About the Tea Party

To begin with, let’s define the context of all American political movements. Noam Chomsky says it best, namely, we have a ruling class (RC) which is continually and on all fronts promoting its own interests. The people be damned. For that matter, the whole planet be damned too. This RC, guided by the multinational corporations, is brutal, relentless, and without conscience. In Jesus’ words, they are like whitewashed tombs, spotless on the outside and full of corruption.

First let us listen to a description of Chomsky’s point-of-view. His is basically an anti-imperial voice. We Christians, whose lord was crucified by an empire, should be in deep sympathy.

Time and again, Chomsky claims, the US backs terrorists and spreads conflict in order to guarantee the wealth of a tiny minority. In his analysis, America has become a superpower of near demonic dimensions. He condemns American actions abroad, but he also dismisses western “democracy” as a sham, with the rich and powerful manipulating public opinions. He says the masses are duped with consumerism, stupefied day after day with mind-numbing entertainment, and misled by unquestioning news reporting. Big government and big business want to keep the truth from the people, he says. The media only provide an illusion of free speech.

Why Should I Join MFSA?

(or why should I renew my membership?)

Has this question every crossed your mind? Perhaps the better question is “Why not join MFSA?”

When I was a member of a local United Methodist Church, my pastor asked me if I was interested in going to an MFSA meeting. Even though I knew nothing about this organization I went along, just to have a day away. It was a pivotal meeting for me. On that day, I became enthused, for the first time in a couple of decades, about the United Methodist Church. It was an eye-opening experience because I had not known that the church cared about social issues. Here was a reason to be proud of being a United Methodist. As of that meeting, I became active in the Social Concerns Committee of the church I was attending and eventually answered the call to ordained ministry.

This organization is vital for the future of our church. We are called to stand with the oppressed, to fight to right injustice wherever we encounter it; to live and do as our Lord and Savior taught; “when I was hungry you gave me food; naked, you clothed me. When I was a stranger you welcomed me and sick or in prison you visited me.” (paraphrase from Matthew 25). The Methodist Federation for Social Action is where our faith becomes real. If like me, you are hungry to make a difference in our world, than become active in this amazing organization.

--Rev. Evy McDonald

Opportunities for personal involvement in MFSA will continue to be offered on an on-going basis, especially as Annual Conference approaches and again in the fall when we join with several other organizations across the NYAC to host a symposium on hate crimes in November, but today we want to offer you the opportunity to support MFSA’s work financially.

Although we welcome everyone to participate with MFSA, at any level, regardless of whether or not you contribute financial support, when you contribute financially (such as paying annual dues), 20% of that stays within the chapter and goes to fund the wide range of activities that we partake in and 80% is forwarded to the national office to support MFSA’s work across the church-wide connection. Locally, those funds support things like the educational and informational materials MFSA provides at Annual Conference, such as what will be on display during this year’s Festival of Ministries or what we did last year with our analysis and recommendations on the Constitutional Amendments, and programs such as the previously mentioned symposium on hate crimes. Nationally,
those funds support MFSA’s churchwide social advocacy, including the educational materials they produce, the informational newsletters we receive, participation in and support of various social action events and movements, the overwhelming work of our extremely small national staff (just two people right now), and advocacy for progressive church policies at General Conference.

We’ve not always been very consistent about reminding you that you can contribute to MFSA financially, and we haven’t always kept up with the times in terms of taking advantage of current technology to make it easier for you to contribute, but we are trying to take some steps to address that. To that end, we can offer you two ways of contributing today. If you feel moved by Evy’s testimony and you are able to give financially, please do so.

The first option is to give on-line, through PayPal:

https://www.paypal.com/cgi-bin/webscr?cmd=_s-xclick&hosted_button_id=RF2TFH8TNHPGW

Or, just as we have been doing for many years now, you can contribute by physically sending your check to

Laura C. Veatch
204-15 Foothill Avenue, #A44
Hollis, NY 11423-1643

WHAT IS FRACKING AND WHY SHOULD I CARE?

You may have heard of the term “fracking” sometime over the last year or two and wondered what the heck it means. Fracking, or hydraulic fracturing as it is more formally known, is a process used for many years by energy companies to extract greater quantities of natural gas or oil from the ground. Fracking involves pumping large quantities of water, combined with chemicals and a material such as sand or other particulate, under high pressure into well boreholes, targeting rock formations deep underground that hold reservoirs of oil or natural gas.

The fracking mixture enters cracks and fissures in the targeted rock formations underground and propagates and opens up those fissures and cracks. The fractures in the rock formation are maintained by the presence of the sand or particulate material, known as a proppant, in the fracking mixture. The proppant is a permeable material that provides a conducive channel in the fracture, allowing for greater quantities of natural gas or oil to be extracted from the well. The chemicals used in the fracking fluid are used to reduce friction and promote the flow of the fluid into the rock formations. The fracking process requires huge quantities of water, on the order of millions of gallons per well. The chemicals used in the fracking fluid mixture are generally guarded by energy companies as trade secrets.

So now that you know what fracking is, you may ask why you should care about it. In recent years rising energy costs

HOW MUCH ARE DUES?

The Sermon On The Amount

Of course, Mark 12:41-42 applies. MFSA would not exclude anybody for financial reasons. We will gladly receive the widow’s mite. Send us what you can.

But Luke 12:13-34 also applies:

For those who really want to build up treasures in heaven there are:

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Thank you for your support!
After serving as Executive Director of MFSA for nearly 12 years, Kathryn Johnson has decided it is time to hand over the reins of MFSA to another Executive Director for the next leg of our journey. Although we are saddened at her departure, we support her in her decision to take on a new challenge. At the end of June she will begin working full time with the National Breast Cancer Coalition in Washington, DC. The MFSA Board and Executive Committee are working diligently on plans for the transition as we celebrate the good work that Kathryn has done over the past 11+ years.

A personal note from Kathryn: It has been an incredible privilege to serve as the MFSA director for these last 12 years. As I have often said when speaking with many of you, "I can think of no other position in the entire denomination that I would rather have." You are an amazing network of people - passionate and committed justice seekers - without whom United Methodism would be much poorer. Though I will no longer be the director of MFSA, I am sure that we will find ourselves standing side by side in the future at some point witnessing for peace, demanding justice, or celebrating when the occasion calls for it.

Frank Rich, in his Sunday op-ed in the NY Times, seems a bit scared of the TP potential: “It’s harder and harder to cling to the conventional wisdom that the TP is merely an element in the GOP, not the party’s controlling force.”

My hunch is that Jesus had the Zealots and the Sicarii in mind when he preached love for enemies. The end result of their extreme anti-imperialism was the destruction of the Jewish nation by the Roman forces in 70 CE (AD). Today’s TP adherents have been known to display their guns and rifles in public, and if they get more organized and more enraged, who knows what damage they may do to our beloved but troubled U.S. of A.

My personal guru, Gene Marshall – check out his RealisticLiving.com website and get on their newsletter mail list – says this:

Republican leaders are pandering to the right wing of their party and to the Tea Party, anti-Party, anti-government, anti-change, fear-mongering, anger-fostering fringe of our national life. . . . If in an attempt to win elections, mainline Republicans continue to cower before these wildly irrational reactionaries, the entire Republican Party will be compromised. By 2012 or 2016 they might lose every seat in Congress.

Now there’s a hopeful note to end on.
Fracking (continued)

costs and volatility in the worldwide energy market has spurred energy companies to seek to develop domestic energy sources that until now may not have been economically viable or were restricted by environmental regulations. One such energy source that is being eyed by energy companies for development is the Marcellus Shale, an ancient rock formation that spans about 600 miles and covers areas in four states in the Northeast, including New York. It is estimated that there may be upwards of 50 trillion cubic feet of natural gas stored in the Marcellus Shale. Innovations in drilling technology, including advances in hydraulic fracturing, have made the Marcellus Shale attractive for development.

One of the primary concerns about permitting energy companies to move forward with drilling in the Marcellus Shale is that one million acres of the Marcellus Shale are in the New York City watershed in upstate New York. Over nine million New Yorkers depend on the watershed for clean, unfiltered water. What is in question is the environmental impact of the fracking process on water supplies. It is more than just the water and chemicals that are pumped into the ground. Byproducts of the drilling process are also generated. One such byproduct is called “produced water,” which is fracking fluid that is removed from the ground to allow natural gas or oil to flow out of the well. This produced water may be contaminated with chemicals from the fracking fluid, as well as by contact with the natural gas or oil itself. Produced water must be treated to make it safe prior to disposal. The proper treatment process can be complex and in New York State, there is a shortage of adequate treatment facilities. These waste products must be stored and transported prior to treatment, leading to the risk of spills and seepage from holding ponds.

In 2004, the Environmental Protection Agency or EPA released a study that found that hydraulic fracturing posed little or no threat to drinking water supplies because there was no unequivocal evidence of health risks. However, many questions surround the scientific validity of the 2004 EPA study, which was not intended as a general study of hydraulic fracturing, but rather was limited to its use in coalbed methane deposits. Specifically, the study did not address the above ground impacts of fracking. One of the outcomes of the 2004 EPA study was that energy companies voluntarily agreed to stop using diesel as a component in fracking fluids due to concern about benzene contamination. Benzene is a known carcinogen. Another outcome of the study was that in 2005, energy companies were granted an exclusion from the Safe Drinking Water Act, allowing them to not disclose the chemicals that are used and injected into the ground in the fracking process. Without knowing the chemicals that are being injected into the ground it is impossible to monitor drinking water supplies for possible contamination and to accurately assess environmental impact. Concerns about the environmental impacts of hydraulic fracturing are being elevated by continuing reports of drinking water contamination in states where the hydraulic fracturing process is used, including Colorado, Texas, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. A recent documentary film entitled Gasland (http://www.gaslandthemovie.com) highlights what it claims are some of the environmental impacts of hydraulic fracturing, including reports of explosive gases entering private wells causing flammable water.

Energy companies have been aggressively targeting land owners in the upstate New York region, offering lucrative financial deals in exchange for drilling rights. These companies have been exploiting the financial distress that many in the rural areas of upstate New York find themselves in as a result of the financial crisis of the last couple years. People faced with the choice between economic survival and protecting the environment have been opting for economic survival courtesy of the energy companies. At the same time, energy companies have been vigorously resisting environmental oversight and regulation of their drilling processes, stating they will add to the cost unnecessarily. The State of New York is also struggling with severe economic problems and may not have the resources to adequately monitor and regulate the drilling in the Marcellus Shale at the state level. But at what point does additional cost become necessary to safeguard our environment, our drinking water supplies, and our health?

So where do things stand right now on the issue of using hydraulic fracturing in drilling for natural gas in the New York State watershed areas? On April 23rd of this year, New York State environmental officials announced a decision to impose strict regulations on the use of hydraulic fracturing in the watershed areas of upstate New York. Energy companies desiring to drill in the watershed area of the Catskill Mountains and in the Skaneateles Lake watershed would be required to conduct a separate environmental impact review and get
Fracking (continued)

approval for each proposed well. The strict regulations make it highly unlikely that any drilling will take place in the New York State watershed areas. However, this is not an outright ban on drilling. Also, these strict regulations do not apply to other areas outside the watersheds and of course do not apply to other states. Does this decision by New York environmental officials mean that we no longer need to worry about this issue? While the use of hydraulic fracturing for drilling may be prevented in our own back yard, at least for now, it is still an issue of environmental concern and justice for our neighbors in other parts of the state and in other states. In truth, what is needed is a federal approach to overseeing and regulating the use of fracturing across the nation to ensure proper care for the environment and the safety of all people.

So what can we do to help make sure that if hydraulic fracturing is used in drilling, it is done in an environmentally safe way and that our health and drinking water supplies are safeguarded? Reps. Diana DeGette (D. Colo.) and Maurice Hinchey (D. N.Y.) are sponsoring House measure H.R. 2766 and Sens. Robert Casey (D. PA.) and Charles Schumer (D. N.Y.) are sponsoring Senate bill S. 1215, known collectively as the Fracturing Responsibility and Awareness of Chemicals Act or FRAC Act. The FRAC Act would require energy companies to disclose the chemicals used in the fracturing fluids and it would remove the energy companies’ exemption from federal regulation under the Safe Drinking Water Act. All hydraulic fracturing that occurs within the United States would be regulated by the EPA, providing needed oversight of the energy companies. As an Annual Conference and as individuals, we can contact our Representatives and Senators to express our support for the FRAC Act and urge them to continue to move this legislation forward. We can also contact the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and urge the DEC to continue to adopt an approach at the state level to regulating natural gas drilling throughout New York State that is fully protective of the environment and the health of all New York residents. Finally, we can share this information with family, friends, and co-workers and urge them to take action as well. What we cannot afford is to stand by and do nothing.

Dale Ashby

MFSA National News Updates

Strategic Plan Well Underway

For the last several months, the MFSA board has been developing a Strategic Plan to guide MFSA in its work as we move into the future. Here you’ll find a summary of the board’s work-to-date.

VISION: MFSA envisions a healed, renewed and fully inclusive United Methodist Church that embodies God’s transforming love and grace in the world.

MISSION: To mobilize, lead and sustain a progressive United Methodist movement that energizes people to be agents of God’s justice, peace and reconciliation.

SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION: MFSA is grounded in God’s all-inclusive love and open to the Spirit’s leading in the current age. Acting out of a deep spiritual yearning for justice and peace, we follow the radical teaching and example of Jesus.

GUIDING VALUES

1. Actions are grounded in faith MFSA will ground all we do in the justice imperative of the Gospel in a way that inspires communities and activates members’ spiritual desire to do justice in the world. Inspired by the advocacy of Jesus for the least, the last and the lost, we will participate in God’s ongoing creation through doing justice in the world.

2. The prophetic tradition of Christianity is given voice MFSA will give voice, clearly and without apology, to the prophetic message of a holistic Gospel that honors the dignity and value of every human life. MFSA will deepen its understanding of the prophetic tradition by listening attentively and carefully to those on the margins of the church and of society. MFSA will speak and act in ways that honor truth over fear and integrity over comfort.

3. Inclusivity and radical welcome are embodied in MFSA. MFSA will be fully inclusive and radically welcoming in our own practices and will work for this in the church and in the world. MFSA is committed to being agents of reconciliation in the journey towards full inclusion.

4. Oppression in all its forms is resisted MFSA will work nonviolently to end economic injustice, institutional racism, sexism, homophobia, militarism, and the degradation of the environment. These commitments will guide MFSA’s selection of issues and organizing strategies. We understand that work against injustice in any one of these areas brings us closer to justice in every one of these areas. As such we will work at the intersections of oppression, refusing to pit oppressed persons and groups against one another.

5. MFSA’s work takes place at the level of changing systems MFSA is committed to bringing about systemic change and creating long-term solutions in ways that bring healing and hope to the church and the world.

continued on page 6
Staff Transitions

The second change in staffing at MFSA is very good news. Jennifer Mihok, who has been working with MFSA for a year and a half through the Mission Intern Program, will be staying on staff for another year as the Communications and Outreach Coordinator. You may remember Jennifer from the wonderful assistance she provided to the NY chapter at Annual Conference last year.

Rob Walty, who has been a great asset in the MFSA office, will be continuing in his position and Ginny Lapham, who has volunteered at MFSA for 8+ years, has committed to increased support as well. Beth Zemsky will also continue working with us as a consultant as we move forward with our Strategic Plan.

MFSA National News Update (Continued)

6. Actions of the organization have integrity MFSA is committed to operating internally in a way that mirrors the change we hope to create in the world. Towards that end, we commit to integrity, kindness, creativity, and self-care in all organizational practices. We will engage in self-examination and reflection as individuals and as an organization.

STRATEGIC ORGANIZING CRITERIA
Within the UMC: MFSA will provide a theologically grounded progressive vision and will organize to provide avenues for progressive United Methodists to transform the church.
Within society: MFSA will identify places where speaking from a progressive faith perspective can make a difference in public policy. MFSA will provide avenues for action for progressive United Methodists to bring about cultural and societal transformation.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS
The following Strategic Directions will guide MFSA’s work and priorities over the next year. These strategic directions will be considered in developing the organization’s program priorities and annual budget.

Theological Articulation and Grounding: Create and utilize theological articulation and grounding to produce inspiring progressive Methodist spiritual framework that guides all of MFSA’s policy work.
Chapter Development and Base Building: Develop the quantity and capacity of MFSA chapters to act as key centers in a renewed and revitalized United Methodist movement for justice. Develop new chapter structures, remove geographic barriers and nurture solidarity and relationship-building.
Young Adult Outreach, Diversity and Inclusion: Continue to focus on outreach to young adults, listening to the wisdom of the next generation. Develop members with an intentional emphasis on leadership development and full inclusion including people of color and sexual minorities at every level of MFSA’s work.
Communication Infrastructure: Continue to modernize MFSA’s communication by expanding the use of Facebook, Twitter, multimedia and other communication mechanisms that promote more active communication to disseminate MFSA’s perspective, reinforce its collective identity, and promote avenues for action.
Enhance MFSA’s Organizational Effectiveness and Sustainability: Working together, the board, staff, and chapter leaders will commit to honestly and professionally assessing MFSA’s capacity to carry out our mission and programs and to identify potential barriers to our collective success and achievement. This will include, but not be limited to, increased integration of MFSA’s fundraising and organizing strategies and nurturing a climate of self care (Sabbath practice) and joy for staff, board, and members.

MFSA currently has four Strategic Direction Teams meeting regularly by phone to put these values and strategic directions into action. The four committees are: Theological Articulation and Grounding; Young Adult Outreach and Inclusivity; Chapter Development and Base-Building; and Communications. We invite anyone with passion, interest, time and/or energy in one of these areas to contact the national office to determine how we can plug you in!

Faithful Witness Campaign Update
Campaign began: 11/27/2006 - date of first payment received. (Last payments scheduled into 2013)

Total gifts pledged: $385,627 from 201 constituents making an average pledge $1,918.54
Lowest and Highest single pledge overall: $10 to $25,000.

Total Gifts Received by the Faithful Witness Campaign by year from inception:
2006: $ 2,834.00
2007: $80,740.70
2008: $89,843.78
2009: $54,949.69
2010: $11,567.00 through April 14, 2010

Overall total received to date: $240,025.77

Total pledgers for New York chapter: 30
Total pledged from New York givers: $79,075
Total received from New York givers to date: $42,831.96
Lowest and Highest single pledge from New York givers: $10 to $12,000
Chapter Updates

Inspired by the national office, the NY Chapter (MFSA-NY) has decided to undergo a certain level of strategic planning this year in order to evaluate our purpose and determine what our values and guiding principles are that guide our work and activities. This began with a leadership retreat in January which has provided much of the fodder that has shaped the conversations the steering committee has continued to have since.

To that end, the key piece I want to report right now is that based on those conversations, in addition to the six values identified by MFSA national, the steering committee has identified six values unique to us that will be guiding MFA-NY's work in coming years.

MFSA national's guiding values have been identified as:
• Actions are grounded in faith
• The prophetic tradition of Christianity is given a voice
• Inclusivity and radical welcome are embodied in MFSA
• Oppression in all its forms is resisted
• MFSA's work takes place at the level of changing systems
• Actions of the organization have integrity

MFSA-NY's values are:
Advocacy
Collaboration
Education
Spirituality
Community
Non-hierarchical

Not surprisingly, the values we have identified echo some of MFSA National's values, but are articulated in a way that we can claim as our own.

Advocacy for social justice with the oppressed and marginalized has been a hallmark of MFSA since its foundation, and it is a value that will continue to be embodied by this chapter. One of our key strengths is organization in terms of our ability to mobilize people for action.

Collaboration means that social justice work is never done alone, and we are most effective when we work together with others—collaboratively. MFSA-NY seeks to work with any group/organization in the NYAC with which we find common ground and see an opportunity to try to collectively advance our work. Some of our closest partners include Methodists in New Directions (MIND) and the Conference Board of Church and Society (CBCS).

Education is another tool, along with collaboration, that we use to complement and undergird our advocacy efforts in support of achieving social justice. The value of education is sometimes overlooked, but people will not mobilize or advocate for issues they know nothing about, and so we put a priority on making education a key aspect of our events and Annual Conference agenda, including legislation.

The primary motivation for our work is grounded in our spirituality at its very core. Jesus calls us to love our neighbors as ourselves. John Wesley tells us holiness is not only personal but also social. Thus, being Christian and being Methodist means that part of living out our faith in God is living it out socially, in the pursuit of social justice.

Building on the spiritual component, living out our faith is also a communal experience; it is something that we do together. All persons who share these values are invited to be part of this community. Lay persons are invited as well as clergy. Bisexual and transgender persons are invited as well as gay and straight. Women, persons of minority cultures and races and the young are invited as well as old white guys. We do fall short at times in our efforts at being welcoming and inclusive—there are always going to be growing edges when you bring people with different lives and experiences together—but nonetheless we extend the invitation and offer ourselves as open to growth.

Building now on the community component, we value the characteristic of being non-hierarchical. I read an article recently where the author was exploring the premise that the internet benefits liberals more than conservatives. I'm not interested in evaluating that premise here, but what's significant about the article is the writer identified conservatives as oriented towards hierarchy, particularly in terms of commanding leadership and restrictive policies, and identified liberals as oriented toward community activism, participation, egalitarianism and collaboration. In this context, we will own that latter part; envision this community as a circle rather than a pyramid and think of that in an egalitarian sense.

For details on the rest the chapter's activities, both recent and upcoming, please peruse the other articles in this newsletter, and join us at our Annual Dinner on June 10th at Annual Conference, where we will honor Joe Agne and Dana Jones, and join us again this fall on Saturday, November 20th, for a Symposium on Hate Crimes at Grace UMC in Manhattan.
November symposium to bring diverse communities together to address hate crimes

Every year, thousands of people across our nation are assaulted and dozens are killed solely because of who they are or who they are perceived to be -- their race, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, religion, sex, gender identity, economic status, immigration status or disability. As people of faith we are called to respond, and a group of activists has been doing just that with planning for a symposium on hate crimes this fall.

The November 20 event will run from 10 to 4 and include a panel of speakers – Rosario Quinones, Terry Todd and Fred Brewington – as well as a performance of “What Killed Marcelo Lucero?” by Teatro Experimental Yerbabruja and a discussion afterwards led by the “actor-vists.” Symposium planners have also structured the day to include small group discussions and interactive participation as well as youth involvement. Emphasis is also being placed on creating sacred, space for healing and worship.

The hope and the goal is to come together across different communities as one body of Christ, to lift up our common humanity and vulnerability and to work to end hate violence. The event is currently co-sponsored by the Conference Board of Church and Society, the NYAC Immigration Task Force, the NY chapter of the Methodist Federation for Social Action and Methodists in New Directions. Organizers are actively seeking additional sponsoring organizations as well as new people to join the planning team. The next meeting of the planning team will be Saturday, July 24, 10am at Park Slope UMC in Brooklyn.

Ideas, new people, co-sponsors and outreach suggestions are welcome! Contact Kristen Dunn at kristen.dunn@comcast.net or Dorothee Benz at DrBenz3@verizon.net. And make sure to mark the date on your calendar and spread the word in your community.