



New Garden Community Church

Unitarian Universalist - a labor-peace church

312-405-9470 ♦ minister@NewGardenUU.org ♦ www.NewGardenUU.org
meeting at 6pm, UE (United Electrical workers), 37 S. Ashland, Chicago

May 11, 2007

"Love for the Earth, Justice for the People"

Calendar:

- **Sunday, May 13, 6pm** – we celebrate **Mother's Day**, and continue the **"First Person"** series with **Dave Karcher** talking about his spiritual journey, starting with his Prussian grandfather who ran away from the military to start anew in America.
- **Sunday, May 20, 6pm** – **Adam Kader**, director of an immigrant Worker Rights Center, reflects on **Popular Education**, an approach pioneered by Paolo Freire in the slums of Brazil. How can this revolutionary, bottom-up approach be used in worker education? How does it contribute to building Earth Community?
- **Sunday, May 27, 6pm** – **Film Night** – Come see – **WHOLE, UNEXPURGATED!** – the documentary about **"The Yes Men,"** who impersonated the World Trade Organization and got away with it. The response of business people to their subversive honesty is heartening.

All services followed by potluck supper and conversation.

Spirituality Book Discussion Group

Tuesday, June 5, 6:30-8pm – Read Jimmy Carter's *Our Endangered Values: America's Moral Crisis*. Meet at the back table, Westgate Coffeehouse, 924 W. Madison.
Phone 312-405-9470, for info.

Peasants and Kings

Mexico is a place of vivid contrasts. From the air Cuernaca is studded with blue swimming pools in walled private homes. On the ground these pools are invisible; the public streets are splashed with color from tropical flowers and brightly painted buildings, sometimes peeling.

"Peace in Our Earth Community"

Saturday, June 9, 9am – 4pm

Union Park Fieldhouse

1501 W. Randolph St., 312-746-5494

*Tired of gang violence or police harassment?
What about the divide between neighborhoods –
can people connect across Ogden Avenue?
And in the wider world, what can we do about war,
repression and genocide?*

Come to a neighborhood gathering to learn some tools for inner peace, and join a conversation about how to address these issues and imagine another future.

Massive smooth-barked trees hold up a delicate canopy of lacy leaves and orange flowers, that also litter the ground below.

A million people march in the streets of Mexico City on May Day, while a few visitors drift through the home-turned-museum of Leon Trotsky, where he was murdered by an agent of Stalin in the 1940s. A street vendor hands me a lovely coral necklace from the varied bunch around her arm – only 200 pesos! 100! Only 10 dollars! Taxis hurtle around the square – driven by Phd's and unemployed doctors.

Mexico has not seen the economic boon that the North American Free Trade Agreement was supposed to bring that country. "The neo liberal programs have taken the poor back 100 years," an official in the Dept of Labor of Lopez Obrador's shadow government tells us. Since NAFTA's implementation (Jan '94), she tells us, there is less employment, lower salaries and thus less consumption, not more, as NAFTA had promised.

We find out that farmers cannot sell their corn at a profit, because of the influx of cheap U.S. corn, subsidized by our government. They must leave the land and go to the cities to look for work, or

emigrate – illegally – to the U.S. The two largest sources of foreign currency in Mexico come from oil sales, and from remittances from people working in the U.S. and sending money home to their families.

We visit a maquila, a highly rationalized and automated Korean factory in its own free-trade zone, which means that its high quality sweatshirts cannot be sold anywhere in Mexico, but only exported. The Korean production manager tells us proudly that they pay the workers more than the minimum wage – it is 50 pesos a day – they pay 54 to starting workers, and up to 120 for fast, experienced workers. But they can't go higher – China pays only half as much to its workers.

The labor official has told us that to survive you need to make four times the minimum wage.

Some of the young women in this factory whom we meet over lunch tell us that 540 pesos a week barely will pay for diapers and milk, let alone make ends meet. They estimate that a fair wage would be 800 pesos a week (about \$80).

But working conditions in this factory have improved since an independent union organized and was recognized by the company, with support from U.S. students (from USAS, United Students Against Sweatshops). The union hopes to open a day-care center in the factory, raise wages, and spread its success to other factories that now only have government unions, notoriously corrupt.

Far from this state-of-the-art factory, we visit a village of peasant farmers, living much as their ancestors may have – except that they grow sugar cane instead of corn – who have driven out the planners who had intended to turn their ancestral coop lands into a huge regional airport. In 2003, after two years of struggle, they celebrated this victory.

But the federal government doesn't want other villages to get the wrong idea, and sets out to make an example of these people. A year ago the village is surrounded and raided by national, state, and county police, who break into homes and beat the inhabitants, including women and children, and haul many off to jail.

We stand in the high archway of the Cathedral in Cuernavaca watching as one of the village leaders, Ignacio del Valle, and the People's Front in Defense of the Land, are awarded the 15th annual Sergio Mendez Arceo Human Rights Prize. The prize is accepted by his wife and his 92-year-old father, as Ignacio is still in jail. His wife, a leader herself, tells us with tears that those arrested have just this morning been sentenced to 67 years for – what? Disturbing the peace?

Amnesty International has taken up their cause. We can help by writing letters in support. (see <http://news.amnesty.org/index/ENGAMR410452006>)

We can help by revisiting "free-trade" policies and instituting policies in their place that are designed to help the people of the countries involved, instead of benefiting multinational corporations. We can help stem Mexican immigration by helping fix the Mexican economy, the one we helped break. It's time we put people's needs first.

peace, Jean

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