops with Kinfolk, Camp Diva, Youth Engagement, Lincoln Mews, and Richmond Co-Housing Group.

We will have workshops with youth from Hopewell, Mosby, Fifth Baptist Church, First Unitarian Universalist Church and the Armstrong Leadership Program, as well as our 6-hour RYPP advanced training in December.

'They Closed Our Schools'

"They Closed Our Schools," the documentary film depicting Prince Edward County's closure of public schools from 1959 to 1964, will be shown Thursday, Oct. 22, at the Virginia Historical Society, 428 North Boulevard, Richmond.

This will be the last of four film showings in the series, "Created Equal," sponsored jointly by the VHS and RPEC, and in part by Diversity Richmond's Guy Kinman Research Award.

The showing, at 6:30 p.m., will be preceded by light refreshments and followed by discussion.

The film documents the denial of education to more than 2,000 African American children and a number of white children as well. The film is still in production and a segment will be shown.

Peacemaker John Moeser

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‘Can you imagine having someone like that speak at a program for new business leaders?’ I felt like standing up and shouting, ‘I’m the guy he’s talking about.’”

Back in 1982, when Moeser and Rutledge Dennis published a book, “The Politics of Annexation,” about Richmond’s 1970 annexation of 23 square miles from Chesterfield County, “we seriously considered taking out liability insurance should the good people who ran Richmond in those days decide to take us to court for slander. We were meticulous in our documentation. . . . We nailed down every bit of evidence. And the evidence was overwhelming.

“A small group of Richmond’s corporate and political leaders, working in concert with their allies at the highest levels of state government, orchestrated the reduction of the capital city’s black population by annexing close to 50,000 white residents from Chesterfield County.

“We were confident about two things. First of all, the facts. Second, we were confident that we would never be asked to join the Commonwealth Club or the Country Club of Virginia. . . . Our only question was whether we would be confronted directly, or whether they would pressure our employer, VCU, to ‘fix the problem.’”

Moeser held his ground at VCU but soon upset the University’s leadership when the Department of Urban Studies and Planning, which he helped organize, publicly opposed VCU’s plans to extend the campus into Oregon Hill.

“Word got back that the President, in a conversation with the Provost, questioned whether the university really needed an Urban Studies Department. I thought it was our finest hour.”

Moeser chaired the Richmond Human Relations Commission when it investigated racial discrimination in the Richmond Department of Public Works and issued a report that embarrassed City Hall and angered the white members of City Council.

“When Ed Peeples succeeded me as Chair of the Commission, there were more investigations of discriminatory practices in city agencies. As the Commission grew stronger, however, it drew more opposition. Ed and I joke to this day that we did such a good job chairing the Commission that it was ultimately abolished.”

Summing up this history of contrariness, Moeser insisted: “The truth is that I have never considered myself a peacemaker, but neither have I set out to be a trouble maker. What I have tried to do is to follow the example of people I’ve admired throughout my life. Members of my family, outstanding teachers, courageous ministers,

friends, and other people influenced my behavior, not so much by what they said, but what they did.

“My Dad was a wonderful role model. Back in the 1950s, he lost his job at a bank because he blew the whistle on a bank executive for doing something that was wrong. It was a rough time financially. My older brother, who was probably ten or so, loaded our wagon with bottles, newspapers, whatever it was, James doesn’t recall, but then went door to door asking neighbors if they would buy whatever he was selling.

“Another example was Dr. Albert Winn, the former Pastor at Second Presbyterian Church in downtown Richmond who was later elected to the highest office in the Presbyterian Church USA. Years earlier, when he was teaching at Stillman College, an historically black college in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, he preached in both white and black churches until the Brown decision, which he supported, and learned that he was no longer welcome to preach in white churches. He continued to challenge the evils of racism and soon caught the attention of the Klan and received threats from the Klan Grand Dragon. He feared for the safety of his family, but the police and the FBI provided no protection since they also included members of the Klan. Al never retreated, however, but continued to preach an inclusive Gospel despite the dangers. .

“My friend Ed Peeples risked his life by going every day to Prince Edward County to work in special recreational and educational program for black children who had been locked out of their schools. At night when he returned to Richmond, there were occasions when he was closely followed by a car. Ed strongly suspected who they were.

“What I have learned is that truth can be dangerous, but it is the foundation for peace. We have examples throughout history and many examples today of nations and communities that have buried the truth in an effort to maintain calm. Whatever calm might appear on the surface, however, hides the anger that festers underneath. It’s not long before the calm is shattered. What happens is what we witness across the world today. It is what we can witness in any city, including Richmond.

“Others must judge whether my attempts over the years to write and speak honestly about metropolitan Richmond have led to anything positive or simply angered more people who sit in high places. Yet, I owe it to so many others to keep the faith, tell the truth, live by it as best I can, and keep going. I’m not much of a peacemaker, but I’m honored to accept this award on behalf of those who taught me to be honest and tell the truth, live by it as best you can, and don’t let those who hide the truth deter you. To my Dad, to my wife Sharon, Al Winn, Ed Peeples, and so many of you who are in the audience this evening, thank you. Thank you very much.”

'Moral Injury' Challenges Veterans and the Rest of Us

By Gordon Davies

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) has become a familiar (and perhaps somewhat over-used term as societies attempt to cope with the difficulties faced by women and men who have been engaged in military conflicts during the past 14 years, and their families. As we reflect on their experiences, we become aware that PTSD is not just a phenomenon of the 21st century. It has affected persons engaged in previous wars, going back through centuries and perhaps as long as the human species. Descriptions of what we now call PTSD can be found in the epics of ancient Greece.

But now the concept of "moral injury" has been introduced to describe a kind of experience with which some military personnel must deal, whether they are still in service or have returned to the civilian life. The distinction between moral injury and PTSD is not always clear, partly because they are "two different hidden wounds of war" that are closely related.

Because of PTSD, one veteran observes, the "world was no longer a safe place." Now, he goes on, "I always prefer to sit with my back to the wall, . . . to see what's going on around me. I like to be in clear sight of the exits. And I always identify places that could provide cover and concealment from possible attacks."

While PTSD represents a breach of trust with the world, moral injury is described as a "violation of a moral agreement. . . with his own internal world, his moral identity." The soldier struggling with PTSD also is dealing with a psychological problem that goes to the roots of who he thinks he is and what he believes human beings can and should do. He

fought a war "that he deemed to be illegal and immoral. He allowed prisoners of war to be tortured, and he killed unarmed civilians." (quotations from *Soul Repair*, by Rita Nakashima Brock and Gabriella Lettini, Boston, Beacon Press, 2012, p. 87)

Lynn and Steve Newsom will lead a workshop on "moral injury" at the Richmond Friends Meeting on Saturday October 24. Lynn and Steve are directors of Quaker House, which is located near Fort Bragg in Fayetteville, NC. For 40 years, Quaker House has helped military personnel deal with their difficult experiences, and has advocated non-violent ways of dealing with difficult global affairs among nations and militant organizations. It is a major participant in the GI Hotline, a service that provides telephone advice to troubled military personnel and offers references to organizations that can provide advice and assistance with issues like conscientious objection.

In the past few years, Quaker House has expanded its mission to recognize the ways in which the experiences of military personnel returning from combat can affect their spouses, children, and neighbors. Alienation, preoccupation with personal actions, feelings of guilt and even domestic violence – all are issues to which Quaker House now gives priority. The response from counselors, chaplains, and other caregivers at Fort Bragg has been very positive.

The Moral Injury workshop on October 24 will be held from 10 a.m. until noon, at Richmond Friends Meeting (4500 Kensington Ave.).

There is no charge to attend, but if you plan to come please email gdavies02@comcast.net, or Brinson422@comcast.net. Space is limited. Find directions here: www.richmondfriendsmeeting.org.

This event is sponsored by Richmond Friends Meeting together with Richmond Peace Education Center and Alliance for Unitive Justice.



Consumers Corner

John Gallini

Laudato Si - On Care for Our Common Home

On June 19 Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si* was released to the public. Two months later a number of reviews have been published - most of them quite positive. The two that I found most helpful were written by Bill McKibben (in *The New York Review of Books*, 8/13/15) and Fritjof Capra (on his website, 6/22/15).

Here are some of McKibben's reflections:

*On a sprawling, multicultural, fractious planet, no person can be heard by everyone. But Pope Francis comes closer than anyone else. . . . Francis's words fall as a rock in this pond, not a pebble; they help greatly to consolidate the current momentum toward some kind of agreement at the global climate conference in Paris in December. He has, in effect, said that all people of good conscience need to do as he has done and give the question the priority it requires. The power of celebrity is the power to set the agenda, and his timing has been impeccable. On those grounds alone, *Laudato Si*' stands as one of the most influential documents of recent times.*

It is, therefore, remarkable to actually read the whole document and realize that it is far more important even than that. In fact, it is entirely different from what the media reports might lead one to believe. Instead of a narrow and focused contribution to the climate debate, it turns out to be nothing less than a sweeping, radical, and highly persuasive critique of how we inhabit this planet—an ecological critique, yes, but also a moral, social, economic, and spiritual commentary. . . .

The pope intervenes in a variety of contemporary debates. Automation versus work, for instance. As he notes, "the orientation of the economy has favoured a kind of technological process in which the costs of production are reduced by laying off workers and replacing them

with machines," which is a sadness since "work is a necessity, part of the meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth."

It's not just small versus large. The pope insists on giving priority to diverse culture over the "leveling effect on cultures" encouraged by a "consumerist vision," which diminishes the "immense variety which is the heritage of all humanity." In words that are somewhat remarkable coming from the head of an institution that first set out to universalize the world, "the disappearance of a culture can be just as serious, or even more serious, than the disappearance of a species of plant or animal." Even more striking, in this regard, is his steadfast defense of "indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. They are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting their land are proposed," because for them land "is a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values."

The pope is at his most rigorous when he insists that we must prefer the common good to individual advancement, for of course the world we currently inhabit really began with Ronald Reagan's and Margaret Thatcher's insistence on the opposite. . . . Take water, which the pope addresses at length. We probably should not need his words to know that "access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival." Or take biodiversity, where the pope rightly notes that "caring for ecosystems demands far-sightedness, since no one looking for quick and easy profit is truly interested in their preservation."

It's quite possible—probable, even—that the pope will lose this fight. He's united science and spirit, but that

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Laudato Si

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league still must do battle with money. The week the encyclical was released, Congress approved, in bipartisan fashion, fast-track trade legislation, a huge victory for the forces of homogenization, technocracy, finance, and what the encyclical calls “rapidification.”

Fritjof Capra, Ph.D., is a scientist, educator, activist, and author of many international bestsellers that connect conceptual changes in science with broader changes in worldview and values in society. His analysis of the Pope's encyclical is based on a systems view of life and he shows, with many examples, that *Pope Francis reveals himself in Laudato Si as a truly systemic thinker.* I will cite just a few paragraphs from his essay:



Ethics and the common good

From a systems perspective, ethical behavior is always related to community; it is behavior for the common good. In today's world, there are two relevant communities to which we all belong. We are all members of humanity, and we all belong to the Earth Household, the global biosphere. As members of the human community, our behavior should reflect a respect of human dignity and basic human rights. As members of the Earth Household, our “common home,” we should not interfere with nature's inherent ability to sustain life. This is the essential meaning of ecological sustainability.

The defining characteristic of deep ecology is a shift from anthropocentric (human-centered) values to ecocentric (earth-centered) values. It is a worldview that acknowledges the inherent value of non-human life, rec-

ognizing that all living beings are members of ecological communities, bound together in networks of interdependencies. All these considerations, and the radically new system of ethics they imply, are clearly expressed in the Papal encyclical, as shown in the following passages. (Capra then cites 9 passages from Laudato Si).

“Integral ecology”

The systems view of life, integrating life's biological, cognitive, social, and ecological dimensions, is implicit in the conceptual framework of Laudato Si. The Pope states explicitly that solving our global problems requires a new way of thinking, and he makes clear that what he has in mind is thinking in terms of connectedness and relationships — in other words, systemic thinking. (He cites another 7 passages)

Of course, not everyone thinks *Laudato Si* is helpful. Some conservative Catholics, including a few presidential candidates, were quick to explain that our ecological crisis is not a proper subject for Papal instruction. But for the most part, the response has been quite positive. A recent survey by the Public Religion Research Institute finds that *“American Catholics are much more likely to agree with the pope's position on climate change than to disagree (47 percent vs. 24 percent): however, one in five (20 percent) Catholics are unfamiliar with his position on the issue.”*

In paragraph 206 Pope Francis states: *“Purchasing is always a moral — and not simply economic — act.” Today, in a word, “the issue of environmental degradation challenges us to examine our lifestyle.”*

This, indeed, is the foundation of Consumer's Corner.