



VOLUME 13, NUMBER 1
EASTERTIDE, APRIL 2002

GOD'S FRIENDS

JOINING AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN WORSHIP
AND LIFE EXPERIENCE

JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

*photo essay by David Sanger;
text by Bishop William Swing*

PRAYING FOR OUR ENEMIES

by Rick Fabian

JESUS AND THE CENTURION: A NAVY CHAPLAIN'S STORY

Dave Hurlbert interviews Mark Spaulding

ALLAH AKBAR

by Jake Slichter

WARRIOR FOR PEACE

by Maria Schell

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

The editorial board of *God's Friends* met, as planned, around Margaret Lukens's dining room table on September 19, 2001. In addition to the food we always share when we meet, this time we also brought to the table our feelings of fear, anger, confusion, and grief, and our urgent needs for solace and understanding.

Our government had already identified Osama bin Laden as the principal suspect in the airplane attacks of September 11. Our president said it was war. Already millions of people both inside and outside American borders, including each of us, were being pulled into myriad states of conflict and allegiance. Sitting at Margaret's table, we deferred our plans for an issue about a capella congregational singing and spoke instead about ways *God's Friends* might address this new encounter with violence and war.

Peace, compassion, love, forgiveness—these are at the heart of our Christian practice. But so is justice. So is action. How can we bring all these parts of our practice to bear when we engage an enemy? Maria Schell, writing about her experience with Aikido, has found one satisfying answer.

How are we, who are urged to pray for peace and to love the enemy as ourselves, to bring the violent to justice? How can we go to war while holding on to our longing for peace? Episcopal priests Rick Fabian and Mark Spaulding offer eloquent—and very different—reflections.

Where does “us” stop and “them” begin, and what do we do about the distinction? Jake Slichter's account of visiting a mosque in New York on September 14—and what he witnessed on his way home—speaks vividly to these dilemmas. So do David Sanger's photographs of religious leaders in Jerusalem and so does Bishop Bill Swing's commentary that accompanies these images.

Whenever and however members and friends of the St. Gregory's community came together in the days and weeks following the attacks, we sought understanding and comfort. But more than once, our conversations made us uncomfortable, exposing adversarial positions among friends. And often we had to admit that we did not understand quite a few things, and maybe never would. Afraid, combative, stricken, resolute, gracious—we were just like people everywhere, which may have been all we needed to know for sure.

—Clancy Drake, issue coeditor

COVER:

Rabbi Yisrael Meyer Lau, Chief Rabbi of Israel, and His Holiness the Dalai Lama at the Western Wall of the Temple of Solomon.

BELOW:

The Interreligious Friendship Group at the Holy Sepulchre, the Tomb of Jesus.

*Jerusalem photography
© 1999 davidsanger.com.*

JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

In June 1999, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, along with Bishop Bill Swing and the United Religions Initiative, sponsored a meeting in Jerusalem of thirty religious leaders, including Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims. The intent of these three days of informal conversation was to be inspired and to inspire, to honor the great religions, to help encourage interfaith activities in the immediate area and to learn by listening and interacting. Three years later the Bishop reflects:

“Anytime you go out of your world, God stretches you. We [the people who went] actually did interfaith cooperation there. [But] the greatest impact is among people who heard about it—a conference of Buddhists and Christians and Jews!?! with the Dalai Lama!?! in Jerusalem!?!?”

The photo essay in this issue documents that meeting. All photos are by David Sanger; the accompanying text, unless otherwise noted, is by Bishop Swing.

The Right Reverend William Swing is Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of California and the founder of the United Religions Initiative.

*David Sanger is an award-winning travel photographer and a member of St. Gregory's. His latest project is a book, *San Francisco Bay: The Estuary and Its People* (www.sanfranciscobaybook.org).*



PRAYING FOR OUR ENEMIES

by Rick Fabian

MY TOUR GROUP EMERGED FROM CHINA INTO COLONIAL HONG KONG THE VERY WEEKEND THE BRITISH WON THEIR QUICK WAR OVER THE FALKLAND/MALVINAS ISLANDS COLONY.

Everyone knew Britain had lost only a few warriors, while Argentina had lost thousands. (Indeed, the Argentine junta would collapse soon afterward.) So I was startled when at the Anglican cathedral evensong, a native Chinese priest prayed at length for the safe return of “our” British fliers and sailors—with no mention whatever of the heaping Argentine dead. Of course Hong Kong’s return to China was imminent, and his prayers showed the feelings of Hong Kong residents used to growing freedoms under the British, and who were now fearing oppression by a native Communist government. But his bald omission of the Argentine dead felt eerie, and sent me praying earnestly for those myself. Surely Canterbury Cathedral offered no such exclusive prayers that Sunday!

Conflict makes enemies out of brave, loyal, idealistic people as well as out of greedy, treacherous ones. We can thank God that more countries today pursue peaceful trade rather than war and that oppression sometimes dies at the ballot box without bloodshed. But conflicts still abound. In a free society they multiply with diverse opinions and priorities, and only lies or willful blindness can conceal them. When they lead to social breakdown, a journalist can explain every argument, or the complex history of injury that has driven each partisan to desperate resolve. Because understanding alone cannot banish real conflicts, the nicest strategy is to avoid them, and the nicest way to avoid them is to choose one’s companions and places carefully: gated communities, purist reform groups, like-minded schools and celebrations, gatherings where everyone agrees what it means to mean well. Hence church congregations characteristically conform in political vision more than in other conscious factors—certainly more than in theology, which everyone today knows not to wrangle about disruptively!

St. Gregory’s unusually joins left- and right-wing supporters in the same worship, prayers, social ministries, choir rehearsals, and dinner parties. At stressful times, apparently heedless remarks or prayers can strain this rare alliance: actually, I rather think these mark a heedful push toward that nicer strategy, an appeal for an illusory but comforting common mind. We would surely do better by exploring our different views together, and discovering what really unites us — and could one day unite humankind.

For conflict makes enemies, and churches must pray for them, and pray aloud. Scripture equivocates only slightly on this point. For every psalm asking God to destroy my foes, I find twenty biblical prophecies and commandments for reconciliation. The tale of Adam and Eve’s “Fall” in Genesis 2 expresses mythically the biblical view that humanity’s goodness remains somehow realer, more “original,” than the evil we encounter everywhere we humans interact. And Gregory of Nyssa taught that evil can never limit God and God’s goodness, no matter what terrible works we do. So synagogues pray even for anti-Jewish governments, and orthodox Christian prayer is shaped by living through persecution into public peace. Ours is a tradition of conversion from cynicism to faith, bringing order out of chaos, rebirth out of ruin, though our oppressors thereby escape suffering for the wrongs they do us. The Book of Jonah focuses on this problem precisely: God honors our witness to our enemies by denying our longing for their just punishment. The gospels exhort us to endurance instead of retribution. And Luke’s accounts of both Jesus’ passion and Stephen’s martyrdom—the last passion materials written in the New Testament—say God’s forgiveness absolves our mortal enemies whose evil defies understanding.

Yet we must “make no peace with oppression,” as the Prayer Book puts it. Martyrs have found no nice way to mollify the bloodthirsty mob; soldiers in every war lay down their lives for their

continued on page 4

*Dome of the Rock,
Haram Esh-Sharif.*



We heard “Jerusalem is a city that changes with the season: during Holy Week it is a Christian city, during Ramadan it is a Muslim city, during Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur it is a Jewish city.” There is a long history and tradition of mutual acceptance. When our prayer is pure, Jerusalem is a friend. But when the real motive behind our prayer is eviction, coercion, or dominance, then friction follows.

Metropol Daniel, Church
of the Holy Sepulchre.

*Peace is one of
the Names of God.
Calling for peace is
part of true religion.*



PRAYING FOR OUR ENEMIES

Continued from page 3

comrades and their common cause; generals, diplomats, and police strive to enforce and reinforce peace against all who threaten it; and social reformers promise no peace without justice. Pacifists and militarists do disagree over means to their one end: this too is real conflict. But both belong in church, where both must pray for their opponents, and pray aloud.

How can we pray for our foes honestly together, without denial or emotional subterfuge? Cyprian, bishop of Carthage during the last great Roman persecution, set one classic example as he prayed for those who would soon kill him. Here are Cyprian's prayers at length (I make no effort to correct his antique male pronouns):

Let us pray to the Lord without duplicity, in tune with one another, entreating him with sighs and tears, as befits people in our position placed as we are between the many, lamenting that they have fallen away (renouncing Christ's faith during persecution), and the faithful remnant that fears it may do the same itself; between the weak, laid low in large numbers, and the few still standing firm.

Let us pray that peace may very soon be restored to us, help reach us in our dangers, to draw us from our dark retreats, and God's gracious promises to his servants find fulfillment. May we see the Church restored and our salvation secured; after the rain, fair weather; after the darkness, light; after these storms and tempests, a gentle calm.

Let us ask him to help us, because he loves us as a father loves his children, and to give us the tokens of his divine power that are usual with him. So will our persecutors be stopped from blaspheming, those who have fallen away repent to some purpose, and the firm, unwavering faith of the steadfast be crowned with glory.

We beg and beseech the God whom the enemies of the Church are forever provoking and irritating that he would tame their wild hearts. May their rage subside and calm return to their hearts; may their minds, clouded by the darkness their sins produce, repent and see the light; may they seek the bishop's prayers and not his blood.

Your prayers are more likely to be answered now, for it is easier to obtain what you ask when you are being persecuted. Beseech the good God, then, as earnestly as you can that we may all confess his name to the end, and that we too may emerge unscathed and glorious from the snares of this world and its darkness. As we have been linked together by charity and peace, and together have withstood persecution from the pagans, so may we rejoice together in the kingdom of heaven.

Finally, at Bishop Cyprian's trial the pro-consul read out his sentence from a tablet: "Our decision is that Thascius Cyprianus shall die by the sword." And Bishop Cyprian prayed aloud: "Deo Gratias." ☉

(Cyprian quoted from A. Hamman, Early Christian Prayers)

Rick Fabian is co-rector at St. Gregory's.

JESUS AND THE CENTURION: A NAVY CHAPLAIN'S STORY

*Just after September 11 our Bishop invited a gathering of priests to share our losses and concerns. We talked of lives lost and the people who mourned them in our congregations. We pondered how to pray with people who were afraid. We wondered how to teach peace and inspire interreligious dialogue. Several among us expressed unhappiness with President Bush. And then a lone voice reminded us, with good nature, of his obligation to his commander-in-chief and to the men and women serving our country here and in Afghanistan. It was Mark Spaulding, an Episcopal Navy Chaplain. We've asked him to share more of his experience with the readers of *God's Friends*. Dave Hurlbert conducted the interview.*

—Donald Schell, *God's Friends* Editorial Board

How is it you became a Navy Chaplain?

It started with the Franciscans. As a high school drop-out, I needed a place to go, and wondered, "Who would welcome me in?" From youth ministry in the Diocese of California, I knew Brother Philip, a Franciscan at Bishop's Ranch in Sonoma. When I drove up there on my motorcycle, he said, "You can stay with us." After I had some time to think, I said, "I'm not going anywhere; why not join the Navy?" In 1975 I signed a contract.

It was post-Viet Nam, just barely. I was a boiler technician; I made boats go. Back then the military were "baby killers," and "slime-balls." We had more than 600 ships and not enough sailors. Consequently, if you were convicted before a federal bench, you could do time or do the military. A lot of these guys chose the military. I was a drop-out from high school, and a Rhodes Scholar in Engineering compared to them.

Brawn ruled the day in this environment. "Beat the snot out of them if they don't do what you tell them to do." But I was a 90-pound weakling. The only thing I had over these guys is that I'm quick to learn, and I'm good with my hands. I could fix equipment they couldn't fix.

Now I see being in the Navy was part of my Christian journey, but I was a starving Christian. I couldn't go to Mass because the Catholic priest would have brought charges against me, and the other Protestants were fundamentalist "Brothers in Christ." So for three years on that ship, I was starving for the Sacrament, and I was starving for real community— where I would be accepted for who I was.

During my last year in the Navy, Father John Edwards checked on board. He was an Episcopal priest. Every morning, we met in the chapel at 6:00 a.m. to say morning prayer and celebrate the Eucharist. And we met in his stateroom for evening prayer at 5:00. Then we would talk for an hour, sort of like a 12-step program.

When I left the Navy in 1980 I worked for six months as an electrician, making huge amounts of money. I also volunteered as a youth minister at St. Paul's Walnut Creek. After a while the Rector there offered me a full-time job. Eventually I went to college and divinity school.

Finally I said, "This is really easy, and I've been doing it for a long time. Maybe it's time for a change." Now I know that as a youth minister I'd experienced too much grief. For 18 years, I'd get a new group of kids, grow them up, move them through, and graduate them. And I couldn't go through the grief of falling in love with another group of kids and then losing them. So I thought, What do I do? I'm a vocational youth minister and a priest. I know adolescents and young adults really well, and there's a part of me that's still a sailor. So I said to myself, "Go back into the Navy!"

The military is Youth Ministry 101. I know the culture, I know the kids, and to that I add the plurality of my experience; these things equip me for doing this role as Chaplain.

Whom do you serve as Chaplain? Men and women of all faiths?

Navy Chaplains are commissioned to serve everyone. But, typically, if you don't talk the Chaplain's game, you get kind of a minimalist approach.

About two-thirds of the military are Protestant Christian. The other third is Roman Catholic, along with a smattering of other religions.

The Christian community is mostly fundamentalists. The first sermon I heard a Navy Chaplain preach was about dinosaurs, which he proclaimed were a myth perpetuated by a liberal theology and a liberal academia. He said, "Dinosaur bones were planted in the earth by Satan, to confuse us Christians." And this preacher, this chaplain, had the same level of training I did!

I think fundamentalists are drawn to the military because it's a rigid system. In the officers and senior ranks it's a whole different cup of tea, but for enlisted people especially, you know exactly

continued on page 6

WE [CHRISTIANS IN
WAR] ARE CALLED TO
THE HARDEST OF
ALL TASKS: TO FIGHT
WITHOUT HATRED,
TO RESIST WITHOUT
BITTERNESS, AND IN
THE END, IF GOD
GRANT IT SO, TO
TRIUMPH WITHOUT
VINDICTIVENESS.

—William Temple,
Archbishop of Canterbury
(during World War II)

A NAVY CHAPLAIN

Continued from page 5

what you're supposed to do, or not supposed to do. Just do your job.

Do you take a different approach?

Sure. One time I had a young sergeant talk to me about life issues. In case the people who talk to me want to pray, I always ask, "Do you have a religious background?" This sergeant said, "Yeah," but he seemed uncomfortable.

I said, "Look, I'm a priest. Your spiritual development is important to me."

"I don't think you'll like my background."

I said, "Try me."

"Well, I'm an American Indian. I have an Indian religion." He had no idea I'd spent summers on Indian reservations, building houses with teenagers, and learning about Native American spirituality, so I asked, "Do you have a spirit guide?" He was dumbfounded, and started to cry. "Sir, you don't understand. I'm a sergeant in the Marines. I've seen five chaplains, and every one of them threw me out because I told them I have an Indian spirituality. And you're trying to find me a spirit guide? No one's ever taken care of me before."

I said, "That's my job as a chaplain." There are a lot of people to be taken care of in the military, and one of the fun parts of my job is that I get to do it.

Doesn't Jesus ask us to turn away from violence? How do these military men and women face their doubts about killing others, or dying themselves? How do you face these concerns yourself?

As chaplains we have it easy, because I'm not allowed to carry a gun no matter what. But I have to take care of the people who do.

Jesus didn't tell everybody to do the same thing. The question we need to ask is, "Is this the right thing for me to be doing at this time?"

Why didn't Jesus tell the Roman centurion to break up his sword, his spear, and be quick about it? Jesus told him to be ethical, to do his job, and to do it right. Centurions had lots of power to abuse. The issue is, Do it right. I use the same analogy of the rich young man who comes before Jesus. "What do I do to inherit eternal life?" Notice what he said: "Take all you have, sell it, give it to the poor, and come, follow me." Did Jesus say that to *everyone* he met? No, he banned money from that man because it was an issue for him. He didn't ban all military actions, either.

Here's a big military issue: defense. Do we really, as Americans, want to give up the police? Do we want to disband the military?

Can we do this? Sure, but are we willing to live with the consequences? Do we want Jeffrey Dahmers living next door? Frankly, I think that's what the military has moved into, police services. The idea of us being imperialistic is laughable today. Could you see us taking over Cuba? I don't think so. We're over that. This is the twenty-first century. So the military is now about maintaining property. It's defense.

The way people see the military has changed dramatically. It was different during World War II, and in Viet Nam. And it was different during the Gulf War. Since September 11th we're one of the most honorable professions; we're fighting a terrorist aggressor.

St. Gregory's, where I've worshiped, is there because fellow Christians in the military are standing their post, standing watch to protect our freedom, our religious freedom, to worship the way we want to worship. I give thanks to my Lord Jesus Christ that men and women have laid down the sacrificial service, and as a priest I pray every day that we will never have to use our military might to preserve our freedoms.

At a recent clergy conference I attended, people were saying, "The church needs to talk these people out of combat, get them to choose other options." Okay, I'm all for that. Give me another option! Clearly, they haven't met bin Laden or Hussein. There are no other options for these guys. The tension that Chaplains have is to impart critical thinking: to get people to use the best gifts they have, and to do that spiritually as well.

The media tries to tell us that 9/11 was the most tragic event ever. If we get on this bandwagon, do we forget the 1895 Indian Ghost Dance Rebellion? We sent in the cavalry and slaughtered every man, woman, and child. In World War II we took out a city: every man, woman, and child, not once, but twice! So after 9/11 everyone says to the Chaplain, "This is the worst thing to ever happen to humanity." But it's just the latest tragic event to happen to God's people. Is it horrific? Absolutely. Is it the worst? Nah.

Here's the real tension for Navy Chaplains: you have a young Marine whose job is to go over there and prosecute the war. He says, "I go over to do a job, and to come home. It's either kill them or be killed." We both know if you're killed, you don't come home. You lose the battle, you lose the war, you lose the American way of life. The only way to be able to do that job is to personify the enemy as evil. To put it in the colloquial, "My job is to go over there and kill rag-heads." If a soldier thinks about the enemy having a wife and children and religion and a country, he'll hesitate. And if he hesitates, we lose.

*His Beatitude Archbishop
Torkom Manoogian,
Armenian Patriarch.*



We asked the Armenian Patriarch for his best advice in carrying out our interreligious agenda. "I have no advice to give. I am a prisoner in my palace," he laughed. "I can't do the interfaith ministry that is needed. But you all are mobile. You do it!"

So, what do I do as a chaplain? If I talk these kids out of doing their job, they get killed. Their mothers or wives get a flag. But what does Jesus ask us to do? Love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. That's the tension that we constantly live in. Can we do our job and look in the mirror in the morning, both as a chaplain and as a military person?

It's the big question about stewardship. Stewardship isn't just about money, it's about the most important thing ever: the breaths we take into our body. And we're called to use those wisely. War, prison, police: these are about containing the evils of the world. Is it possible to work in the military? Yes, it's hard, but it's possible.

It's like how the Episcopal church treats divorce. Does anybody in their right mind walk down the aisle on their wedding day, thinking, "Oh, goodie, I get to be divorced some day." Of course they don't. But do they get divorced? Yes, because sometimes it's the most responsible decision a couple can make. Are there people in the military who get up in the morning saying, "I get to kill people today?" Well, yeah, there are some people like that. But most people in the military get up every day thinking, "Am I ready to go to battle? Yes, I'm going to do what I'm called to do in this world." Going to battle is the most responsible thing a military person can do. Is it a good thing? No. But it's the thing we have to do right now.

We constantly pray for peace. How do we pray for you and the young men and women you serve?

We pray for you at St. Gregory's. You're on our prayer sheet for the 10:30 a.m. service. I also pray for justice and peace in Afghanistan. I pray for those who are victimized by the atrocities of war. And I pray for my brothers and sisters who are forward deployed on my behalf.

We've become so accustomed to taking peace for granted. That's taking people for granted, the people in our military who have sacrificed lives and limbs, and millions of men and women who have left their families for six months to a year, God bless them. It is hard to imagine what is it like to kiss your wife and children good-bye. We can't recover the moments we miss watching our children grow up. Why do we do it? Because America wants us to protect our way of life.

The parishioners at St. Gregory's drive to church on fuel that's being defended by the men and women who are forward deployed. It's gas, steel, and the international market: our way of life. We vote by going down to buy our

SUVs and our Lexuses. We want to walk into our Lucky store and see a multitude of choices. Well, there's a cost to these choices, and that cost is being paid by the men and women who protect and defend this republic. Some folks want to say, "How can you be a religious person and hold up an M16?" But how can I buy iceberg lettuce that was grown in North Africa, with starving people there, in order to provide a nutritionally blank food for the American consumer?

How do we pay our taxes? Our taxes are maintaining this military structure. The way we consume, the way we are, the way we worship: we want to maintain all those things. And I say that's a good thing. But there's a cost that sometimes results in conflict and war prosecuted by the men and women in our military.

Are we willing to give up how we worship? Or even our SUVs and our iceberg lettuce? If we are, then we will call the troops home, and we will end our participation in international warfare. Will international warfare end then? No, it won't.

You began your journey with the Franciscans. Can you still reconcile the peaceful teachings of St. Francis with the role you've chosen?

It's an interesting dialectic in my life: how does this work, being a Franciscan and in the military? Francis began his journey in the military. And if Francis could do it, I can do it.

Even to this day, where I sit in my office, I still have San Damiano's cross. I'm this Franciscan priest in the military! How do I live in this tension? I'm an Anglican, and I follow the *via media*.

I also have on my desk a letter about joining the Franciscan Third Order. I have not completed the form and joined the Order, but I've been thinking about joining for 25 years. Am I going to formally become a Franciscan priest? I know myself. I live the Rule of Francis now, but I've never been part of that Order. I'm not sure what I'll do. ☸

Dave Hurlbert is a writer and a member of the God's Friends editorial board.

Is revelation finished for the people of God? Or is God saying something new?



Hindu philosopher and writer Badrinath Chaturvedi with Bishop Swing.

ALLAH AKBAR

by Jake Slichter

THE FRIDAY AFTER THE SEPTEMBER 11 ATTACKS WAS DECLARED TO BE A NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER. I HAD NOT BEEN TO CHURCH IN MONTHS AND KNEW I HAD TO GO. BUT WHERE?

I had moved to Brooklyn from Minneapolis a year ago but had not found a congregation. I immediately thought of the Muslim mosque on Atlantic Avenue. Several times I had walked down Atlantic and had heard the calls to prayer that summon the local merchants. Several times a day, they close up shop for fifteen minutes of prayer.

That Friday afternoon I walked two miles from my apartment up to Atlantic Avenue. Men in Muslim dress stood outside various shops. I couldn't identify which building housed the worship space. I asked one man, "Where is the mosque?" He seemed afraid and spoke little English. He directed me to his boss inside the shop. I walked in and greeted the shop owner. Then I asked him where the mosque was and when the prayer services were. Would it be all right if I took part? I could see him observing in my face an embarrassing mix of enthusiasm and fear.

I hated that my fear was visible. I was dipping my toes into strange waters. I heard rumors that some of the men who had tried to blow up the World Trade Center several years earlier had been recruited in this very neighborhood. I insisted to myself that the men with whom I was speaking were upstanding citizens, but I really knew nothing about them. I was ashamed for conducting this internal debate.

For his part, the shop owner was calm and polite. He told me that the mosque was three doors down. The next prayer service would be sometime around 7:15 p.m. He said I would be welcome to join in. I thanked him and left. As I walked down the street, I imagined FBI surveillance watching the shops and wondering about my conversation with this man. Fear was closing in from different directions.

I had an hour to kill, so I walked back through my neighborhood, counting the possible reasons why I shouldn't go to the prayer service—work, dinner plans, the suspicions I might arouse from the other worshippers, my ignorance of Muslim worship practices. I took out my cell phone and called various people who might know what would be expected of me. I finally got through to one friend in California who was a former Muslim. "I'm sure they'd love to have you. Just remember to take off your shoes."

Thus assured by the shop owner and my friend, I decided to go through with my plan. I walked back through the neighborhood, past small gatherings of people on the sidewalk, flags, and memorials. I got back to Atlantic Avenue just in time to hear the call to prayer ringing through the streets over a loudspeaker. I walked into the mosque and shuffled down the entrance hallway with the other men. Some were dressed in traditional clothes: long robes and skull caps. Others were dressed much like me in jeans and street shoes. Some wore sweat pants, sandals, and T-shirts.

I came upon a man who seemed to know what was going on and identified myself as a non-Muslim visitor who wanted to pray with the other worshippers. "You want to pray with us?!" he asked, smiling. Fine. He invited me to take off my shoes and recruited one of the regulars to walk me upstairs to the worship area.

The building itself seemed like a former department store. The worship area, with its low ceilings, florescent lights, and carpet, felt more like an inner-city Pentecostal church. That made sense to me. Urban congregations searching for worship space must face the same choices, regardless of their faith.

Everyone in the room stood in lines oriented diagonally across the carpet, facing a closet in the corner. I quickly realized that we weren't facing the closet but Mecca. Some men knelt on the floor in prayer. I stood, somewhat awkwardly, waiting for things to start. I was the only Caucasian, but the other men, who included Arabs, Asians, Africans, and African-Americans, represented a good amount of racial and national diversity.

Palestinian children, Hebron.



*The final chapter
in interfaith
cooperation has not
yet been written.*

As the imam stood ready to begin, the man who sent me upstairs stood next to me and said, “So, whatever we do, you do.” I was relieved to receive such simple instructions.

The imam began to sing in Arabic. We got down on our knees. Friends of mine who know Arabic talk about what a beautiful language it is to speak. It’s also a beautiful language to hear sung. The sound of the imam’s singing was the perfect inducement to a prayerful state of mind. The prayer melody twirled about, rising up and then pausing. Then the imam sang, “Allah Akbar.” We all bowed forward, quietly repeating those words, which translate as “God is great.”

Most of my associations with “Allah Akbar” are of angry crowds shouting these words at anti-US demonstrations. What a contrast this quiet utterance was. When the imam sang, “Allah” came out slowly, and “Akbar” was almost split into two words. It was if the imam kissed the final syllable “Allaaaaaah Ak...bar.” The singing, the soft speaking, the prayer posture — it all produced in me an eye-opening serenity. I remembered that Muslims describe their religion as being focused on peace, and peace is what I felt. Experiencing this peace five times a day, as faithful Muslims do—what a profound effect that would have on one’s life.

The singing continued. I followed the different prayer postures, sometimes miscuing and bumping into other worshippers. By the third “Allah Akbar” I had caught on. Then we exchanged the peace. “A salaam aleikum”—peace be with you. “Aleikum salaam”—and also with you. That’s how Muslims greet each other on the street.

The service ended. We stood up. I thanked my host. He smiled and said, “You are welcome to pray with us whenever you want.” Then he asked me if I wanted to stay. I declined. In the background one of the worshippers got up to speak. I thought he was going to talk about the attacks. Instead, he went into a speech about how he was visiting from Atlanta, and in need of some money for travel. Eyes started to roll. Once again, I was reminded of how much all religious services have in common. How many times have I been in church when a stranger stood up to make an unauthorized appeal for cash? This man wasn’t getting very far. I collected my shoes and walked out.

On my way out of the mosque I noticed a black van parked nearby and wondered again if I was under some kind of surveillance. I soon forgot about that. I walked the two miles back to my apartment humming the melody for “Allah Akbar,” trying to caress the words as the imam had done. The words and melody stuck in my head for a week. I found myself

singing those words under my breath and being reassured by them.

A few days later I saw an Arab woman coming out of the subway with her teenage daughter. The mother wore a headscarf, a practice that many other Arab women had set aside for fear of harassment. I smiled at her and said, “A salaam aleikum.” She smiled back in surprise and said, “Aleikum salaam.” As I went down the stairs to the subway, I turned around to see her looking at me still.

A few days after that, I was riding the subway home from Manhattan when a homeless man went into his pitch. No sooner had he shouted, “Ladies and Gentlemen,” than another person yelled from the other end of the car. Everyone around me laughed. The homeless man stopped and turned to watch.

A man seated at the far end of the car was shouting at two men standing near him. These men may have been Arab. I couldn’t tell. The man doing the yelling was white. I heard him shouting, “...blew up the World Trade Center.” Then he pointed at the men near him saying, “Arab motherfuckers!” He got up and started hitting them, and they hit back. Everyone screamed and ran away from him towards the end of the car where I was standing. Out of nowhere, a slight woman of fifty stepped into the whirlwind of punches and hair pulling. She held out her hand, saying, “It’s okay. It’s okay.” And, miraculously, the fight stopped.

The car was silent. The angry man sat down. The men he had attacked got off at the next stop. I stared at this woman. She kept a protective watch over the man as he sat there. I squeezed my way through the passengers to stand next to her, in case the man lost his mind again.

Standing next to him, I imagined that he was deeply ashamed for having lost control. He wore a wedding ring. He carried an attaché case. He was coming home on a Friday afternoon, and things had gotten too much for him. I looked at the woman and thought about how she had stepped into the fray with such calmness. Was she a Zen master, or was she too tired to approach the situation in any other way? She, the man, and I all got off at the same stop. I walked next to her on our way out of the station. I told her, “Everyone on that train thanks you for what you did.”

She was modest. “People are very upset these days.” She spoke with an accent. I wondered if she herself might have been Arab-American.

I walked up the subway stairs and out into the late afternoon. I couldn’t let go of the image of her stepping into the fray and calmly holding out her hand, saying, “It’s okay. It’s okay.” ☸

Jake Slichter is a musician living in New York.



*Pray for the peace
of Jerusalem.*

—Psalm 122

WARRIOR FOR PEACE

by Maria Schell

MY WARRIOR LIFE BEGAN WITH PRIDE.
I WAS THIRTEEN AND EAGER TO GRAB AT MY
PLACE IN THE WORLD. IN MY NEW ADULT
SIZE I WANTED TO BE A FORCE TO BE RECKONED
WITH, AND I WANTED TO KNOW OTHERS
SAW THAT IN ME.



THROUGH PRACTICE I KNOW
NOW I DON'T HAVE TO LIE
DOWN WHEN FACED WITH AN
ATTACK, BUT I ALSO KNOW
NOW THAT I DON'T HAVE TO
BE AGGRESSIVE. I CAN DEFEND
MYSELF WITHOUT HURTING
OTHERS. THIS IS THE WAY OF
PEACE FOR A WARRIOR.

I was the daughter of an Aikido student, and he was the son of my father's teacher. In those days the two of us hung around the practice studio, seeing the power of Aikido and wanting it, neither of us really ready to commit to its study. That day we were pushing at each other, turning the energy of puberty into jesting insults, neither relenting. Then he called me "just a girl." But I was a warrior daughter, and I knew no warrior could ever be thought of as "just a girl."

In my thirteen-year-old mind what I did next was an act of Aikido. (I was of course defending myself.) I understood that the world gave you two choices: to let others take advantage, backing down in the face of their threats, or to stand up proud and unafraid, defending yourself. I wouldn't be pushed around by a puberty-stricken boy. So I slapped him. Hard. And I felt proud of myself, and smiled when I saw the redness on his face.

That was many years ago. I don't tiptoe around Aikido anymore. I simply practice it. On Aikido mornings I rise before the sun and dress in the familiar white gee of karate movies, and the less familiar hakama (long blue culotte pants), and join my Aikido partners on the mat. I come to the mat combat-ready, attacking my partners and finding each attack turned against me, my energy to harm taken to the floor. In turn, I face the fists and blades of my partner's attack and take them safely to the ground. I do this to learn the way of peace.

So what is Aikido? In the most simple terms it is a purely defensive martial art born from the teachings of Morihei Uisheba. Uisheba understood that it is in war that we understand and seek peace. It is no coincidence that Aikido came from Japan, a warrior nation that brought the world both Zen meditation and Kamikaze suicide pilots. Aikido is the daughter of kendo, the Japanese art of sword practice, and she has never rejected her warring mother. However, unlike her more aggressive sisters (karate, judo, and jujitsu), Aikido is completely defensive. We direct an attacker's energy away from the attack and to the floor. There is no "against," no "push" or "pull"; we simply join with the attack and redirect its energy.

For those who practice it, Aikido is way toward peace in our daily lives. Through practice I know now that I don't have to lie down when faced with an attack, but I also know now that I don't have to be aggressive. I can defend myself without hurting others. This is the way of peace for a warrior. This is the third option I never considered that day years ago. It is the way of Aikido.

My Aikido practice is a constant internal battle for me, a war against my desire to use my strength, height, and weight against my partner, to force my way forward. I am neither a small nor a large woman. I know that I can push my way to success at least half the time. But odds like that only work on the mat. In the world, conflict most often comes from those who believe me an easy target.

Two years ago, just as I was beginning to return to Aikido, I had a job working at a summer camp. It was a good job: I was the director for the entire staff and the 60 kids who attended each session. Toward the end of the summer I supervised a camping overnight for the whole camp. It was a huge task, not just because of its logistical challenges, but also because I was taking the campers and staff out of the safety we created at the camp into the big bad world.

Shortly after I arrived at the campground with the first group of campers, I got word that a middle-aged woman had been swearing at some of our kids. Apparently she was angry about where the kids were playing. I found this woman and introduced myself; she immediately began her verbal attack. We were breaking rules, were not being environmental campers as the campground requested. We were too loud and out of control. I assured her that I was in charge and would address her

LETTERS FROM FRIENDS

Friends,

I taught liturgy and theology at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago from 1981 to 1995. During that time theological faculty from the University of Rostock, Germany, in the eastern zone "behind the iron curtain," visited several times. They told us that the peace movement, by then gaining considerably in energy and numbers, was centered mostly in churches. At the peace assemblies which were happening then, the Eucharist was celebrated and a general invitation was made to all, baptized or not, to participate. The leaders knew that baptism created an impediment with the authorities and, thus, many people had not undergone this ritual of initiation. They were wise enough to know that lack of baptism was no indicator of a person's Christian orientation, in this unusual case, so they invited all to the table. This story came to mind when I read your August issue about the relationship between baptism and Eucharist.

Thank you.

Rev. Jay C Rochelle Allentown PA

concerns to the best of my ability. It wasn't good enough for her. She began to yell at me, swearing and waving her arms, threatening to get the ranger and "let him know exactly what was going on."

I could feel her trying to make me mad. She wanted me to snap, to confirm that I couldn't handle this situation. "How old are you anyway? I don't mean to be rude, but you seem just too young to be in charge of so many people."

It was a good attack. I was young and it was my first time being responsible for such a large group. But standing there in front of her I could see the eyes of my staff and the campers on me. I knew they trusted me, and I knew they were behind me. Once again I was faced with a choice. I could counter her attack, yell at her for swearing around children, making up rules that she alleged we were breaking, and being ageist. I could point out that her version of environmental camping involved a battery-operated TV and two large coolers of beer. There would have been some winning, of that I was sure, but not much peace. Instead I offered to buy her permit and suggested another nearby campsite. I left feeling compassion for her anger and loneliness

I think about both those days together, and know that I have come a long way since the one day so many years ago, when I confused my bravado with real bravery. That piece of me isn't gone; I am still filled with fight. But now I understand it differently. I know that I am here to be a warrior for peace: to take bold steps into the battlefield and make my peace there. ☸

Maria Schell is a writer who currently divides her time between San Francisco and Chicago.

Aikido illustration by Karen Soleau. Karen is an illustrator, a teacher of children, and a member of St. Gregory's. See more of her work at www.karensoleau.com.

GREGORY OF NYSSA, a fourth-century bishop, theologian, and patron of St. Gregory's Church, saw life as unending progress towards discovering God at work among humanity, and sin as refusal to keep growing in this discovery. In this journal, which takes its name from his writings, we aim to further Gregory's vision by featuring two kinds of work:

☸ essays on liturgy and church practice, focusing on fresh and ancient approaches to corporate worship that honor human experience as an opening to God;

☸ writing and art by people who are searching for truth in their lives.

We are committed to the sharing of authentic personal experience as opposed to ideas or opinions. We welcome the voices of Christians, people of other faiths, and people of no particular faith.

GOD'S FRIENDS is published three times yearly by St. Gregory's Episcopal Church. Articles from past issues of *God's Friends* and more information about St. Gregory's can be found at our website: www.saintgregorys.org

FORTHCOMING ISSUES

WILL FOCUS ON

- ☸ CONGREGATIONAL SINGING
- ☸ MOURNING
- ☸ LEARNING, TEACHING, AND SERVICE
- ☸ MULTICULTURAL WORSHIP

Writers interested in contributing may review our editorial guidelines at www.saintgregorys.org/GodsFriends/Guidelines.html or by contacting *God's Friends* at the addresses on the right.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

We welcome your response to *God's Friends* and publish letters whenever possible. Please contact us using any of the addresses on the right.

TO CONTINUE TO RECEIVE GOD'S

FRIENDS We offer the online version of *God's Friends* free of charge. Go to www.godsfriends.org to add your name (or the names of friends who you know would like to receive the journal) to our Guestbook, and you will receive an email notice when each issue is available online. To continue receiving a printed copy of the journal by mail, please subscribe by sending us your name and address, and a check for \$15 — or more if you can.

ISSUE EDITORS: Clancy Drake, Tracy Haughton, and Tish Momirov

COPY EDITOR: Lynn Park

EDITOR: Clancy Drake

ART EDITORS: Paul Mahder and Tish Momirov

EDITORIAL BOARD:

Tracy Haughton, Dave Hurlbert, Diana Landau, Donald Schell, Joan Stockbridge, Janice Wickeri, and Margaret Lukens (Executive Director, All Saints Company)

WEBMASTER: Todd Fincannon

PUBLISHING BOARD:

Janice del Fiacco, Clancy Drake, Tracy Haughton, Margaret Lukens, Donald Schell, and Gail Whipple

MAILING ADDRESS:

God's Friends, St. Gregory's Episcopal Church, 500 DeHaro Street, San Francisco, CA 94107-2316

EMAIL: godsfriends@saintgregorys.org

PHONE: 415-255-8100

FAX: 415-255-8120

EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Friends,

When a group of us began *God's Friends* seven years ago, we wanted to share the vision that guides St. Gregory's Episcopal Church: We meet God in all our life experience, its great sorrows and its giddy pleasures, and the steady pull of simple labor—sometimes hard, sometimes repetitive—required for our daily survival. In all these moments God calls us into intimate friendship. As our rector, Donald Schell, tells us: "From our finite beginnings we embark on an infinite journey into the depths of God's own self." It is in listening to our experience, in our individual practice and in our corporate worship, that we will discover how and where God is calling us forward.

With every issue we publish, I still feel a thrill knowing our writers and readers are going to discover something together, something that may open them to the power of God at work in their own lives.

During my years as Editor of *God's Friends*, my husband and I welcomed a third daughter into our family and our older two girls grew into adolescents. Our family life has become a wildly wonderful whirlwind of activity, conversation, learning, and teaching. I find myself with less and less time to devote to *God's Friends* and I have decided to pass on the role of Editor.

Clancy Drake is an accomplished book editor who has worked in London and San Francisco. She has agreed to become our new Editor. She brings not only her professional expertise to the task, but also her perspective as someone in her 30s, about to be married—and helps us fulfill our mission as a magazine and a church to join the voice of the next generation with older voices.

I will continue to be a member of the magazine's Editorial Board and look forward to many more years of joining with you in listening for and presenting fresh accounts of God at work in our experience.

With love,
Tracy Haughton

**WE HOPE YOU ENJOY THIS ISSUE OF GOD'S FRIENDS.
PLEASE LOOK FOR THE ENVELOPE INSIDE AND SIGN UP
FOR YOUR SUBSCRIPTION. OR LOG ONTO WWW.GODSFRIENDS.ORG,
WHERE YOU CAN SIGN UP TO RECEIVE THE FREE ONLINE VERSION
OF THE JOURNAL. OTHER RESOURCES FOR OUR READERS
INCLUDE ST. GREGORY'S MUSIC CD'S AND SONGBOOKS, VIDEOS,
RECORDED SERMONS, AND LITURGY WORKSHOPS, ALL PART OF
OUR GROWING WEB SITE, WWW.GODSFRIENDS.ORG.**

St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church
500 DeHaro Street
San Francisco, CA 94107-2316



**THIS IS TRUE
PERFECTION:
NOT TO AVOID A
WICKED LIFE
BECAUSE WE FEAR
PUNISHMENT,
LIKE SLAVES; NOT
TO DO GOOD
BECAUSE WE EXPECT
REPAYMENT, AS IF
CASHING IN ON THE
VIRTUOUS LIFE BY
ENFORCING SOME
BUSINESS DEAL.
ON THE CONTRARY,
DISREGARDING ALL
THOSE GOOD THINGS
WHICH WE DO HOPE
FOR AND WHICH
GOD HAS PROMISED
US, WE REGARD
FALLING FROM
GOD'S FRIENDSHIP
AS THE ONLY THING
DREADFUL, AND WE
CONSIDER BECOMING
GOD'S FRIEND THE
ONLY THING TRULY
WORTHWHILE.**

GREGORY OF NYSSA

God's Friends is printed on recycled paper
by Golden Dragon Printing