

The Wolf

Pace e Bene Nonviolence Service

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PACE e BENE



PEACE AND ALL GOOD

Pace e Bene Goes Down Under

by Ken Preston-Pile



Pace e Bene's *Engage* nonviolence training team traveled to Australia in late November for the first national Pace e Bene Australia conference organized by Australian Associate Brendan McKeague. Four members of PeB's North American staff — Veronica Pelicarić, Ken Butigan, Laura Slattery, and I — led a five-day national planning retreat, along with Brendan, attended by twenty-one leaders from across Australia in what was a truly a transformative experience. This gathering was the result of six years of Brendan's work facilitating *From Violence to Wholeness* workshops and promoting Pace e Bene throughout Australia.

Moribindi, an Aboriginal leader, led an opening ritual in which we learned about *dadirri*, the Aboriginal word for deep listening. Throughout the week, Veronica Pelicarić led several spiritual rituals, including a silent Buddhist dinner. *Engage* program coordinator Laura Slattery directed an entertaining theatrical history of Pace e Bene for the Australian audience in which staff members played themselves and others in skits highlighting the development of the organization, with Ken Butigan delivering a notably comical performance.

During the retreat the group engaged in community-building, skill-sharing and decision-making. Fr. Brian Bainbridge, a Catholic priest, led the final two days using Open Space, a participatory decision-making process, to plan next steps for Pace e Bene in Australia. Participants decided to create a national network and form a steering committee of six members from throughout the country to organize a two-year plan to move the

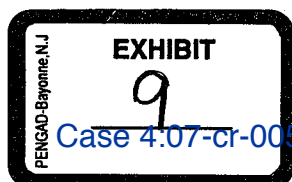
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Participants from across Australia gathered at Pallotti College near Melbourne for a five-day Pace e Bene national Australia retreat organized by Brendan McKeague and attended by Pace e Bene's North American training staff.

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Pace e Bene's mission is to develop the spirituality and practice of active nonviolence as a way of living and being and as a process for cultural transformation. Formed by a small group of Franciscans in 1989, we are a growing community representing a diversity of spiritual traditions and cultural backgrounds now reaching across the continent and networking with nonviolence practitioners in many countries.



Reflections from Muscogee “Monastery”

by Louis Vitale, ofm

Louis Vitale recently rejoined the *Pace e Bene* staff as *Action Advocate*. In November 2005, Fr. Vitale was arrested while engaging in civil disobedience at Fort Benning at the annual School of the Americas Watch protest. He shares the following from Muscogee County jail. His address is Muscogee Co Jail, 700 10th St., Columbus GA 31901.

Franciscan Jerry Zawada and I are spending six months in the Muscogee “Monastery” adding a new vow of ‘stability’ to our vows of poverty, charity and obedience. With the blessing of our provincial ministers we traveled to Fort Benning located in Columbus, Georgia for the annual commemoration of the martyrs of Central America. Some 19,000 people gathered as the anniversary of the Jesuit martyrs of San Salvador was recalled as well as the four Churchwomen Ita, Maura, Dorothy, and Jean, Archbishop Romero, the people of El Mozote and thousands of other victims.

The procession began with marchers bearing crosses and others carrying black coffins chanting the names of the dead with the entire crowd responding “present!” Jerry and I were privileged to carry one of the coffins.

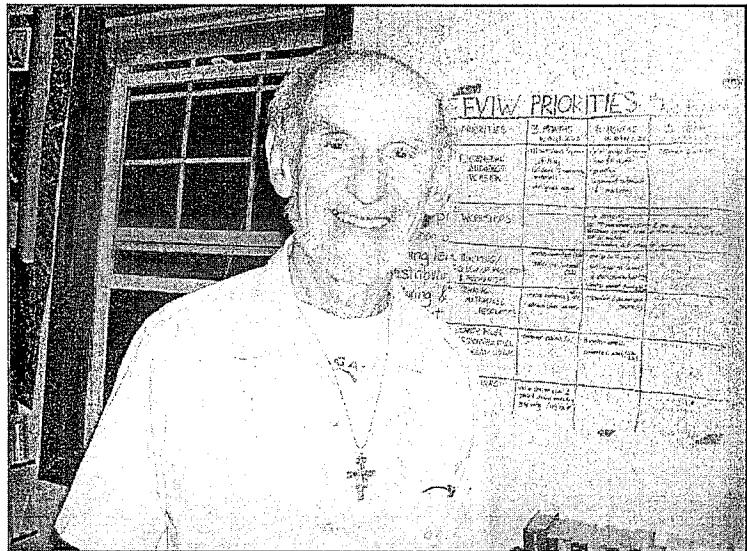
We marched to an opening where, with help from friends, we slipped under the first of three fences erected to keep protesters off the premises. As we knelt in prayer on the other side of the fence, our military brothers and sisters approached us and took us into custody. Later on the bus, I engaged in conversation with a military police officer asking which of the leaders — Jesus or the U.S. Army — he would follow if called to kill in battle. “I shouldn’t be having this conversation with you,” he said, ending our talk sounding somewhat frustrated.

Now we are living in the “Old Men’s” cell for men fifty years or older. A community is forming. We hear stories of loss — of family, parents, brothers and sisters — and we hear of the desperate efforts to hang on to new family ties of spouses and children. We hear stories of anxious attempts to go through the courts, to win freedom, to try again, or to go forth and deal with retribution for erring. I am reminded of the plea in Isaiah 61, read by Jesus in his opening proclamation (Luke 4) to “Give release to the captives and set the prisoners free.” I would gladly open the door and allow the high cost of prison maintenance to be used to restore families and communities.

We continue mourning as we remember the 25th anniversary of the martyrdom of the four Churchwomen killed on December 2 in El Salvador by graduates of the

School of the Americas. And we are prayerfully mindful of the four Christian Peacemaker Team members captured in Iraq. Is there is no end to the violence, torture and massacre? We share this with our cellmates and they pray with us, grieve with us. Our nightly Bible study reminds us of God’s accompaniment even in the face of massacre. Some of our supporters sent us this quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer written from prison:

There remains an experience of incomparable value...to see the great evils of world history from below, from the perspective of the outcast, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled—in short from the



perspective of those who suffer, to look with new eyes on matters great and small. (From *Letters and Papers from Prison*)

Yes, we are learning from our brothers and they from us. They teach us of survival and give testimony of human weakness. We share our confidence in their intrinsic goodness in the face of the crushing presence of structural violence so evident in war and prisons. We all grow in hope, even as our Bible study group grows. We even had opportunity to witness to nonviolence, when I mentioned that it seemed some of my envelopes were missing. The entire cell was indignant and insisted that the “thief” be discovered and either volunteer or be forced out by whatever means necessary. When we pointed out the contradiction with the passages we were studying regarding Jesus and mercy and his eagerness to forgive, an amazing transformation took place in which the unity of the community was restored and members professed new awareness of mercy and nonviolence.

We do learn from each other. It is indeed good to be here.