

# Consistent Life News

Spring 2012

Pro-lifers for Peace. Peaceworkers for Life.

## NEW PERSPECTIVES ON "SEAMLESSNESS"

By Tony Masalonis, Consistent Life Board Member

Consistent Life began 25 years ago under the name the Seamless Garment Network, a name that referred to the garment worn by Jesus Christ in the Gospel of John and to the fact that the life issues we stand for are inexorably "woven together in one piece"—even Jesus' executioners did not dare to tear the seamless garment (John 19:23-24). Though we became Consistent Life (CL) about 10 years ago, and though CL is not tied to the Christian religion or any other faith, the message remains the same: standing up for lives threatened by one form of violence rings truer when we stand up for all threatened lives.

Our 25th Anniversary Conference led me to consider how the threads of the seamless garment, whatever name it is called by, extend across many dimensions, not the least of which is time. The range of the workshop topics showed how the fabric of respecting life stretches across the ages. Participants in Rob Arner's workshop explored the early Christians' Consistent Life Ethic (CLE) views 2,000 years ago, while some of CL's founders recounted the resurgence of the CLE in the 1970s. Another workshop covered taking the CLE into the future by teaching a holistic reverence for life to college- and high-school-age youths, and another focused on teaching the same to younger children. In their plenary session, the Life Matters Journal founders shared a concrete example of how the message is being spread to a young adult population. It was clear that the Seamless Garment spreads across so much of human history, and though the message's forms may change, the underlying truth is the same.

In the session led by CL co-founder Mary Rider in which participants shared how they had come to believe in the CLE, a common thread of connectedness emerged. Though many of the workshop participants, yours truly included, are fond of deep thinking and navel-gazing (which are very good things at the right time and place), our stories of coming to recognize the value of all life and the connectedness of life issues were frequently tales of connections with others, of shared experiences. We came to our knowledge from personal relationships, from the culture we live in, rather than from introspection and meditation.

The Seamless Garment, then, is not made for one era in history, nor is it made to be worn by one. We bring each other in to live under its shelter—and it brings us together. According to John, only one of the soldiers at the crucifixion could win the original Seamless Garment in a game of dice. Thankfully, under our garment, everyone wins!

## BEING THE CHANGE

By Bill Samuel, President of Consistent Life



PICTURED FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Bill Samuel, Consistent Life President; Pre-Conference Public Witness in front of the White House, Washington, DC

One theme that I saw running throughout the Conference was the importance of being the change we seek. With the exception of the Reconciliation workshop, this was not the explicit subject of any of the sessions. Yet it permeated the plenary sessions, the workshops, and the informal sharing times.

This seems to me to be natural for our movement. It is foundational to the Consistent Life Ethic (CLE) that all humans are of intrinsic worth and should be treated with dignity and respect. Human beings are not to be treated as objects to achieve our personal or other desires. We cannot accept a philosophy of "the ends justify the means" which implicitly underlies almost all justifications for violence. We understand that the means ultimately determine the ends.

Treating others with respect is inherent in our Mission Statement, which ends with, "We challenge those working on all or some of these issues to maintain a cooperative spirit of peace, reconciliation, and respect in protecting the unprotected." This is key to our working together because we have different understandings of our core issues, as well as significant differences on other issues that some of us consider connected to the CLE. Moreover, a spirit of respect and listening needs to extend beyond the CLE community to those with whom we disagree on core issues.

We certainly weren't perfect in modeling this spirit of engagement with one another during the Conference, but it was evident much of the time. For example, we had a workshop in which we had panelists who work within the Democratic, Republican, and Green Parties, as well as an independent. All the panelists treated each other as colleagues in a common cause and no one tried to "win" any partisan arguments.

I came out of the Conference resolved to continue to grow in the spirit which underlies the idea of a CLE. We need to be the change we seek and serve as an example to all of how to treat one another.

# CONSISTENT LIFE MEMBERS...CONSISTENTLY CHANGING LIVES.

## REV. DR. JOHNNY M. HUNTER

The Rev. Dr. Johnny M. Hunter, a longtime endorser of Consistent Life (CL), spoke during the opening plenary session of the conference Friday evening. The Rev. Dr. Hunter is the National Director of the Life Education And Resource Network (LEARN, Inc.), the most prominent African-American pro-life ministry in the United States, and the Pastor of Praise and Worship at Cliffdale Community Church in Fayetteville, NC, a multi-ethnic Christian congregation.



The Rev. Dr. Hunter's presence is both down-to-earth and commanding and made his inspirational life story even more riveting. He told of his two experiences with death, decades apart. He was born dead and revived by a very persistent midwife who continued smacking him to get him to breathe, after the doctor present had given up hope. More recently, during bypass surgery, his heart stopped for several minutes, and he owes his life to the doctor who continued to massage the heart long after others would have stopped. The message was unspoken but crystal clear: Never give up in the struggle to save life. What seems impossible is possible.

Known more for his anti-abortion activism than for work on other life issues, Hunter still drew connections between issues. He handed out an article about Richard Miles, who was convicted of murder, then found innocent after 14 years in prison. He also used the warmongers' term "collateral damage" to refer to the white babies aborted in clinics that have been shown to target ethnic minorities. Near the end of his talk he added rousing words of inspiration for all activists on life and justice issues, noting that even if one can't work on every issue, "whatever you're doing, keep doing it," because all efforts to protect life are part of the "same fight."

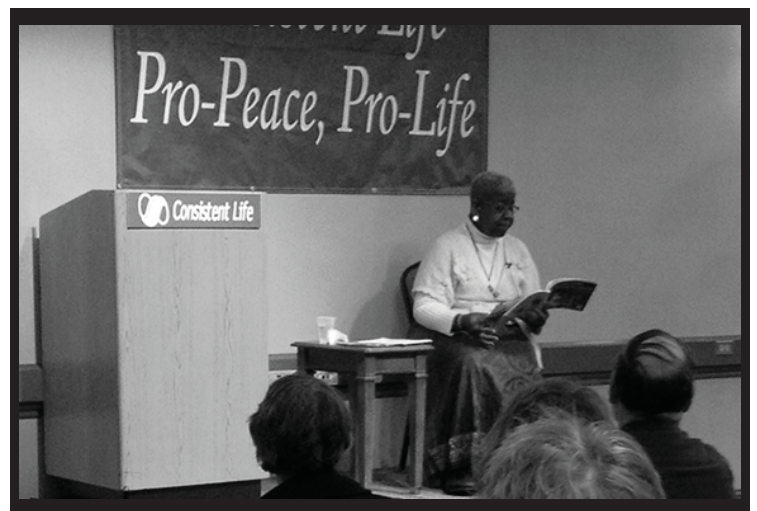
***"The message was unspoken but crystal clear: Never give up in the struggle to save life. What seems impossible is possible."***

## CATHERINE MEEKS, Ph.D.

Catherine Meeks, Ph.D, gave the Saturday morning plenary talk. The retired Clara Carter Acree Distinguished Professor of Socio Cultural Studies from Wesleyan College and the Founding Executive Director of the college's Lane Center for Community Engagement and Service, Dr. Meeks spoke on several topics, including the injustice of racism and peace activism's basis in inner peace.

She described her own experience growing up in Arkansas, the daughter of a sharecropping father who could not read and a mother who pursued an education through correspondence and extension courses, eventually receiving her college degree at the time Dr. Meeks graduated from high school. Her family endured a tragic encounter with prejudice when her brother, suffering from appendicitis, was refused admission to a whites-only hospital and subsequently died of a burst appendix. She also discussed contemporary manifestations of racism in the United States against African Americans and Mexican Americans.

Dr. Meeks recounted the development of her religious faith, as she began talking to God at an early age and came to the belief that God is everywhere, in every person. An important motivation for her has been the desire to have control over her life and make a positive difference. She said that personal peace must come before working for peace in the world and that this personal peace can come through confronting un-peaceable, ugly parts of oneself. Encountering people she finds it difficult to feel compassion for, and acknowledging that fact, ultimately increases her compassion, Dr Meeks explained. She mentioned that when her writings for the Macon, Georgia, Telegraph drew criticism, she invited critics to have coffee with her. Other means of dealing with negative emotions that Dr. Meeks recommended were silence (her own practice is to try to be silent for one day a week), journal keeping, and prayer.



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# CONFERENCE CANDIDS

## REFLECTIONS ON THE CONSISTENT LIFE CONFERENCE

By Elizabeth Palmberg

As a newcomer to Consistent Life (CL), the thing that most jumped out at me at the conference was the almost mind-boggling variety of people there: attendees varied in age, political perspective, personality, sexual orientation, and faith (or non-faith) perspective. Among the (comparative) youngsters, Aimee Bedoy shared her enthusiasm and her experience of how entrenched political battle lines are starting to shift among college-age and other young adults. Among the several movement elders who spoke, I particularly valued Catherine Meeks. She shared her wisdom and experience in a way that offered profound spiritual grounding—no small thing in a movement facing issues, such as a divided political landscape, which can seem overwhelming without spiritual food for the journey.

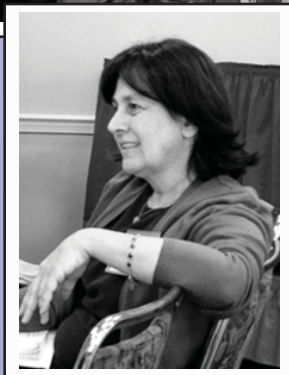
Perhaps the most encouraging—and also challenging—thing was the way Consistent Life Ethic (CLE) beliefs brought people together despite divergences in practically everything else. Passionate libertarians met passionate socialists (and, if I'm not mistaken, passionate Christian anarchists). People who felt called to and enthusiastic about civil disobedience talked with people who felt more ambivalent about it and with people whose activism takes a different form entirely.

Flamboyant extroverts met pensive introverts. I only regret that I didn't get a chance to talk with the folks from the Pro-Life Alliance of Gays and Lesbians.

However, I did get a chance to record short interviews with just a couple of the many amazing people there --feminist Mary Krane Derr and Jim Balmer, who has been an activist since the Vietnam era. These interviews will appear on the CL website.

I should also say that, having been around various kinds of political advocacy for a dozen years or so, I was impressed by Rachel MacNair's extremely practical advice on communicating persuasively. When CL puts it on their website, run, don't walk, to check it out!

Elizabeth Palmberg joined Consistent Life a few months ago, and works at Sojourners magazine.



## Consistent Life

P.O. Box 9295

Silver Spring, MD 20916-9295

Phone 1-866-444-7245 (Toll free) | Fax 413-485-2881

[info@consistent-life.org](mailto:info@consistent-life.org)

## FRESH FACES SHOW US “LIFE MATTERS”

The youngest of our plenary speakers, Aimee Bedoy, Nick Neal, and Catherine Rodriguez, spoke Saturday evening about engaging college-age young people with the connections among the life issues. As president of the Respect Life club at Carnegie Mellon University, Ms. Bedoy oversaw the club's transformation from a narrowly focused anti-abortion student group to an activist organization tackling the whole spectrum of life issues. As part of the club's conversion to a Consistent Life Ethic (CLE) platform, it also changed its name to Life Matters, and, as Ms. Bedoy reports, experienced a significant increase in interest, participation, and enthusiasm from the broader student body. After widening their focus to include efforts like peace vigils, anti-death penalty campaigns, and creative, cooperative initiatives with other student organizations on such problems as bullying, the club began to flourish and grow. Carnegie Mellon's Life Matters club, now led by Ms. Rodriguez, continues its fine work of creating and broadening the social consciences of college students, who, as any professor will tell you, are notoriously difficult to engage in the “real world.”

Ms. Bedoy, along with Mr. Neal, who is also a Consistent Life (CL) Board member, and other collaborators, have recently created Life Matters Journal ([www.lifemattersjournal.org](http://www.lifemattersjournal.org)), an online publication geared toward promoting the CLE and igniting discussion among its supporters. This promising periodical features inspiring stories, artwork, and poetry relating to peace, justice, and life, as well as insightful articles exploring the boundaries and strengths of, and areas that need further development within, the CLE.

Already, Life Matters Journal has been used in many college campuses and other settings to foster discussion of the CLE and the holistic view of a just and sustainable world it promotes. The new generation of American youth, Ms. Bedoy says, is exceptionally receptive to the message of the CLE because they have become cynical about the polarizing political and ideological status quo.

## RACHEL MACNAIR, PH.D

Rachel MacNair, Ph.D, a social psychologist who is vice-president of Consistent Life (CL) and director of its research arm and president-elect of the American Psychological Association's Society for Peace Psychology, gave the closing plenary talk on Sunday afternoon. She spoke about violence's psychological effects on its practitioners and how the human mind's need for consistency can help Consistent Life Ethic (CLE) advocates.

Dr. MacNair has originated the concept of “Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Stress (PITS)”: symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder that come from committing violence, especially killing. The U.S. government's database on Vietnam War veterans shows that those who said they killed others had higher trauma scores than those who did not. Even those who killed in light combat had higher scores than those who did not kill in heavy combat, indicating the trauma was not due to battle intensity alone. Other evidence shows that PITS may also apply to executioners, abortion practitioners, and others involved in killing or torture.

## FATHER JOHN DEAR, SJ

Consistent Life (CL) endorser Father John Dear, SJ, gave a presentation at the Servant Leadership School on March 8, 2012, as part of the Servant Leadership series. A few participants in the CL 25th anniversary conference attended his talk.

“Jesus is a nonviolent radical,” Fr. Dear told an audience of about 50 people. He said that our culture is caught in a cycle of death and violence, and we have “lost our imagination...lost our ability to inspire a different, nonviolent world.”

In contrast, the Gospels are words of life, he explained. Jesus said that living life to the fullest has nothing to do with death. Jesus calls us to be activists “working to reform the culture of death.”

Fr. Dear used the story of the raising of Lazarus as an example of Jesus' message that life is to be celebrated and death defeated. “Lazarus, come forth” is a way of telling humanity to come out of the tomb it has buried itself in, the tomb of a culture of death. He emphasized the social and political implications of rolling away the stone by Lazarus's tomb. This theme is explored in Fr. Dear's new book, *Lazarus, Come Forth*.

Jesus' God was a God of peace, a God of life, he said, and he encouraged his audience to adhere to Jesus' message and continue to work for a world without war and poverty. One way to do this is to start on a personal level, taking 30 minutes a day for mediation and prayer. We don't do this, he said, because we live in a “now society, we just want to do.” We need to let the “resurrected Jesus give us peace,” Fr. Dear said. Then, we can work for peace.

The key to the movement for a culture of life, said Fr. Dear, is that people not give up, that they keep at it. “Be resisters of death, practitioners of nonviolent love,” he said.

(For more details, see [www.rachelmacnair.com/pits](http://www.rachelmacnair.com/pits); for a book-length scholarly treatment, see Dr. MacNair's *Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Stress: The Psychological Consequences of Killing*.)

The notion that the mind normally has a drive for consistency among beliefs is the basis of the psychological concept of “cognitive dissonance.” People are bothered by inconsistency, and Dr. MacNair discussed how this discomfort relates to protecting life. For example, people who view the United States as a good country and themselves as good people might reconcile this view with the empirical fact of rising abortion rates by affirming the rightness of abortion. In such a situation, the desire for consistency works to pro-lifers' disadvantage. Given the decline in American abortion rates, however, people might be more receptive to anti-abortion arguments: believing a decreasing practice to be wrong is more consistent with patriotic and self-affirming attitudes. (Dr. MacNair elaborates on this argument in her book *Achieving Peace in the Abortion War*.)

## CONSISTENT LIFE MEMBERS. CONSISTENTLY ACTIVE.



Witness at the Armed Forces recruiting office at 14th & L NW



Linda Naranjo-Huebl, Serrin Foster and L. Lewandowski

## PRE-CONFERENCE WITNESS HELD

We wanted to have a public witness opportunity that would connect multiple issues. On Friday afternoon before the Conference, we witnessed at three locations:

1. We started with a White House witness being sponsored by Consistent Life (CL) member group Dorothy Day Catholic Worker every Friday during Lent. This witness focused on war and peace issues, although there were some mentions of other life issues.
2. We then moved to a military recruiting station to witness against war. Guards there told us we couldn't demonstrate on the public sidewalk in front of their offices, but we pointed out our rights and the guards changed their tune after talking to their superiors.
3. We concluded by taking an hour shift in the 40 Days for Life vigil in front of Planned Parenthood in downtown Washington. We had the opportunity there to dialogue with some others who were there to protest abortion but who didn't have a good grasp of the Consistent Life Ethic (CLE).

The entire public witness was planned in conjunction with Dorothy Day Catholic Worker. We hope our public witness will be an encouragement to others to engage in public witness in their communities in a way that ties together multiple life issues.

## Looking for conference photos, videos, and more?

<http://cl25conf.wordpress.com/conference-talks-presentations/>



CL taking a shift at 40 Days for Life in front of Planned Parenthood in DC

## SERRIN FOSTER

Serrin Foster, president of Feminists for Life of America, gave a sweeping and inclusive talk Saturday evening, covering a wide span of time and variety of topics. She began by noting that she was giving the talk 99 years to the day after Harriet Tubman, the abolitionist, heroic rescuer of slaves, and suffragist, died. Ms. Foster commented that the suffragist movement rose out of the abolitionist movement and went on to speak of the early suffragists Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, both of whom defended the rights of the unborn (in her talk, Ms. Foster thanked Consistent Life Board member Carol Crossed for founding the Susan B. Anthony Birthplace Museum and encouraged others to visit it). This defense was continued by one of Anthony's successors, Equal Rights Amendment author Alice Paul, who said, "Abortion is the ultimate exploitation of women." These early feminists were much mistreated for their pains, being arrested, beaten, strip searched and force fed.

Moving from past to present, she described Feminists for Life's work in making college campuses more congenial for pregnant and parenting students here in the U.S. She also spoke passionately about the suffering of girls and women all over the world. The staggering variety of women's rights violations include female genital mutilation, practiced in much of Africa; trafficking of women from the former Soviet Union and other countries that leads to their working in sweatshops or in involuntary prostitution; and the tragic situation in China, India, and other nations, where a preference for sons has led to mass abortions of unborn baby girls. As a result of this last injustice, 163 million girls are missing from Asia. Given this global situation, Ms. Foster proposed a variety of measures to empower women and protect children: education and employment opportunities for women; health care, including immunizations and pre- and post-natal care; child care for the working poor; protections against domestic violence and forced labor; and suffrage for all women around the world.



**Consistent Life**

P.O. Box 9295 Silver Spring, MD 20916-9295

**CONSISTENT LIFE NEWS: SPECIAL EDITION  
CL 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference,  
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This weekly email publication contains brief notes, including action suggestions, news of events past and present, notifications of resources available, and relevant quotations.

[www.consistent-life.org/weekly.html](http://www.consistent-life.org/weekly.html)



# Consistent Life

## OUR MISSION

We are committed to the protection of life, which is threatened in today's world by war, abortion, poverty, racism, capital punishment and euthanasia.

We believe that these issues are linked under a 'consistent ethic of life'. We challenge those working on all or some of these issues to maintain a cooperative spirit of peace, reconciliation, and respect in protecting the unprotected.

## OUR PURPOSE

We serve the anti-violence community by connecting issues, building bridges, and strengthening the case against each kind of socially-approved killing by consistently opposing them all.

## TWITTER

CL is now on Twitter!

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