

Peaceways

CENTRAL KENTUCKY COUNCIL FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE

February 2020

Iran in Context

by Peter Berres

“Death to America” is hard to reconcile, especially for an American peace activist. Painfully aware of America’s long history of countless, indefensible deaths perpetrated around the world, I nonetheless recoil at that chant. Neutralizing its dominion over my worldview has been a quest.

Saturating American screens over four decades, “Death to America” frames our “understanding” of the Middle East, particularly Iran. Conscious of this historic conditioning, I joined a small group of Americans who recently visited Iran — coincidentally during the 40th anniversary of Iranian students overrunning the US Embassy in Tehran, sparking the Iranian Revolution in November 1979.

Ten days later, America had imposed (ever-increasing) economic sanctions, which eased slightly after the “Iranian Nuclear Deal” was signed in 2015. In May 2018, however, President Donald Trump’s unilateral withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Accountability (JCOPA), despite verified indications Iran was abiding by its commitments, led to sweeping new “maximum pressure” sanctions further

choking the economy and negatively impacting ordinary citizens. This also signaled to Iranian citizens and leaders an end to diplomacy — while we planned a \$1.2 trillion modernization and expansion of our own nuclear arsenal.

Last summer, Trump threatened Iran with obliteration while piling more sanctions on financial institutions and development funds, and threatening ‘secondary sanctions’ against other countries that violate American-imposed sanctions. This intentional ‘economic war’ against the people was expected to force Iranians frustrated with economic hardships to rise, overthrow their government and move toward a system we prefer.

But much like six decades of American sanctions against Cuba, the sanctions have had an opposite effect: causing long term damage to the U.S.’s standing among Iran’s populations while eliminating the potential for peaceful democratic change in Iran by emboldening conservative, far-right forces in Iran’s government.

The rare presence of Americans in Iranian cities and cultural/historical sites drew friendly attention and great conversations from Iranians on the streets, who freely criticized their government while voicing desire for more freedom and democratic liberties. That desire was evidenced days after our departure when the government announced a 50 percent increase in fuel prices, sparking protests throughout Iran against government corruption and

mismanagement. The protests were then crushed by the Revolutionary Guard.

America shouldn’t take Iranians’ anger with their own government as welcoming new U.S. interference in Iran’s internal affairs. During four decades of this ‘economic war,’ Iranians have hardened themselves and are

determined to plot their own future.

Buoyed by the warm reception and high intelligence of the Iranians we encountered, we left with renewed hope for future relations and with the question: What could we do to help prevent war with Iran? Through public

communication, personal conversations and constant pressure on legislators ... working to reopen talks on another nuclear deal, toward sanctions relief and resistance to American involvement in Iran’s internal politics can be effective.

“Death to America,” understood in political, cultural and historical context, doesn’t feel as scary or any more threatening than the aggressively toned, increasingly less veiled threats of violence in some chants of “USA! USA! USA!” or the gloating over death and dying in the Middle East for personal blustering and audience venting at rallies. Those images legitimately scare the people of Iran.

Peter, a semi-retired educator and Vietnam veteran, has taught International Relations at universities in Cambodia, Vietnam and China, and in the Kentucky Governor’s Scholars Program in recent years.

America shouldn’t take Iranians’ anger with their own government as welcoming new U.S. interference in Iran’s internal affairs.

Gun Violence In America as of 1-30-20

2020 (year to date)

Killed	1,198
Suicide	1,980
Wounded	2,171

2019 (annual)

Killed	15,208
Wounded	29,501

Register for Time to THRIVE

The Human Rights Campaign is sponsoring a conference Feb. 14-16 in Washington, D.C., at the Renaissance Downtown Hotel. The conference welcomes people working with LGBTQ youth who want to learn more about creating a safe and inclusive environment for them. HRC has partnered with the National Education Association, the American Counseling Association, and the National Association of Secondary School Principals, among others, to present "Time to THRIVE," an annual national conference for youth-serving professionals on supporting LGBTQ youth. To register, go to timetothrive.org. Registration includes the full three-day conference, including registration, meals and free resources. The Human

Rights Campaign also has registration scholarships for those with financial need.

HRC's annual "Time to THRIVE" conference provides an opportunity for youth-serving professionals to build awareness and cultural competency, learn current and emerging best practices, and gather resources from leading experts and national organizations in the field. In addition to several celebrities and youth speakers, 65 diverse workshops are planned, which will be presented by over 40 national and grassroots organizations. Many exhibitors will distribute free resources on LGBTQ inclusion.

For more information contact Andi Salinas at Andi.Salinas@hrc.org.



Support needed for HB237

The Kentucky Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty is working to gather support for House Bill 237 which has been introduced by Rep. Chad McCoy, a Republican from Bardstown. The legislation, when passed, will keep seriously mentally ill defendants from execution. See the KCADP website for a set of talking points and other specific information about what the bill does and does not do. Go to apps.legislature.ky.gov/record/20rs/hb237.html to read the actual text of the bill.

The proposed bill is narrow, and the protection of society is insured:

- It does not provide that everyone who has a mental illness should be exempt from capital punishment. Rather it considers the degree and type of mental illness.
- It only applies to those defendants whose trials commence after enactment of the legislation.
- It specifically excludes from the exemption those diagnosed with conditions that are manifested primarily by repeated criminal conduct or attributable solely to the acute effects of the voluntary use of alcohol or other drugs.
- Unlike the insanity defense, the proposed bill only precludes the penalty of death, and so protection of society through incapacitation is

unimpaired.

- Life without parole remains a possible sentence for those who are found seriously mentally ill
- KCADP estimates that 82 percent of Kentuckians believe we should not be executing mentally ill persons. If you are among these people, your support is critical if this legislation is to pass.

KCADP asks that you call (800) 372-7181 to leave a message for your State Representative. Let him or her know that you want them to support House Bill 237 by co-sponsoring the bill and by voting Yes for it whenever it comes before them. This phone number is answered from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. on weekdays, except Friday when it stops earlier.

Sixteen state representatives from both major parties have already co-sponsored the bill and the goal is to include an additional 25 signers, showing the legislation has bipartisan support.

Please share this telephone number with friends and family members who might be willing to contact their state representatives and share it on social media. The more calls legislators receive, the more likely HB 237 will be to pass.

The Central Kentucky Council for Peace and Justice

Board of Directors: Rebecca Ballard DiLoreto, Rick Clewett, Bilal El-Amin, Mary Ann Ghosal (secretary), Heather Hadi, Randolph Hollingsworth, Rahul Karanth, Steven Lee Katz (treasurer), Richard Mitchell, Bruce Mundy, Steve Pavey, Nadia Rasheed, Rabbi Uri Smith, Teddi Smith-Robillard, Craig Wilkie.
Peaceways Staff: Margaret Gabriel (editor); Penny Christian, Gail Koehler, Betsy Neale, Mary Ann Ghosal, Jim Trammel (proofreaders). The views expressed in *Peaceways* are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of CKCPJ.

Member Organizations: ACLU-Central Kentucky Chapter; Ahava Center for Spiritual Living; Amnesty International, UK Chapter; Bahá'ís of Lexington; Berea Friends Meeting; Bluegrass Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO; Bluegrass Domestic Violence Program; Bluegrass United Church of Christ; Catholic Action Center; Central Christian Church; Commission for Peace and Justice, Catholic Diocese of Lexington; Gay and Lesbian Services Organization; Humanist Forum of Central Kentucky; Hunter Presbyterian Church; Islamic Society of Central Kentucky; Jewish Federation of the Bluegrass; Kentuckians for the Commonwealth; Kentucky Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty, Central Kentucky Chapter; Kentucky Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights; Kentucky Resources Council; Lexington Fair Housing Council; Lexington Fairness; Lexington Friends Meeting; Lexington Hispanic Association (Asociación de Hispanos Unidos); Lexington Labor Council, Jobs with Justice Committee; Lexington Living Wage Campaign; Lexington Socialist Student Union; Maxwell Street Presbyterian Church; Newman Center at UK; North East Lexington Initiative; One World Film Festival; Students for Peace and Earth Justice (Bluegrass Community and Technical College); Peacecraft; The Plantory; Progress (student group at Transylvania University); Second Presbyterian Church; Shambhala Center; Sustainable Communities Network; Union Church at Berea; Unitarian Universalist Church of Lexington; United Nations Association, Bluegrass Chapter.



Peaceways is published 10 times a year by the Central Kentucky Council for Peace and Justice, 1588 Leestown Rd., Ste. 130-138, Lexington KY 40511. The next issue of *Peaceways* will appear in March 2020. Deadline for calendar items is Feb. 10. Contact (859) 488-1448 or email peacewayseditor@gmail.com.

Calendar for Peace & Justice

The council seeks to promote dialogue as a path to peace and justice. Consequently, we announce events that we do not necessarily endorse.

Tues., Feb. 4

CKCPJ peace action committee, 5:30 p.m. Quaker Meeting House, 649 Price Ave., Lexington. Discussion of non-violence training and other peace-related activity.

Sun., Feb. 9

One World Film Festival One World Films formally opens its 2020 season with *Toni Morrison: The Pieces I Am*. The film follows American novelist Toni Morrison, who examines her life, her works and the powerful themes throughout her literary career. The film was released prior to her death. 2 p.m., Kentucky Theatre, 214 E. Main St. Lexington. Free.

Tues., Feb. 11

PFLAG Central Kentucky, 6:30-8:30 p.m., St. Michael's Episcopal Church, 2025 Bellefonte Dr., Lexington. The speaker this month will address the topic of bisexuality. There will be discussion and Q-and-A for the first hour, followed by our confidential support group meeting.

Tues., Feb. 11

CKCPJ single-payer health care committee, 5:30 p.m. Quaker Meeting House, 649 Price Ave., Lexington.

Thurs., Feb. 13

One World Film Festival *The Babuskas of Chernobyl*, 7 p.m. Kentucky Theatre, 214 E. Main St., Lexington. A portrait of a group of women who, after the 1986 Chernobyl disaster and evacuation, returned to the exclusion zone surrounding the nuclear power plant and have resided there, semi-officially, for years. Free

Fri-Sun., Feb. 14-16

Human Rights Campaign, *Time to Thrive*, Renaissance Washington, D.C. Downtown Hotel. The conference invites people working with LGBTQ youth who would like to learn more about creating safe environments for them. To register, go to timetothrive.org. Registration includes the full three-day conference, includes registration, meals and free resources. More information on page 2.

Fri-Sun., Feb. 14-16

Image Theatre Company, *Assassins*, music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, book by John Weidman. Farish Theatre, Lexington Public Library, 140 E. Main Street. 7 p.m. (Friday and Saturday, 2 p.m. Sunday). This Tony-award-winning musical explores the historical figures who attempted or assassinated American presidents. The play includes mature language and simulated gunplay. Tickets are available at imagetheatre.org and at the door. \$15 (students \$10). More information on page 5.

Sat., Feb. 15

One World Film Festival *The Eagle Huntress*, 10 a.m. Kentucky Theatre, 214 E. Main St., Lexington. Aisholpan, a 13-year-old girl, trains to become the first female in 12 generations of her Kazakh family to become an eagle hunter and rises to the pinnacle of a tradition that has been handed down from father to son for centuries. Aisholpan's father believes a girl can do anything as long as she's determined. Free

Mon., Feb. 17

CKCPJ steering committee meeting, 5 p.m., Quaker Meeting House, 649 Price Ave., Lexington. Discussion will include planning for the upcoming committee meetings, proposals for new initiatives, and continuing action.

Thurs., Feb. 20

One World Film Festival *Shoplifters*, 7 p.m. Kentucky Theatre, 214 E. Main St., Lexington. After one of their shoplifting sessions, Osamu and his son come across a little girl in the freezing cold. At first reluctant to shelter the girl, Osamu's wife agrees to take care of her after learning of the hardships she faces. Although the family is poor, barely making enough money to survive through petty crime, they seem to live happily together until an unforeseen incident reveals hidden secrets, testing the bonds that unite them. Free.

Sat., Feb. 22

One World Film Festival *From Nowhere*, 10 a.m. Kentucky Theatre, 214 E. Main St., Lexington. Three undocumented teenagers — a Dominican girl, an African boy and a Peruvian girl — are about to graduate high school in the Bronx, while working with a teacher and a lawyer to try to get proper documents to stay in the U.S. Forced to grow up quickly and navigate problems most adults don't ever have to face, the students are really just American teenagers who want to be with their friends, fall in love, and push back against authority. Free.

Sat., Feb. 22

Christian-Muslim dialog, 10 a.m.-noon. Masjid (Mosque) Bilal ibn Rabah, 1545 Russell Cave Road, Lexington. Dr. Jamil Farooqui, *Being an Interfaith Activist*. Dr. Farooqui has spoken about his passion for interfaith dialogue, and will be with CMD to share his enthusiasm and ideas.

Thurs., Feb. 27

One World Film Festival *Soul Power*, 7 p.m. Kentucky Theatre, 214 E. Main St., Lexington. In Zaire, James Brown, B.B. King, Miriam Makeba, the Spinners, and others perform in a three-day concert preceding 1974's "Rumble in the Jungle" boxing match between Muhammad Ali and George Foreman. Among the songs performed are "Soul Power," "One of a Kind (Love Affair)," "The Click Song" and "Payback." Free.

Sat., Feb. 29

One World Film Festival *Impulso*, 10 a.m. Kentucky Theatre, 214 E. Main St., Lexington. The word "impulso," the flamenco dancer Rocío Molina explains, refers to an urge that passes through the body before reaching the senses. The documentary "Impulso," directed by Emilio Belmonte, follows Molina, who has been credited as one of flamenco's rising stars for combining traditions with improvisations and other experiments, as she prepares for a show in Paris. Free.

Cooked: Survival by Zip Code

Cooked is a 2018 documentary that examines the the shocking and often-forgotten impacts of a deadly heat wave that overtook Chicago in 1995, killing 739 residents, most of them poor, elderly and African American. The movie presents an argument that the best preparation for a disaster may start with actually redefining the terms “disaster,” “preparedness,” and “resilience.” The documentary will be screened at the following times:

- Monday February 3, 2020 10:00 pm ET on KET
- Tuesday February 4, 2020 2:30 am ET on KET2
- Friday February 7, 2020 2:00 am ET on KET2
- Saturday February 8, 2020 3:00 am ET on KET2

Local theatre company presents *Sondheim*

Image Theatre Company will present *Assassins*, a musical by Stephen Sondheim, book by John Weidman. on Fri. and Sat., Feb. 14 and 15 at 7 p.m. and Sun., Feb. 16 at 2 p.m. at the Farish Theatre, Lexington Public Library, downtown branch, 140 E. Main St.

The musical bends the rules of time and space and takes the audience on a roller-coaster ride in which assassins and would-be assassins from different historical periods meet and interact in the name of claiming the “prize,” the American dream.

Assassins has been described as a theatrical tour-de-force and has won multiple Tony Awards. It is recommended for mature audiences and includes rough language and simulated gun play.

Tickets cost \$15, \$10 for students.

Assassins isn’t about good and bad; it’s about why?

.....

CKCPJ on Facebook

By “Liking” the CKCPJ Facebook page, you will receive posts by a variety of people focused on local, national and international issues.

Items from local and national publications and websites routinely appear on the CKCPJ Facebook page, so you can expect varied and enlightening posts. Check them out and be sure to share.

Recent posts include comments about Kentucky SB 1; a link to stories about the encounter between NPR reporter Mary Louise Kelly and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo; the relative lack of good-paying jobs, why the assassination of Qassem Soleimani was an act of war; and information about Seedleaf.

Check it out!

Cherokee Spirituality Experience, Mar. 10-15

For 25 years, Father John Rausch has hosted a five-day workshop that introduces participants to the spirituality of the Cherokee people.

Held in Cherokee, North Carolina, Father John and co-host Mary Herr have invited Native American presenters to illustrate the legends, ceremonies, history, culture and food of the Cherokee people. Presentations will slowly reveal the depth of Cherokee spirituality and offer participants a background to reflect on their own expression of spiritual growth.

The times of prayer and theological reflection will integrate the learning with the participant’s own life experiences. The workshop will include discussion of traditional Cherokee religion and beliefs, the history of the Trail of Tears, integration of Christian worship with Native American symbols, and a visit to the Cherokee mother town of Kituwah.

At the conclusion of the five days, participants will have insight into the difference between Christian spirituality and Native American spirituality.

The workshop is scheduled for March 10-15, with arrival on Tuesday afternoon and departure on Sunday after church services.

The cost, which includes lodging, program fees and some meals, is \$400 (double occupancy) and \$600 (single occupancy). Scholarships are available.

For more information, contact Mary Herr, (828) 497-9498 maryherr2017@gmail.com or Fr. John Rausch (606) 663-0823 jsrausch@bellsouth.net.



Submissions to *Peaceways*

Articles submitted to *Peaceways* should show an awareness of and sensitivity to the CKCPJ's mission and concerns.

Feature articles should be no longer than 500 words, unless you are willing to have the piece cut to fit one page of *Peaceways* text. Pieces will be edited for clarity.

Please include references in the text for all quotations, statistics, and unusual facts. End-notes or footnotes are not used.

Please query submissions to peacewayseditor@gmail.com before writing a feature article intended solely for *Peaceways*.

For all submissions, the author's name, address, and phone number should appear on the body of the submitted text.

If you submit material that has been published or which you are also submitting to other publishers, be sure to indicate this.

Also include information about your relationship to any organization or issue mentioned in the article, for inclusion in a biographical reference at the end of the story.

Submissions should be made in Word format *via* email. Book reviews are usually solicited by the editor, but we welcome inquiries from potential reviewers.

Submission deadline is the 10th of each month. *Peaceways* is published monthly except January.

Support CKCPJ by linking
your Kroger Plus card
to #16439 at
krogercommunityrewards.com

MONTHLY MEETINGS

CKCPJ Steering Committee Meetings, third Monday, 5 p.m., Quaker Meeting House, 649 Price Ave. More info: (859) 488-1448 or peaceandjusticeky@gmail.com. All are welcome.

Interfaith Prayer Vigil for Peace, every Thursday, 5:30 - 6 p.m. at Triangle Park (corner of Broadway and Main Street) in downtown Lexington. Contact Richard Mitchell, (859) 327-6277.

Migrant Network Coalition, first Monday, noon - 1:15 p.m., GLOBAL LEX, 1306 Versailles Road, Lexington. Contact Lindsay Mattingly, lmatingly@lexpublib.org, (859) 231-5514.

PFLAG Central Kentucky, second Tuesday, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m. LGBTQ individuals of all ages, family members, friends and allies are welcome. St. Michael's Episcopal Church, 2025 Bellefonte Dr., Lexington. Visit info@pflagcentralky.org or (859) 338-4393. Speakers followed by confidential support group meeting.

Bluegrass Fairness of Central Kentucky, second Tuesday, 7:30 p.m., Lexington Public Central Library, 140 E. Main St., Lexington. Contact Craig Cammack, chair, (859) 951-8565 or info@lexfair.org.

Wednesday Night GLSO "Heart to Heart" discussion group, 7 p.m., Pride Center, 389 Waller Ave., Lexington. GLSO operates Kentucky's only Pride Center, where they have quietly provided services to the GLBTQQIA community for decades. More info, Pride Center hours, and other links at www.glsso.org.

Humanist Forum of Central Kentucky, first Thursday, 7 p.m., Great Hall of the Unitarian Universalist Church, 3564 Clays Mill Rd., Lexington. The Forum is a Chapter of the American Humanist Association. Meetings are open to people of all beliefs willing to express their opinions in a civil manner. Child care is provided. Contact President Staci Maney, staci@olliegee.com or (859) 797-2662.

Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, third Thursday, 7 p.m., Episcopal Diocese Mission House at Fourth St. and MLK Blvd, Lexington. Contact Beth Howard, (859) 276-0563.

NAMI Lexington Support Groups, every Sunday, 2:30 - 4 p.m. Participation Station, 869 Sparta Ct., Lexington. Call (859) 272-7891 or visit www.namilex.org.

Christian-Muslim Dialogue Program, fourth Saturday, 10 a.m. - noon. All are welcome. Locations vary, call (859) 277-5126. The Christian-Muslim dialogue promotes understanding and mutual respect between Christians and Muslims. By exploring moral, cultural and political factors shaping the current context, the program promotes personal and collective responsibility to build a more just and peaceful world.

Dance Jam, every Tuesday, 5:30 - 7 p.m., Quaker Meeting House, 649 Price Ave. Move to the extent you are able. Sponsored by Motion Matters, \$7 per session to cover space rental. Contact Pamela, info@motionmatters.org, (859) 351-3142.

Movies with Spirit, second Friday of every month. Unitarian Universalist Church, 3564 Clays Mill Road, Lexington. Potluck at 6 p.m., film at 7.

National Action Network, third Thursday each month, 7 - 8:30 p.m. at the Central Library, Lexington.

Showing Up for Racial Justice, second Tuesday of the month, 5:30-7:30 p.m., Wild Fig Coffee and Books, 726 N. Limestone, Lexington.

To include a regular meeting of your organization in this space, contact Margaret Gabriel, peacewayseditor@gmail.com.

Book/film review

See the film, read the book , save an innocent life

Just Mercy (2019). A film directed and co-written by Destin Daniel Cretton. Starring Michael B. Jordan, Jamie Foxx, and Brie Larson. 2 hours 17 minutes. Rated PG-13. Reviewed by Jim Trammel

After reading *Just Mercy* in 2016, I said Walter McMillian's case that is profiled in the book would have made one of those "Making a Murderer" cable shows. Hollywood did me one better – now it's a movie. (It played in Lexington in January, and is likely gone by the time this sees print, but you can still get it from the streaming services, of course.).

And to think it happened in Monroeville, Alabama, hometown of *To Kill a Mockingbird* novelist Harper Lee. The film gives us real-life versions of the fictional events Lee wrote about, proving that people just don't learn the lessons that went before.

McMillian, who died in 2013, was a gentle guy, a local business owner, respected by the white establishment. But he struck up a relationship with a white woman, which was remembered when local law enforcement, pressed to solve the murder of a white teenage girl, believed the lies of an unhinged jailbird.

Enter young attorney Bryan Stevenson, who will become the author of *Just Mercy*. At this point, he is a confused and rudderless Harvard law school graduate who dreams of establishing a legal services program based on principles of social justice, funded by donations and grants. He takes over McMillian's case, impressed by the defendant's sincere pleas of innocence.

You've read the dismal stories before, dreading the endings as you devour the details. Racist deputies, willfully blind judges and jailers, lying witnesses, and winked-at circumventions of legal safeguards — they're all here. The stink of corrupt Southern justice is pungent; legal



Michael B. Jordan, Jamie Foxx in *Just Mercy*.

efforts flawlessly played by Stevenson and his assistants see every motion denied, every maneuver foiled, every hope dashed, until it looks, inescapably, as if "Yellow Mama," Alabama's electric chair, will seat yet another. (Alabama executes by injection now, but what's the difference?)

Stevenson once declaimed before the Alabama Court of Appeals: "We have serious problems and important work that must be done in this state." Indeed they do, and they can start putting things right by ending what's called "judicial override," in which a judge can inflate a jury's life sentence into a death penalty on his own. This happened to McMillian.

Florida had those rules too, until the U.S. Supreme Court specifically banned Florida's judicial override system. In Alabama, prisoner Vernon Madison's execution had been set by a rogue judge, using Alabama's version of the Florida rules. Despite the constitutional questions, Alabama almost went ahead with killing Madison anyway. The Supreme Court, without Antonin Scalia, deadlocked 4-4 and Madison's stay of execution was allowed to stand.

Another guy wasn't so lucky — Scalia condemned him in the last

judicial action he took before going on permanent recess. I hope those two had a fun conversation in the hereafter.


So see the movie and read the book.

Also, any attorneys reading this, please acquire and consume *Tell the Client's Story: Mitigation in Criminal and Death Penalty Cases*, an authoritative guide to successfully litigating complex capital criminal issues. Who knows, you might be the next crusading hero up there on the screen, in addition to saving an innocent life.

Reviewer Jim Trammel should be imprisoned for reading *Just Mercy*, being moved by the story, and then completely forgetting about it before the film reminded him.

*Afflict the comfortable;
give comfort to the afflicted.*

PEACEWAYS



The Central Kentucky Council
for Peace and Justice
1588 Leestown Rd., Ste. 130-138
Lexington KY 40511

Issue #326 • February 2019

*“Of all the forms of inequality,
injustice in health is the
most shocking and the most inhuman.”*

~ Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The only tool of the powerless?

by Margaret Gabriel

A couple of weeks ago I attended the community meeting at the Catholic Action Center. The center on Industry Road in Lexington holds a meeting every Sunday to give residents information about the availability of jobs, housing and other pieces of the puzzle that will enable folks to move from the CAC community to a home of their own.

Some of the residents at the Sunday meetings live at the CAC for only a short time; others have been a part of the community for several years. After the meeting, each resident signs up for four hours of chores which reserves a bed and a locker for the coming week. Chores are diverse and include cleaning details, both inside and outside the Industry Road facility, helping in the kitchen and with bed-making and laundry. There are always chores available for people with a limited amount of mobility.

As one might assume, the number

of residents grows during the winter months and people who are not staying overnight come during the day for meals. As many as 150 people or more come through the doors every day. The community thrives, despite the fact that everyone is dealing with varying levels of stress.

Early on the agenda of the meeting I attended, a young woman presented a petition that had been drawn up, asking that all residents be treated with respect. Several people related instances when they were treated disrespectfully and they made it evident that the lack of respect made the difficulty of being without a home even more stressful.

CAC director Ginny Ramsey facilitates the meeting every week and that day made it evident that treating people with respect and dignity was always required of every member of the CAC community, but it appeared that additional consideration and thoughtfulness was needed during

winter, a difficult time of year. As I observed the highly charged scene, the reality of petitions — and who uses them — hit me squarely in the face.

When I was in the later years of elementary school, teachers who made rules or decisions that were unpopular were often presented with a petition asking for change. We students knew (and were told as much at one time by a teacher whose name I have blessedly forgotten) that petitions never change anything. But what we did know was that we needed to do something to counter what we saw as a lack of justice.

It occurred to me on that Sunday afternoon meeting that petitions are a tool of the powerless. Unfortunately, the powerless often perceive them as the only tool they have and even though they rarely achieve the change they are requesting, at least voicing that request gives a momentary feeling of power.

As editor of *Peaceways*, I try to suggest actions that can remedy societal problems we point out. There's little we can do to make a person experiencing homelessness feel more powerful, but I am committing to learning the names of more of the people I see every week at CAC. I hope that greeting someone by saying, "Good morning, Bobby," instead of "Good morning," will give him the power of connection with another person.

Margaret Gabriel is the editor of *Peaceways* and a volunteer at the Catholic Action Center.

