

This spring issue of the IPWG Newsletter begins with Frederick Trost's reflection on the meaning of Lent, the season many Christian communities will be observing when this newsletter arrives. Jerry Folk's article looks at the relationship between nonviolence and communities of faith, emphasizing particularly the centrality of nonviolence in the life and teaching of Jesus and the early church. Jane Kavaloski and Jerry Folk offer an outline for a Bible study focusing on Jesus' nonviolence that local congregations can

use in a youth or adult study group during Lent or the Easter Season. Paula Rogge has contributed two interesting articles on the United Nations Nuclear Weapons Treaty Ban and on the future of the Point Beach Nuclear Power Plant. This issue closes with an article by Tom Boswell on the continuing efforts to prevent the stationing of F-35 Fighter Jets at Truax Field in Madison.

– The Editor

## Lent: A Time of Repentance and Reflection

by Frederick Trost

Lent has arrived, a time of repentance and deep reflection on human nature and the faith we proclaim. For many of us, it will be a time of tears; a time to bend our knees and confess our indifference to the brutality present in the world into which we are sent. There might well be gnashing of teeth among us and a humbling of spirit before we once again dare to “rise up on wings like eagles” in the light of Easter.

Some of us will return to basics—to the catechisms which describe the purpose of our lives as seeking after the “righteousness” of God; to honest reflection on biblical texts that awaken and renew in us resistance to the present inhumanity that suffocates life and crucifies the hope that is in us. We shall walk alongside Jesus and the peacemakers, close to the prophets and the saints of old and modern times, allowing ourselves, perhaps, to be embraced by saints like Hildegard of Bingen, Mohandas Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Dorothy Day and the great 20th century scripture scholar, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. If we allow ourselves to be humbled, we may find time to take to heart the “history of God's grace with



Women of Jerusalem weep for Jesus on his way to the cross.

humanity” (Wolf Krotke) and the requirement that we resist the inhumanity that today is raging all around us, including in the policies of governments, especially our own.

Perhaps we shall take time to pray alongside Dietrich Bonhoeffer and others who took to heart that passage in Proverbs (31:8) that calls us all to “Speak out for those who cannot speak; for the rights of the destitute.... (and) the rights of the poor and needy.” It is in embracing (in word and deed) or refusing to embrace the sufferers and the forsaken of this war-fractured world that we reveal to the world whether or not we are truly who we claim to be—people who dare to stake our lives on faith in God.

Staking our lives on faith in God means that we must not be casual about the endless warfare waged by our government in our name or the silence of many of our churches, synagogues and mosques in the face of that warfare. With missiles and drones and sanctions, “crimes against humanity” and cruelty beyond measure, the nature of God is being violated and millions

of children of God, created in the divine image, are being crucified in our nation’s worship of the bloody “gods of metal.”

Saint Jerome spoke long ago about the vocation of those who seek to live by faith: In them, “the lips, the heart, and the hands agree,” he wrote. In the Lenten days ahead, we have opportunities to ponder the reality of our dark and dangerous times. As the old catechisms put it, we live by the grace of God which brings us to the foot of the cross and to the margins of society. From that place, in repentance, with humility, honesty and determination, we can embrace the urgency of moving from darkness into the light where we will be free for humanity and for life. “Blessed are the Peacemakers,” Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. As we emerge into the light of Easter, may we embrace our vocation to be peacemakers, so that we can claim that blessing.

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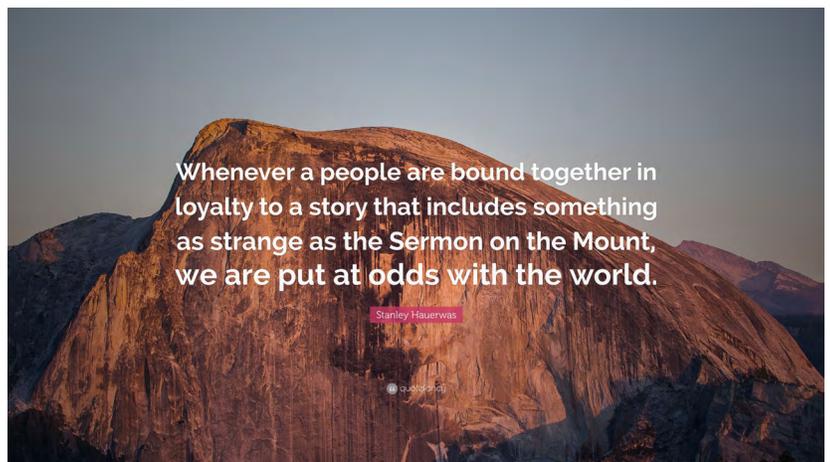
## Jesus and Nonviolence: Part I

by Jerry Folk

In his “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop” speech the night before he was murdered, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said “The choice we face is no longer violence or nonviolence; the choice we face is nonviolence or nonexistence.” The truth of this statement becomes more obvious every day. If humanity is to prosper and perhaps even survive on this planet, people of faith must fight for peace and justice, but we must fight nonviolently following Dr. King’s and Gandhi’s example.

Faith communities are called to lead the way toward nonviolence, because nonviolence is a form of love and love is central in the teaching of most major faith communities. God’s *Hesed*, translated as tender mercy or love, is a major theme throughout Jewish scriptures. The Buddha insisted that no one can attain the “wisdom” of enlightenment unless he or she feels “compassion” for all sentient beings. Every chapter of the Qur’an but one begins, “In the name of God, the Benevolent,” the Merciful, the Compassionate. No religious leader emphasized

love more absolutely than Jesus. The whole New Testament bears witness to this. “Faith, hope and love abide, these three, but the greatest of these is love,” Paul writes in I Corinthians. The author of the First Letter of John actually equates God and love. “God IS Love,” he writes not once, but twice.



For Jesus, love is not confined to the realm of personal relationships. It is an energy that binds us together in what Martin Luther King, Jr. called the Beloved Community and what Jesus called the Kingdom of God. At the heart of Jesus’ whole

life and ministry is his announcement that the Kingdom of God is breaking into the world; that it is, in fact, already among us. Jesus' teachings and actions portray and proleptically realize God's Reign here and now. His welcoming the marginalized, his meal fellowship with prostitutes and tax collectors, his egalitarian interactions with women incarnate the universality of God's love and the solidarity of life in God's kingdom.

Jesus' proclamation and embodiment of the Reign of God was a lethal treat to the religious and political leaders and the social order over which they presided. These leaders accused him of drunkenness and gluttony and called him a friend of prostitutes and sinners, which indeed he was. In fact, he told the priests and lawyers, "Prostitutes will enter the Kingdom of God ahead of you." The authorities soon realized that to preserve the unjust social order over which they presided and from which they benefited they must destroy Jesus.

What is most relevant for any consideration of Jesus' nonviolence is not the authorities' hostility toward Jesus but Jesus' response to it. Jesus never backed down or even moderated his message or behavior. Sometimes he even escalated it. But he unequivocally rejected violence as a means of defending himself or advancing his cause and required his followers to do the same. "Put up the sword," he told Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane. "Those who live by the sword will perish by the sword."

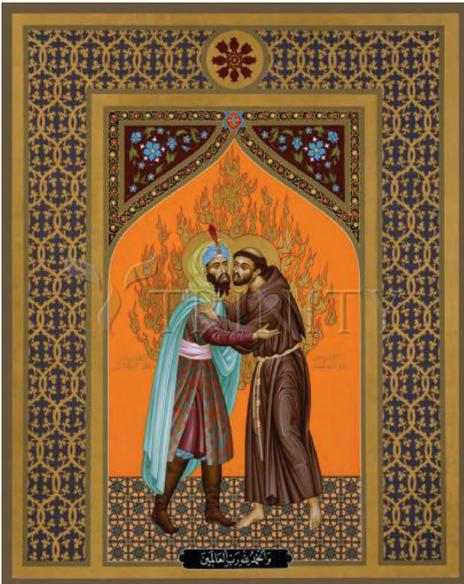
Jesus presents his teaching on nonviolence most clearly in his Sermon on the Mount when he says, "You have heard it said, 'you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy,' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return...and you will be children of the Most High, who makes the sun rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. Be merciful as God is merciful."

Jesus' teaching and practice of nonviolence was well known and emphasized in the church for 300 years. Biblical scholar William Klassen writes

that Jesus' words about loving the enemy were the most frequently quoted of all Jesus' sayings in the early church. In the first three centuries of our era, all the most influential teachers of the Church taught that nonviolence and love of the enemy are marks that identify people as followers of Jesus. In his defense of Christianity to the Emperor Marcus Aurelius around 177 CE, Athenagoras, an influential Christian teacher in Athens, wrote "We (Christians), thinking that to watch a person being killed is practically equivalent to taking life, refuse to attend the gladiatorial displays." Origen of Alexandria, the most brilliant and influential church teacher of the third century, wrote around 220 CE. "(God) did not deem it becoming to his own divine legislation to allow the killing of any person whatever." Commenting on the commandment "Thou shalt not kill," Lactantius, a Christian leader and advisor to the Emperor Constantine in the early 4th century, wrote, "in this commandment of God, no exception at all ought to be made to the rule that it is always wrong to kill a human being, whom God has wished to be a sacrosanct creature." All these respected leaders of the early church pointed to Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount as the inspiration for their teaching.

After the Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity in the 4th century, the churches emphasis on Jesus' nonviolent teaching and life gradually faded, but never completely disappeared and from time to time came to the fore again. The life and ministry of St. Francis of Assisi is a particularly dramatic example of this. One incident especially demonstrates St. Francis' devotion to nonviolence. In 1299, while the 4th Crusade was raging in Egypt, St. Francis journeyed there with several Franciscan brothers. He and Br. Illuminatus left the Crusaders' camp and walked unarmed into to the camp of the Muslim leader, Sultan Malik al Kamil. Thinking him an emissary from the Crusaders' camp, Turkish soldiers took him to the Sultan, who received him graciously. Francis remained in the Sultan's camp for several days and conversed with the Sultan about Jesus and peace. The Sultan is reported to have said, "If all Christians were like you, I would become one."

In a talk to ambassadors to the Holy See shortly before his trip to Abu Dhabi and Morocco in



© St. Francis and the Sultan, Br. Robert Lentz, OFM, Courtesy of Trinity Stores, [www.trinitystores.com](http://www.trinitystores.com), 800.699.4482

2019, Pope Francis referred to this peacemaking mission of St. Francis. He said, “These (upcoming) visits represent two important opportunities to advance...mutual understanding between the followers of (Christianity and Islam) in this year of the 800th anniversary of the historic meeting between St. Francis and Sultan Malik al Kamil.”

In the twentieth century a renewed awareness of Jesus’ nonviolence emerged in the Roman Catholic and mainline Protestant churches and a greater emphasis on his nonviolence appeared in their teaching. At the same time, Mohandas Gandhi, inspired by Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, began his “experiments with Truth” through which he developed nonviolent but effective weapons with which to fight for peace and justice in the spirit of Jesus’ teaching about loving the enemy. Part Two of his article, which describes these developments, will appear in the next issue of this newsletter.

## Jesus as a Model of Nonviolent Resistance: A Group Discussion

by Jane Kavaloski and Jerry Folk

### **PURPOSE: To Think Anew about Jesus as a Model of Nonviolent Resistance**

The message that the reign of God is very near, indeed is already among us, was the central theme of Jesus’ whole life and work. In order to get that message across and give us a picture of life in the Reign of God, Jesus practiced nonviolence throughout his life and sometimes engaged in nonviolent acts of civil and religious resistance. In this exercise we will look for examples of Jesus’ nonviolence and of his acts of resistance in these sections from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke: Luke 13:10-16; Matthew 21:1-2, 6-11; Matthew 21:12-15; Matthew 26: 48-52; and Luke 23:32-34.

### **Suggestions for Conducting this Discussion**

If the group you are working with is larger than 12-15 people, break it down into groups of 4-6. Have participants read the first passage and ponder it in silence for few minutes. Ask them to look for a nonviolent word or act of Jesus which shows his resistance to or rejection of a widespread belief, value, or institution of his day.

Then have participants share their experience with the reading in a “round-robin” discussion. Have a board or flip chart available and write everyone’s response on the board/flip chart. Continue this process with each of the passages listed. Try to get through all the passages in whatever time the group has. Save as much time as you think you will need for closure.

This process is likely to need at least an hour (10 minutes for each reading plus 5 minutes for introducing the study and 5 minutes for closure). If you have more time, please evaluate the process using the following questions:

1. What are your feelings and perceptions of this reflection?
2. Did it change your understanding of the ministry of Jesus?

*The Interfaith Peace Working Group would appreciate comments and suggestions from any group that uses this exercise so that we can improve it based on your experience. You may send a message to us at our email address, [interfaithpeaceworkinggroup@gmail.com](mailto:interfaithpeaceworkinggroup@gmail.com).*

## Background Information for the Discussion

Understanding a little about the historical, cultural, and religious context in which a biblical text was written helps us interpret that text and apply it to our own contemporary situation. We hope the information provided below will be useful in this way for your discussion.

### Luke 13:10-16

There are and have always been a large number of these rules and customs in Judaism about how to keep the sabbath. What do Jesus' words and actions say about his attitude toward rules? What is his point? (Hint: He makes this quite clear himself in this story). Does this story show Jesus' as a model of nonviolent resistance? Why or why not?

### Matthew 21:1-2, 6-11

According to the New Testament scholar John Dominick Crossen, two processions entered Jerusalem at Passover in the year 30 AD. The governor, Pontius Pilate, entered the city from the West no doubt on a Roman warhorse at the head of a procession of Roman soldiers marching to the beat of drums and the blasts of trumpets. He came to Jerusalem at Passover every year, because the city was crowded with pilgrims from all over the Roman Empire who had come to celebrate Passover, the festival commemorating the liberation of the Jews from slavery in Egypt. This liberation celebration stirred up Jewish patriotism and passion for liberation from Rome, which made Jerusalem a tinder box for rebellion at Passover. The governor came with a legion of soldiers to keep a lid on things.

Jesus entered the city from the East mounted on a donkey on which his disciples had put their cloaks. He was surrounded by a rag-tag band of peasants from Galilee and perhaps some lepers, blind and deaf people and a few prostitutes whom he had helped. (See Dominick Crossen, *The Last Week*).

Pilate entered Jerusalem that day claiming it for the Roman Empire and for Caesar. Through his carefully planned counter-procession, Jesus entered the city claiming it for God and the Reign of God, the arrival of which he had proclaimed throughout his ministry.

Looking closely at the imagery of these processions, what does this story tell you about the Reign of God? How does the Reign of God differ from Reign of the Roman Emperor, Caesar? In your opinion, does this story portray Jesus as a model of nonviolent resistance? Explain your opinion.

### Matthew 21:12-15

According to Matthew's gospel, immediately after he entered the city, Jesus went to the Temple and did something quite remarkable and very bold. The Temple was the center of a wealthy, oppressive and somewhat corrupt religious system controlled by an elite group of Jewish leaders backed by Rome, the occupying power. In the spirit of the Hebrew prophets, several first century Jewish groups were highly critical of this system. Through the action described in this text, Jesus joins this criticism. What point do you think Jesus is making in this action? Do you think Jesus is modelling nonviolent resistance here? If so why? If not why not?

### Matthew 26:48-52

When the Temple guard was about to arrest Jesus, Peter tried to defend him with violence. Although by this time he knew what was in store for him, Jesus unequivocally rejected violence. What does this tell you about Jesus' commitment to nonviolence?

### Luke 23:32-34

What do these words of Jesus from the cross say about Jesus' nonviolence?

“Nonviolence has been marginalized because it is one of the rare truly revolutionary ideas, an idea that seeks to completely change the nature of society, a threat to the established order. And it has always been treated as something profoundly dangerous.”

Mark Kuransky,  
*This Nonviolent Life*  
February 18, 2021

# Nuclear Weapon Ban Treaty

by Paula Rogge

The UN Nuclear Weapon Ban Treaty was adopted in July 2017. It entered into force on January 22, 2021, after it had been ratified by over 50 countries. The Treaty was the result of many years of education of UN member states about the humanitarian and environmental consequences of nuclear war and of extensive negotiations. Testimony by hibakusha, survivors of the Hiroshima Nagasaki nuclear bombings, played a crucial role in its adoption.

For those nations that signed it, the treaty prohibits the development, testing, production, stockpiling, stationing, transfer, use and threat of use of nuclear weapons, as well as assistance and encouragement to the prohibited activities. If a nuclear armed state joins the treaty, it must follow a time-bound framework for negotiations leading to the verified and irreversible elimination of its nuclear weapons program.

It binds those who sign it, not those who refused to sign, including the 9 nations who currently have nuclear weapons. But it establishes an international standard which carries a moral weight. And it can carry an economic weight as well. Nations that have signed the Ban Treaty can refuse to do business with companies involved in the production of nuclear weapons and with banks and investment funds which finance such production, since there is a growing consensus that "assistance" in the production of nuclear



Hiroshima survivor Stesuko Thurlow gives the closing remarks at the UN Nuclear Weapons Treaty Ban signing.

weapons includes financing their production.

While private financial institutions cannot sign or ratify the Treaty, they can divest from companies that cause

indiscriminate harm by design and that are prohibited by international law. Since the UN Nuclear Ban Treaty was adopted in 2017, the Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group, the Dutch pension fund ABP, the Irish Bank KBC and Deutsche Bank have excluded the financing of nuclear weapons production from their investments.

The Nuclear Weapon Ban Treaty is the first legally binding international agreement to comprehensively prohibit nuclear weapons. It is a huge step forward on the path towards total nuclear disarmament. For more information, check out these websites:

- [preventnuclearwar.org](http://preventnuclearwar.org)
- [psr-wisconsin.org/nuclear-security](http://psr-wisconsin.org/nuclear-security)
- [dontbankonthebomb.com/50thratification](http://dontbankonthebomb.com/50thratification)

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## The F-35s Won't Keep Us Alive

by Tom Boswell

Neither will they bring us health or wealth or social justice. The last thing Madison needs during a pandemic is another misguided incursion by the military industrial complex, particularly a weapons system that has the capacity to carry nuclear weapons and thus could make Madison a target in any nuclear exchange, putting not only Dane County but the entire state and region at risk.

The squadron of 20 F-35A fighter jets that the Air Force plans to base at Truax Field will cost \$110.3 million each. That's the real cost to taxpayers according to the Program on Government Oversight (POGO). Multiply that by 20 and you get a mind-boggling sum of \$2.206 billion! Those same dollars, if invested in real safety, health and community welfare, could buy us the following, according to the National Priorities Project:

- 61.4 million coronavirus tests **OR**
- 648,82 million N95 respirator masks for a year **OR**
- \$600 weekly unemployment insurance for 70,705 people **OR**
- 27,294 elementary school teachers for a year **OR**
- 29,780 clean energy jobs for a year **OR**
- 61,892 Head Start slots for children for four years.

Here's what a group of community residents, called the Eken Park Resistance, had to say about the impact this project would have on their neighborhood, as published in The Cap Times on November 25, 2020:

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*Dear Editor:*

*In April, our neighborhood learned that we face a bleak future — one that will disproportionately impact those of us who are people of color, low income, and children, and leave our homes “incompatible for residential use.”*

*F-35 joint strike fighters will soon rip through the place we live and love: Eken Park. We know from personal experience that there is reason to be very afraid. When the current F-16s take off or maneuver overhead, our children cover their ears and scream. The aircraft are dangerously loud. Everyone agrees, even the Air Force, that the F-35s will be worse. It isn't our small homes, backyards, swing sets, neighbors or kids that are incompatible for residential use. We do have a corrosive force in our community — but it isn't us.*

*The Air National Guard violates nearly every value our progressive community claims to uphold. It is everything we strive to overcome. It has polluted — perhaps permanently — our lakes and drinking water with PFAS “forever”chemicals. The DNR has found it in violation of spill and environmental remediation laws. With at least six instances of sexual assault and harassment against female members of the 115th Fighter Wing's Security Forces Squadron, the Air National Guard is a hive of violence against women. When someone tried to stop it, they were met with retaliation and reprisal.*

*And now, the result of a disgracefully undemocratic process, Madison may be subjected to a squadron of immoral machines, monuments to mass violence and corporate power. At this moment of pandemic and economic collapse, each of us knows the F-35s are a tragic misuse of resources. We need that money for the health of our families, community, and planet.*

*Neighbors: let's stand together to stop this blight. The F-35s are not inevitable. Community leaders: this is a test of your progressive values. Do everything you can. Creatively and vigorously use our collective power and resources — legal, financial, and otherwise — to protect us. The Air National Guard is incompatible for residential use. It's time we tell them to leave.*

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A low-income, high density neighborhood is an inappropriate place for any military jet, but this one is worse than most. It is the most expensive weapons system in military history and is designed to carry nuclear bombs. You can help make sure this monstrous boondoggle does not come to Madison. Contact Senator Tammy Baldwin, who is the F-35s main proponent in Wisconsin. Tell her to take this squadron of F-35s out of the Pentagon budget, which she has the power to do. Tell her not to accept any more funds from Lockheed Martin or other arms merchants. Tell her that, if the Air National Guard base is to stay, we want it to have a peaceful mission. We want the Guard to continue fighting the pandemic, and whatever threats to our health and security will follow, not to contribute to oppression overseas.

*“I am a nonviolent soldier. In place of weapons of violence, you have to use your mind, your heart, your sense of humor, every faculty available to you...because no one has the right to take the life of another human being. That's all nonviolence is—organized love.”*



**Joan Baez,**  
*This Nonviolent Life*  
February 13, 2021

# Point Beach, Wisconsin Nuclear Power Reactor

by Paula Rogge



The two Point Beach nuclear reactors just north of Manitowoc, Wisconsin were originally designed to operate for 40 years. Their operating license was extended to 60 years and now their current owner, NextEra Energy, has applied to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) for an extension of the operating license for another 20 more years.

Point Beach nuclear reactor has one of the worst safety records in the country. According to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), there have been over 100 mishaps and accidents at Point Beach, including an explosion in 1986, problems with cooling pumps, an instance of complete loss of power in 2008 and two red findings in 2002 and 2004. This is the highest failure rating the NRC had ever given.

Point Beach's many years of service has also damaged the plant's nuclear reactors. During operation, neutrons bombard the pressure vessel of a nuclear reactor, which contains the

reactors' fuel rods, and over the years cause it to develop tiny defects in its structure. This is called embrittlement. The Point Beach vessel is one of the most embrittled in the country. In its damaged state, thermal shock from rapid cooling or from overheating can cause it to crack, releasing coolant from around the fuel rods and leading to a core meltdown. Point Beach sits on the shore of Lake Michigan. Should there be a major accident at this reactor, the drinking and irrigation water of about 40 million people would be affected.

A meltdown could also be caused by a power outage at the Point Beach Plant. Nuclear power plants do not generate the electricity for their cooling systems; they rely on an external electricity supply. If there is damage to the power lines supplying the plant e.g. from snow/ice, tornadoes or sabotage and the backup diesel generators fail e.g. from flooding, the fuel rods can overheat and cause a meltdown. This is what happened in Fukushima.

Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) Wisconsin will be filing a legal challenge to the relicensing of the reactor with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. PSR members are looking for people living within 50 miles of the reactor and others who will be impacted by an accident at the plant to join them in opposing the re-licensing. For more information how to do this, go to [psr-wisconsin.org/action-alerts](http://psr-wisconsin.org/action-alerts).

## Connect With Us

If you would like to learn more about the Interfaith Peace Working Group, visit our website at [interfaithpeacewg.org](http://interfaithpeacewg.org). You can also contact us by mail at Interfaith Peace Working Group, 1433 Wyldewood Drive, Madison, WI 53704; by phone at 608-514-2811; or by email at [interfaithpeaceworkinggroup.com](mailto:interfaithpeaceworkinggroup.com).

If you would like to support our work financially, you may send donations to Tom Boswell, 1942 Sachtjen Street, Madison, WI 53704. Please make checks payable to the Wisconsin Conference UCC-IPWG and write IPWG on the memo line.