



SHEPHERD'S SPEAK

VOICES THAT CHALLENGE

Volume 5, Issue 3

THE NATIONAL ADVOCACY CENTER SISTERS OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD

December 2006



Peace on Earth,
Goodwill to All



CHANUKAH

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An Appeal From The National Coordinator

Alison, Marilyn, and I would like to thank each one of you who have lifted us up in prayer throughout the year.

We have received encouragement and affirmation through phone calls, e-mails, cards and letters. You have expressed gratitude for newsletters, the Voters Guide, Lenten and Advent Reflections as well as other prayer services.

I don't want to leave out the feedback that we received from the weekly listserv. We would like to thank you for taking action. You have sent many letters to Congress and the President from our action website through Congress Web.

When we asked you to make phone calls, you came through. You helped us defeat the repeal of the estate tax which would have widened the deficit and hurt non-profit organizations and agencies like those operated and affiliated with the Sisters of the Good Shepherd.

You kept an enforcement only immigration bill from passing in the Senate. They did get the "Fence Bill" through, but only partially funded its construction. Keep comprehensive



NAC Staff

immigration reform in prayer as we hope for a better outcome in the 110th Congress.

Thank you for all your phone calls and letters that kept our country from establishing permanent military bases in Iraq. The national vote in November sent a loud and clear message that we want a change of policy in Iraq.

You also let our Congress know that our federal budget is a moral document that reflects our care and concern for the "least of these" in our country.

Inside this issue you will find an envelop asking for a contribution. We hope that your gratitude will translate into a tangible gift that together with you we can continue to be Life Bearers With and For the Poor.

Christian Soldier Returns to Front Lines Unarmed

Source: SojoMail <http://www.sojo.net/sojomail>

By Will Braun, Editor, Geez magazine www.geezmagazine.org

On the phone, in between his duties at Schofield Army Barracks in Hawaii, Sergeant Logan Laituri tells me he wants to "live radically for Christ." Normally I stumble over that sort of fervor – couched, as it is, in terms I would usually consider vague and cliché – but if following Jesus means telling your captain that 9/11 didn't absolve you of the need to love your enemies, I'll keep listening.

Laituri came to Jesus, as they say, at a dramatic time in his life. He was back from 14 months in Iraq as a front-liner in the U.S. Army, and scheduled to return. It was spring, 2005.

His new girlfriend's family welcomed him with a Christian love so genuine he couldn't resist. He ended up in a New Testament history class at a local college, and was also faced with the incisive questions from his philosophical brother and roommate. Soon he found himself immersed in scripture, filled with the spirit and brimming with passion.

The 25-year-old Laituri grew up the son of an agnostic Vietnam Vet in Orange County, California. In 2000, he joined the Army, hoping for education and travel. After a first term, he re-enlisted for an assignment in Hawaii, looking forward to some good surf. Throughout his six years in the military, Laituri had identified as Christian. "I had all the stickers and stuff," he says of his earlier faith, but that was about the extent of it.

His conversion brought change. He started heeding his college instructor's directive to let the Bible shape his opinions, rather than his opinions shaping it. Again, I'd dismiss this as tired religio-garble, if he weren't talking about his "place in geo-politics" at the same time.

"I realized I had to figure out what it meant to me to be a soldier," he says. "How do I act in my particular job and still follow the great commandment to love

your neighbor as yourself? Ya know, how can I do that when I'm asked to basically lay waste to kinda large scale areas?"

"We do know [Jesus] preaches peace," says Major Norman W. Jones, an Army Chaplain whom Laituri consulted at one point, "but it did not mean [Jesus]

was against a nation going to war." Major Jones – whose tone is open and entirely gracious – tells me the "sticky point is where [Jesus] says 'do not kill,'" and that's where Just War theory comes in. Though Jones sees faith and military service as compatible, he says he would have sympathy for a soldier whose faith convictions led to the conclusion that the U.S. war in Iraq is not just. "I'm here to support the soldier," he says, convincingly. Jones, who studied at Dallas Theological Seminary, points to the Biblical command to obey the government as the bottom line, though he adds that obedience to God trumps duty to one's nation.

Laituri – who punctuates conversation both with Bible verses and mini-rants about the sins of nationalistic ego – also looks to the good book as the source of "absolute truth," though it leads him in a different direction. When it says love your enemies, he says he "can't kill someone in love."

As his infantry company started gearing up for a return to Iraq, Laituri was busy asking people about faith, war, and the decisions he faced. In response, he got a lot of Just War theory, and rationalization for the the necessity of violence. People told him it was morally wrong to do nothing about the nation's enemies. One commander, who is also a Baptist preacher, assured Laituri that since he was a Christian, Jesus had died for all his sins, and therefore he was already forgiven for whatever he would do on the battlefield.

The people who had welcomed him to the faith did



Christian Soldier Returns to Front Lines Unarmed

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not welcome his questioning of military morality. His then-girlfriend's father told Laituri he was part of God's hand in bringing judgement to Muslim extremists. The views he heard didn't fit with the convictions he felt, and his company was set to leave for a training session in California before heading back to Iraq.

Logan Laituri sat in the bus, he and his colleagues headed to Honolulu airport for their flight to California. It was April 20, 9:40 in the morning. Headphones on, local Christian band *Olivia* playing a song called "Heaven," and his thoughts on what in the world to do about his beliefs. Then, for a moment, heaven itself seemed to open.

"I felt like somebody was showing me something," he says of the "short video clip" from above that followed.

"I saw myself in the Middle East, I'm pretty sure it was Iraq," he says, describing the emotionally vivid experience. "What struck me were two things: number one, that I did not have a weapon." The second thing was a feeling of "confidence;" the confidence that he was "doing what was right."

It was his calling. He would go to Iraq, but without a weapon.

At first he thought he might be able to do that as a non-combative member of his company. So after prayer and consideration, he applied for Conscientious Objector (CO) status, as per the Army regulation allowing a soldier to request discharge for reasons of conscience, as long as military officials deem the applicant "sincere" at the end of the stipulated process. He was ready to go to prison if need be, which, in today's for-us-or-against-us climate is a real possibility for CO applicants. Major Jones says the majority of CO applications are denied.

At that point Laituri was not actually trying to leave the Army, because he saw the human anguish within military ranks, and didn't think it was Christ-like to just abandon people in need. He just wanted to have the

right to refuse to bear arms.

But the military is not going to send someone to war without a weapon, and, as it turns out, it may not treat you very well if you make such a request. With re-deployment looming, Laituri's superiors dragged their feet on the CO process, missing stipulated procedural deadlines without explanation.

Laituri talks of theological discussions with commanders, hostile rumors, and bureaucratic tangles. One superior berated him, saying his actions benefitted the enemies of America – an insult Laituri took as affirmation, given Jesus' invitation to love the enemy.

Military command seemed determined to stall his CO application, but they didn't want him in the battlefield either. Eventually, with his term of service drawing to a close, he was re-assigned to a detachment that would not deploy overseas. He surrendered the CO process in favor of simply letting his term of service expire.

As of October 19, Laituri became a private citizen.

Major Jones says debate about the morality of war seldom comes up in his work, and CO applications are rare. However, according to the United Church Observer, 8,000 members of the U.S. military have deserted since the Iraq war began. During World War II, nearly 43,000 Americans refused to fight for reasons of conscience, and during the Vietnam War 170,000 COs were formally recognized. In addition, 25,000 to 30,000 so-called draft dodgers fled to Canada in the Vietnam era.

Currently there are about 175 U.S. military "deserters" living illegally in Canada, hoping to escape repercussions back home. If Canada's Immigration and Refugee Board starts sending them back to the U.S., Canadian churches will have to decide whether or not to grant them sanctuary - a custom whereby churches allow certain failed refugee claimants to live on church premises where law enforcement officials are hesitant to

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NAC Legislative Priorities for 2007

This fall the National Advocacy Center again sent out its annual legislative survey to help determine priorities for the coming year. We received responses from a majority of Good Shepherd communities and ministries and from those have made some adjustments to last year's priorities and organized them into thematic categories reflecting the core values that guide our work. During the year other issues may arise to which we need to respond, but this is our proactive, positive agenda for 2007. The NAC looks forward to working with you and finding new ways of collaborating to make sure these priorities are heard in the halls of Congress.

Level One issues are the highest priority and require the NAC to take a leading role through proactive and intensive advocacy, lobbying and research.

Level Two issues are priorities that require monitoring, some joint lobbying with coalition partners and reactive strategies, such as letters and alerts.

Level Three issues are ones that the NAC will monitor and address through work with coalitions and occasional alerts.

Level I

Strengthening Human and Economic Security

- *Promote Livable Wages*

Support legislation to increase the minimum wage and benefits such as the Earned Income Tax Credit that boost wages for low-income workers as steps toward wages that bring working families out of poverty.

- *Enhance Social Investment*

Support balanced tax and spending priorities that provide sufficient funding for critical social services and international humanitarian assistance, with special attention to funding for domestic violence, child welfare, and housing programs. Promote greater investment in affordable housing and violence prevention.

- *Increase Access to Health Care*

Support legislation to expand health coverage, particularly through the reauthorization of SCHIP.

- *Strengthen Prevention of Human Trafficking and Increase Supports for Survivors*

Support continuing improvements to the Trafficking Victims Protection Act and monitor implementation. Promote full funding for TVPA programs, especially for victim services.

Level II

Fostering Reconciliation Nationally and Globally

- *Peace Initiatives*

Support reductions in military spending and efforts to end U.S. military involvement in Iraq. Promote legislation for alternative conflict resolution, such as the establishment of a federal Department of Peace.

- *Immigration*

Continue support for comprehensive and compassionate immigration reform and for legislation to lift restrictions on lawfully present immigrants' receipt of federal benefits.

Level III

- *Improving Mental Health Care*

Support legislation to provide mental health/substance treatment parity and promote greater funding for and access to mental health services.

- *Promoting Global Economic Justice*

Monitor funding and legislation for foreign aid and global health, and support fair trade initiatives and responsible/sustainable international development.



Underground With Sister Ibolya Farkas, SSS

By Sr. Gayle Lwanga

Sister Ibolya Farkas is a Sister of Social Service who temporarily lives with the Good Shepherd Sisters in the Silver Spring, Maryland Community. She was born in Romania, but is of Hungarian decent. She came to the United States to study English.

Sister Ibolya Farkas has been a Sister of Social Service since she entered the novitiate in 1987. She made her first vows in 1992. What is so compelling about her story is that all of this was done in secret. Religious Life was practiced underground.

After World War II Romania was forced, through the manipulation of its political system, to become a satellite of the Soviet Union, and remained under Soviet control until the revolution of 1989. Although the practice of religion was tolerated, vowed religious life was not permitted. How Sr. Ibolya came to realize that she had a vocation, and made contact with the Sisters of Social Service, is a testament to God's faithfulness to a suffering humanity.

Sister Ibolya was attending University in Cluj where she met a sacristan when she joined a Christian prayer group that met in the sacristy. This Sacristan, who was a Sister of Social Service, told the small prayer group about her life in prison. Many vowed religious were imprisoned under the Communist regime that was in power in Romania.

Describing the meeting, Sr. Ibolya says, "I saw in her life that she was still able to be joyful, in spite of the hardships she endured in prison. She encouraged us to be joyful and good persons that our society needed. Her joy is what drew me to her."

Later the prayer group made a three day retreat. The first day they prayed "Hail Mary," the second day they prayed "Full of Grace," and the third day they prayed "The Lord is with you." During this retreat Sr. Ibolya explains, "My heart began to stir, I felt it was important for me to serve God

with my whole life. After I talked this over with the Sacristan, she sent me to speak to a woman who worked in a factory. I did not know it but she was the novice director. She gave me a symbol of the Holy Spirit, a small dove." At this point Sr. Ibolya began to learn more about the Sisters and the work they did.



Sr. Ibolya Farkas, SSS

In 1987, Sister Ibolya began her novitiate in secret, not even her family knew that she was in this process. This was done to protect the sisters. The sisters ministered in secret, living and working among the people.

It wasn't until Communism fell, and the President, Nicolae Ceausescu, was killed, that the sisters were able to come out in public and live in community. Sr.

Ibolya says that when this happened, "It was a surprise to me and to many older sisters, how many sisters had been living underground."

Now when Sr. Ibolya reflects on how religion was practiced when people had to be very careful about drawing attention to themselves and now, the difference is very stark. "I think people prayed more when we were under Communism because we had fewer choices. We had time for God. Life is much faster now, there are many things to do. We have to be more intentional about prayer time."

Reflecting on her time in the United States, Sr. Ibolya says, "I feel people here are very tolerant of other people. There is a great deal of diversity of people and cultures. This is a good value, the lesson of tolerance should be taught to the whole world. I will never forget the care with which I was received by the Good Shepherd Sisters, it was very good for my soul."

Legislative Wrap-up By Alison Prevost

The 109th Congress Comes to a Close

On December 8th the final votes of the 109th Congress were cast, but the legacy of its two years will weigh heavily on the new Congress and the country. The following is a brief wrap-up of the legislative action and inaction of the outgoing Congress and a brief look ahead to the 110th Congress.

Budget

Poor fiscal stewardship has been a hallmark of the 109th Congress and the outgoing majority. The past two years have been characterized by imbalanced budgets that have added to the national debt and contributed to increasing inequality in the country. Emblematic of the fiscal mismanagement was the Fiscal Year 2006 budget reconciliation process that slashed billions from vital programs such as Medicaid, SSI, foster care, and student loans in order to help pay for more tax cuts for a wealthy few. A more recent example was the outgoing Congress' failure to complete work on the annual spending bills for FY2007 (which began Oct 1st!).

On the last day of the session, both houses passed another "continuing resolution" that will provide funding for programs until Feb. 15th—by which point the 110th Congress will have to try to clean up the budget mess that has left many critical programs underfunded yet again (despite efforts by Democrats and a handful of moderate Republicans to provide additional funding). Since 2002, almost every discretionary (annually funded) human needs program has been cut, many by over 10% or more when inflation is taken into account.

Immigration

After passing the Secure Border Fence Act of

2006 before the election, the 109th ignored immigration issues for the rest of its abbreviated session. Throughout 2006, comprehensive reform proposals were stymied by a House leadership that chose to push extreme, anti-immigrant, enforcement-only legislation. One positive that arose in response to this hard line approach was increased political participation and involvement in advocacy by immigrant communities and the formation of a strong national/state/local coalition for comprehensive immigration reform.

Trafficking and Domestic Violence

Though the 109th Congress did pass strong reauthorizations of both the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA), it failed to provide adequate funding for programs under both of these acts to ensure their effectiveness. None of the new programs included in the VAWA reauthorization were funded during the FY2007 budget process and many barriers to services still remain for trafficked victims despite improvements in the TVPA.

War and Peace

Even with many of the election campaigns focused on Iraq, Congress did little substantively to address the on-going violence or to demand greater accountability from the Administration. Short debates were held on resolutions calling for the withdrawal of troops and a more specific timetable for U.S. military presence in Iraq, but neither passed. With Congress gone, attention has shifted to the report produced by the Iraq Study Group (ISG) which makes 95 recommendations for actions in Iraq and states a clear need for immediate change in policy.

While the President has shown considerable



Legislative Wrap-up Cont'd

coolness to the ISG plan, its recommendations could be taken up by the new Congress. With the American public now strongly disapproving of the war and many new members elected with expectations of greater leadership in ending U.S. military presence in Iraq, the new Congress will have to address the issue sooner rather than later.

In Darfur, conflict also still rages and greater action is needed. Congress did pass the Darfur Peace and Accountability Act, which imposes some sanctions and encourages greater action by the Administration and it also provided funding to help support the mission of African Union Peacekeepers. Pressure from Congress and the American public led the president to appoint a special envoy to Darfur, but stronger leadership is still needed at the United Nations. Perhaps with the resignation of the controversial US Ambassador to the UN, John Bolton, and hopefully additional pressure from the new Congress, the U.S. can help strengthen the UN's response to the crisis.

Looking Ahead

When the 110th Congress convenes on January 4th, incoming House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) have promised "to hit the ground running." An extended congressional work week, fewer congressional recesses, and an ambitious agenda for the first 100 hours of the new session are some of what the new leaders have planned.

The "100 Hours Agenda" includes several issues that the previous Congress failed to address—ethics reform legislation, a bill to raise the minimum wage, full implementation of the recommendations of the 9-11 Commission—as well as initiatives that were blocked by the previous leadership—legislation to make college more affordable, reduce subsidies for the oil industry,

and improve the Medicare prescription drug program.

There is also a lot of energy for renewed oversight in a variety of areas and for greater openness in the legislative process. In addition, Congress will have to tackle several important reauthorizations in 2007: the State Children's Health Insurance Program, the No Child Left Behind Act, and the Farm Bill. As always, the budget will be one of the more difficult issues that Congress has to deal with and next year's work will be further complicated by the fact that this year's budget remains incomplete.

Among many anti-poverty advocates and at the National Advocacy Center as well, there is renewed hope that the new Congress will be more responsive to the needs of the most vulnerable in our country. However, the difficult budget outlook and the closely divided Senate will make cooperation and strong grassroots advocacy all the more critical.

We have the opportunity to be much more proactive in articulating a positive agenda, but cannot afford to be complacent because even with new leaders promising change, we have yet to hear them say much about reducing poverty or providing health coverage for the millions of uninsured Americans.

Prophetic voices, clearly articulating values of compassion, the common good, peace and reconciliation, and economic justice will be needed to remind our elected representatives of the needs and hopes of the people they serve. So, let us remain hopeful, but also be watchful (both good Advent themes!) that we can start seeing some change in Washington that will bring positive change to those most in need and to the country and our world!

Happy Holidays!





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the Sisters of the Good**

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"Charity and Justice bind us to each other."

St. Mary Euphrasia (Foundress, Sisters of the Good Shepherd)

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SHEPHERDS SPEAK is a free publication to help keep friends informed of the National Advocacy Center's work. Donations to help cover costs are greatly appreciated. Contributions can be mailed to the above address. If you would like to receive the newsletter via e-mail, please contact Marilyn Riffkin at mriffkin@gsadvocacy.org Send your full name and e-mail address.

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forcibly enter to arrest someone.

Logan Laituri doesn't have to worry about fleeing his homeland now that he is out of the Army, but he does have his eyes on distant lands. He feels called to be a missionary to the Middle East. So, last Sunday he left for Israel/Palestine on a delegation with Christian Peacemaker Teams, the violence-reduction organization now famous for the four of their members abducted in Baghdad a year ago.

Not sure what someone who sounds like a cross between Noam Chomsky and an evangelical youth pastor means by "missionary," I asked what message he wants to bring to the Middle East.

"Jesus loves you. I love you," he says, proclaiming his desire to "radiate love" even if he doesn't convert a single person.

So off he goes, back to the front lines, disarmed and disarming, an "attitude of active compassion" at the ready. With the courage of a warrior and the love of God, he's living radically for Christ.

