

Pastor's Reflections

By Dr. Jeffrey E. Frantz

On Saturday, May 10th, our church, along with members of the Jewish and Muslim communities in South Florida, is sponsoring an *interfaith peace-advocacy* event, BRIDGES TO THE 21st CENTURY, to be held at 7:00 p.m. in the sanctuary of our church. The event will focus on *bridge making* in our time ... in the face of the ongoing dialogue between global Islam and the West.

That we may all be one. These words, from John 17:21, are the motto verse of *the United Church of Christ*. The context is the lengthy prayer of Jesus, in part of what are known as the *discourse speeches* in John's gospel.

I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. (John 17:20-21)

This unifying message of Jesus invites us, in all periods of time, to aim for the high ground. The high ground is where the spirit of God, as we know it as love, is everywhere. The impulse of this love—always—seeks to embrace the BIG PICTURE.

Clearly, in this BIG PICTURE, God's consuming passion, as we find it revealed in Jesus, is that *we may all be one*. On an intellectual level, this resonates well with us. It makes sense. It's logical. When we're one, when people are getting along, when we're finding ways of coming together, of building bonded relationships, good feelings abound.

The problem is it's not easy. Our differences—in ethnicity, religion, cultural values etc.—easily divide us. Truth be told, our natural tendency is to prefer people like us; people who are *like* minded, who look like us, and with whom we share some measure of both history and tradition.

Sacrifice and giving up stuff. For us to ever *be* one as God envisions, we have to come to the table with a sacrificial spirit and a tangible willingness to *give up stuff*. As we're learning with the current gas crisis, to say nothing of the most glaring food crisis in my lifetime, we don't come to this easily.

Certainly, the crisis with world oil prices is *not* something that has caught us by surprise. The truth is, we simply haven't wanted to take it seriously because to do so would upend our highly mobile life style.

Moreover, the recent spike in food prices is not unrelated to the emphasis on using our corn harvest for ethanol production. The problem is, no one looked down the line to anticipate the longer-term consequences for food production. As it turns out, corn is a more integral part of the wider food chain than many people thought.

And so here we are—even when we make sacrifices, we don't always think through the sacrifice in light of the BIG PICTURE.

Values, commitments and the BIG PICTURE. For us to ever be on a path toward global peace on this planet, all peoples will have to demonstrate a will and a commitment to embrace a value system that seeks to see the BIG PICTURE.

In this regard, we cannot help but be amazed at the number of Americans who remain uninformed about the international world. Worse yet, in far too many instances, we show only scant interest in learning.

One of the keys to our nation's future in the 21st century will be how and in what ways we embrace the international community. The reality of our times is that we are a global community. Globalization is here; it's not going anywhere. It's only going to be more pronounced and more dependent on enlightened leadership.

One of the pinnacle values of our nation needs to be a commitment to the well-being of all nations (i.e., the demands of the BIG PICTURE). As Americans, we need to understand America and our needs in light of the needs of the international community. Furthermore, the impulse toward this understanding must become a primary value for us as a people.

That we may all be one challenges and invites us all to the spiritual high ground. On the high ground, the fundamental humanity and dignity of all people are honored and valued, both for God's sake and for ours.