

February - March
2024

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Newsletter of **LEPOCO**
Lehigh-Pocono Committee of Concern

Friendship As Peacemaking

Again this year, LEPOCO friends will gather on April 6, 2024, at 4:00 pm, for a stimulating time of reflection, conversation, and good food.

The Annual Gathering is always a place for old friends to share information and stories and for new friends to get to know each other. The speaker for 2024 is the Rev. Dr. Christopher (Chris) Ney, a native son, who will share his thoughts on "Friendship as Peacemaking." Completing the theme, the gathering will be at the Lehigh Valley Friends meetinghouse, 4116 Bath Pike (Route 512, 1/2 mile north of Route 22), Bethlehem.

Chris Ney's dedication to peace and peace advocacy began early; on at least two previous occasions, Chris shared his experiences with a LEPOCO audience at Potluck & Politics evenings. He earned a Master of Divinity at Union Theological Seminary in New York with a focus on liberation theology, writing a Master's Thesis on the Sebastian Acevedo Anti-Torture Movement, a group that used nonviolent direct action to protest torture in Chile.

While in New York, he worked as the Disarmament Coordinator at the War Resisters League (WRL) where he coordinated the Day Without the Pentagon campaign in the late 1990s. Currently, he is a member of the WRL National Committee. In addition, he is co-chair of the National Committee of the Fellowship of Reconciliation.

His doctoral dissertation which addressed ecumenism, encounter, and friendship led him to understand better the importance of friendship -- often taken for granted. "Yet it deserves greater attention, especially in these times of social fragmentation and deepening polarization."

This year's Art Raffle will include the contributions of Lee Buck, Ellen Buck, Monica Sommerville, Michelle Sheehan and Sue Verbalis, Philhomena Gruppo, and The Lit Coffee Roastery & Bakeshop. (See insert.) The drawing will take place at the Gathering.

The delightful LEPOCO Singers will bring their special music to the day. Balloting for the Steering Committee will continue at the event with an introduction of the members chosen during the annual meeting of the winners. (See ballot enclosed.)

A generous array of finger foods will be served during a social hour after the program and presentation.

Tickets are available at a cost of \$35.00 (regular) and \$10.00 (low income). Special contributions of \$75 are welcomed and appreciated.

~ Janet Ney

The U.S., the U.N., & the Devastation of Gaza

The long-standing U.S. alliance with Israel led the U.S. to aid Israel in several ways after Hamas assaulted southern Israel on October 7. The Israeli war of revenge produced a "total siege" of Gaza, cutting off food, water, fuel, and electricity; a campaign of indiscriminate bombing and shelling; and then a devastating ground invasion. The U.S. offered Israel unconditional military assistance in the form of vast quantities of munitions and still unknown operational intelligence, making the U.S. fully complicit in whatever war crimes Israel has committed in Gaza. Equally important, the U.S. has provided Israel with unqualified diplomatic support at the United Nations. This support, exercised through three U.N. institutions, has prevented the Israeli operation from ending and has heightened the humanitarian crisis it has created.

First, in the U.N.'s Security Council (UNSC), the key institution capable of ending conflicts, the U.S. has now vetoed three resolutions seeking a ceasefire. Following a U.S. veto in mid-December, the U.N.'s General Assembly of 193 nations voted in favor of an immediate humanitarian ceasefire by a vote of 153 in favor and only 10 against, including the U.S. and Israel, with 23 abstentions. Most recently, on February 20, the U.S. was the sole vote against a UNSC draft resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire. In the 15-member council, the vote was 13-1 (with the UK abstaining). Amnesty International pointed out that Washington's vote in favor of the resolution would have protected Palestinian civilians but it instead chose "the opposite path."

Second, in February the U.S. also decided to suddenly suspend its funding of the United Nations Relief & Works Agency (UNRWA). It did so on the basis of an as yet unverified Israeli accusation that 12 employees of UNRWA, out of 13,000 employed in the Gaza Strip, participated in the October 7 Hamas attack and despite UNRWA's immediate termination of the contracts of those accused. Israel has long sought the demise of UNRWA. This U.N. agency was founded in 1949 to care for the 500,000-700,000 Palestinian refugees created by the *Nakba*, the "catastrophe" that resulted from the establishment of the state of Israel. The agency provides essential services to refugees including food, education, and health care. In the past, the U.S. has been a principal funder of UNRWA. The loss of funding now comes at a time when Palestinians in

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The U.S., the U.N., & the Devastation of Gaza

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Gaza are facing famine and mass starvation and desperately in need of humanitarian aid of every kind.

Third, the U.S. has backed Israel in a case before the U.N.'s highest court, the International Court of Justice (ICJ). In 2022, the U.N.'s General Assembly asked the court to issue an opinion on the legal status of Israel's occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which has gone on since 1967, far longer than usual for a military occupation. The ICJ recently held a series of hearings on the issue. The U.S. has asked the court not to issue a ruling calling for the Israel's immediate withdrawal from the occupied territories. Of the more than 50 nations addressing the court at these hearings, the U.S. and the U.K. appear to be the sole advocates for continuing the occupation. A lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict requires the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in the occupied territories. The people of our country are ill-served by an administration that continues to reject the needs and rights of the Palestinian people.

The U.N. is frequently disparaged or ignored, especially by right-wing nationalists. Nevertheless, it remains the best measure of the conscience of the planet and the key international institution for preserving world peace, resolving conflict, and alleviating mass human suffering. It is surely regrettable that our government finds itself arrayed against most of the rest of the world when it comes to the slaughter in the Gaza Strip.

~ Mick Baylor

A Look at Some Gaza Ceasefire Activism & Thoughts

Over the past months, I've met some dedicated peace and justice activists, locally. Most aren't LEPOCO members – they are Democratic Socialists, Jewish Voice for Peace members, and Muslim Students of the Lehigh Valley. We met while protesting outside Rep. Susan Wild's office, over her refusal to call for a ceasefire in Gaza, and we formed an ad hoc group.

Later, along with several LEPOCO activists, I organized three constituent visits for us all, with our Pennsylvania senators, and our Lehigh Valley representative, Susan Wild. We met with Sen. Casey's District Manager, in person, virtually with Susan Wild and her Chief of Staff, and virtually with Sen. Fetterman's staff.

And still, after our urgent statements asking them to support an immediate ceasefire, outlining the necessity for more humanitarian aid to be protected through a ceasefire, and for negotiations to release the Israeli hostages, as well as unjustly held Palestinians in prison, to stop this ongoing genocide by Israel, they have

not supported a ceasefire. We know this is the desire of most Americans, when polled.

I close with an excerpt of that famous speech by the Berkeley Free Speech hero, Mario Savio: "There are times when the operation of the machine becomes so odious -- makes you so sick at heart -- that you can't take part. You can't even passively take part."

We continue with the LEPOCO Gaza ceasefire vigils on Thursdays (4-5 pm), the calls/emails to Congressional offices and The White House, whatever we can think of to make a difference. I hope everyone who can do this, is doing it.

~ Kathryn Hoffman

And...

The city councils of Allentown, Bethlehem, and Easton have been asked by college students and other members of the community attending recent meetings to pass resolutions calling for a ceasefire in the war in Israel and Gaza. That effort is ongoing with different results in each city so far. As of early February over 70 cities nationwide have passed ceasefire resolutions.

You can support this effort by speaking out at the local council meetings or by speaking with council members between meetings. Bethlehem's council meets on 1st and 3rd Tuesdays, Allentown's council on 1st and 3rd Wednesdays, and Easton's council on 2nd and 4th Wednesdays.

Newsletter of
LEPOCO

Lehigh-Pocono Committee of
Concern

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The *LEPOCO Newsletter* is published eight times a year by the Lehigh-Pocono Committee of Concern, a nonviolent, non-profit organization dedicated to peace in all forms.

Annual dues are:

Regular Member	\$35
Limited Income Member	\$10
Household Membership	\$45
Supporting Member	\$75

Articles/news should be submitted to one of the addresses above for consideration for the next issue of the newsletter.

Newsletter Staff: Tom Stinnett, Nancy Tate, Amanda Zaniesienko, Carol Baylor, Janet Ney, Rick Dow.

Thanks to all the people who collate and prepare the newsletter for mailing each month.

LEPOCO Steering Committee: Pam Brubaker, Margot Hillman, Julius Iwantsch (co-treasurer), Monica McAgnon, Martricia McLaughlin, Janet Ney, Susie Ravitz, Stefan Rogers, Tom Stinnett (co-treasurer), Nancy Tate (ex-officio), and Amanda Zaniesienko.

Don Miles: Presente! _____

In *The Morning Call*, on Sunday, February 19th, the front-page headline read, "Prominent attorney, activist dies at 74." The headline and the appreciative story that followed was a most appropriate way to remember a person who contributed so much to the community and whose family only amplified those contributions. As a young attorney, Don represented the Muhlenberg Five after their arrest in 1976 for protesting at a campus event where then head of the FBI Clarence Kelly was speaking. Don led their defense all the way to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court where the Pennsylvania First Amendment protection of their action was upheld.

Don represented groups like Hogar Crea, the Allentown Women's Clinic and many environmental causes. He was a leader in the Sierra Club at the local and state level and organized an amazing conference in Bethlehem just as we were learning about the dangers of natural gas fracking and the resulting pipelines. He was a regular announcer on WDIY, our original local public radio station. Don's wife Julia, who died in 2016, was president of the Easton Area teachers union and she introduced their son, Stephen, when he spoke for the LEPOCO Annual Dinner in 2015. Stephen has been a much respected leader in national peace work in his positions at Win Without War. Stephen also spoke at the LEPOCO Annual Gathering in 2022.

In the February 19th *Morning Call* story about Don Miles, Jack McCallum, a retired journalist and friend of Don's is quoted, "It always just struck me how much he embraced these issues... That's sort of how I knew him, as a guy who was really not afraid to stick his neck out on these issues." Don Miles: Presente!

- Nancy Tate

Help LEPOCO Find a New Office

LEPOCO has found itself in the position of needing to find a new home again. Since January when we received a termination notice from the church where we have been renting since June 2020, we have been looking for a new space. There are not many places where the rent is as low and the space as large, as our current office. After looking at several spaces, the LEPOCO Move Planning Committee has narrowed down the options. The primary space that is being considered, is a little shy of the square footage of where we are currently renting but it is considerably more expensive. The other rooms that we looked at have been much smaller and many come with other issues that make them less than ideal for LEPOCO's needs. At least one of those other options is still on our consideration list. Time is running out and we hope that some of you have some ideas that we may not have already thought about. Please call the LEPOCO office, 610-691-8730, with suggestions, contacts, and offers of assistance. We welcome any and all forms of help in this challenge that we face.

- Amanda Zaniesienko

The Struggle Shared (a mini version)

EL SALVADOR - PROTECTING WATER & THE PEOPLE - A year ago this January, five water defenders were arrested in El Salvador. The "Santa Marta Five" led a successful national campaign to ban environmentally destructive mining in the Central American country several years ago. Their arrest may signal a further crackdown on civil society under the increasingly authoritarian President Nayib Bukele. It is feared that President Bukele may seek to resume metal mining operations in part to offset costs incurred by his own disastrous economic policies.

These are the conclusions of the report that resulted from a visit of a U.S. and Canadian delegation to El Salvador in October 2023. The delegation reported shock as they witnessed the fear, suffering and corruption under Bukele who was re-elected on February 4, 2024. They described the country as a "police state." The report lists the demands they are making of the Salvadoran government as well as those of the United States, Canada, and Mexico starting with dropping the charges against the Santa Marta Five and restoring democracy to El Salvador. In addition, they demand that the prohibition on metallic mining be maintained.

You can read a summary of the report or the full report online with a search for "State of Deception: Fact Finding Report on the Detained El Salvador Water Defenders, Mining, and the State of Human Rights Under the Bukele Administration."

RENEWABLE ENERGY IN URUGUAY - At the beginning of the 21st century, countries around the world were seeing a steady escalation in the cost of fossil fuel. With crude oil costs rising steadily, Uruguay and its President Tabaré turned to Ramón Méndez Galain for help.

Galain, Executive Director of Ivy, is a recognized expert in energy policy and sustainable transition. (The name, Ivy comes from a Guarani word that translates roughly as "the desired land.") In Uruguay, Galain's research led him to the conviction that renewables, rather than nuclear power, would provide the solutions to the country's power dilemma.

Between 2008 and 2015, Galain's designs led the transformation of the Uruguayan energy sector that today includes 98% renewable energies in the electricity matrix (with up to 40% participation of wind energy) and 67% of renewable sources in the overall primary matrix of the country.

For more information about these developments in Uruguay do an online search for Ramón Méndez Galain's work in Uruguay.

- Janet Ney



LEPOCO Steering Committee Update, Nominations & Ballot

LEPOCO's Steering Committee plans and provides leadership for the Action Meetings, held the second Monday of the month (these meetings are open to all members and friends of the organization).

The Committee makes decisions between monthly meetings and handles finances, personnel, and other organizational issues. The election for this year's Steering Committee will be completed at the Annual Gathering on April 6th. (See balloting instructions below).

Margot Hillman, Monica McAgnon, Martricia McLaughlin, Susie Ravitz, Amanda Zaniesienko, and Julius Iwantsch (co-treasurer) will continue serving their two-year Steering Committee terms that began in 2023.

A special thank you goes to Pam Brubaker and Stefan Rogers who will not be seeking another term on the Steering Committee. They will both continue to be active in various capacities.

Finally, because our at-large Steering Committee members can number as low as six and as high as ten, we will be shy of a full complement with this election.

If you would be interested in serving on the Steering Committee or if you know someone that would be a promising new member for the committee, please talk to one of the Steering Committee members or contact the LEPOCO office.

And don't forget to support those who take on this responsibility by casting your ballot.

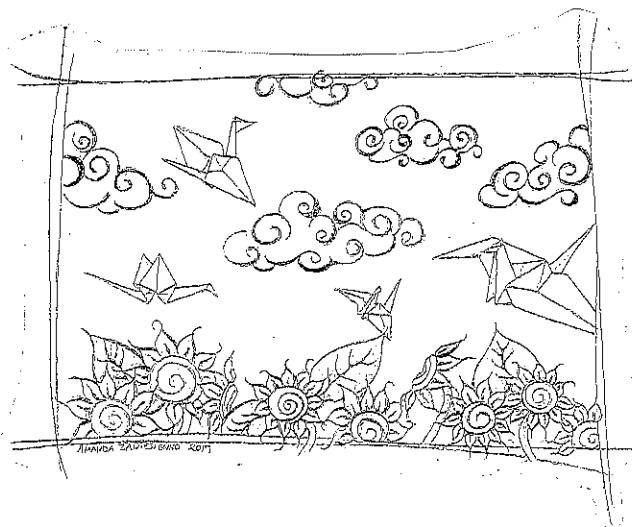
Here are the people nominated to serve on LEPOCO's Steering Committee for the 2024-2026 term.

Janet Ney of Allentown has served as a Steering Committee member for over ten years. She has facilitated the Annual Gathering Planning Committee, previously the Annual Dinner, for many years. She previously served on the National Committee of the War Resisters League. Janet is retired from the Community Action Committee of the Lehigh Valley (CACLV). She is an active member of the First Presbyterian Church of Allentown and volunteers for the Presbytery of Lehigh.

Kellyn Slingerland of Bethlehem got involved with LEPOCO through Peace Singers in 2023. She works at Edge of The Woods Native Plant nursery in Orefield, PA, as a horticulturist. She graduated from Temple with a B.A. in Philosophy and is broadly interested in causes related to peace and justice, but more specifically issues related to the environment.

Tom Stinnett of Riegelsville has served as co-treasurer since 2009, and served a stint as solo treasurer many years ago. A mechanical engineer, he is retired from his work in the biotechnology equipment field, but still does some consulting work. He has served as president of Riegelsville Borough Council for many years and is married to LEPOCO staffperson, Nancy Tate. He has been active in many aspects of LEPOCO's work since the early 1970s.

Dianna Walls of Allentown, SWF ISO seat on the steering committee of a woke liberal organization. Dianna has recently retired after 40 years as a Nurse Practitioner for underserved communities. She has been a member for 35 years, of Lehigh Valley Monthly Meeting, having served on multiple committees throughout those years. She is a rabid lesbian feminist, who once shared a tuna sandwich with Shirley Chisolm at a National NOW Conference. (Yes, really!) ...Swipe left.



Election Ballot

At-Large Steering Committee Members (vote for three people/positions):

Janet Ney ____
(2-year term)

Kellyn Slingerland ____
(2-year term)

Dianna Walls ____
(2-year term)

Co-Treasurer (vote for one):

Tom Stinnett ____
(2-year term)

****Please note here if you or anyone you know would be interested in serving on the Steering Committee:

This ballot can be cast at the Annual Gathering, on April 6, or by mail to arrive at the LEPOCO Peace Center, 1705 W. Broad St., Bethlehem, PA 18018, by Thursday, April 4, 2024.

Bits & Pieces

☪ 'Tis the season to reflect on how your tax dollars are being used. As we know the largest percentage goes to current wars, past wars, and building weapons for possible future wars. **The National War Tax Resistance Coordinating Committee (NWTRCC)** has been present for over 40 years with resources for those who would like to let the tax people and others know about their opposition to the militarism that surrounds us. At nwtrcc.org you can find information about various levels and forms of actual war tax resistance and simpler actions like focused letters and leafletting.

☪ In March of 1997 the **Peace Community of San José de Apartadó** was founded in Colombia on principles of nonviolence, collective action, and dedicated resistance to violence and conflict. Today the community has become an exemplary symbol of peaceful resistance in the face of conflict, offering an alternative way to live. They value communal bonds, collective action, and cherish and protect the lands on which they reside.

You can read more about the community – their accomplishments and the ongoing threats of violence they face -- at www.peacepresence.org the website of the FOR Peace Presence.

Longtime readers of this newsletter will remember the many ties developed between LEPOCO activists and the community in the early 2000s including visitors from the community speaking here. Joe DeRaymond lived with the community for six months and visited other times. Janet Goloub was a member of one of the FOR delegations to the community.

☪ Make the Road PA is urging Senator Fetterman to assist a young mother who was held at the Berks Detention Center for 13 months after fleeing to the U.S. with her young son. She fled Honduras after her sister was murdered. She settled in Allentown and married her husband, a U.S. citizen,

and they have a daughter. Now she is facing deportation because an immigration judge wrongly denied her asylum claim without having attended a single hearing. **Senator Fetterman can introduce a private bill on Linda's behalf, allowing her to remain in Allentown with her family.** We are asked to contact Sen. Fetterman and urge him to stand with Linda and introduce this private bill on her behalf to help make sure her family can remain together.

☪ The Witness for Peace Solidarity Collective is sponsoring a delegation to Honduras, August 1-10, 2024, under the theme, "**Honduras: Root Causes of Migration.**" The focus will be on U.S.-backed militarism in Honduras and its negative impact on communities struggling against the climate crisis. They are seeking participants that are climate and anti-war activists as well as students interested in global human rights and climate migration. See solidaritycollective.org for more information.

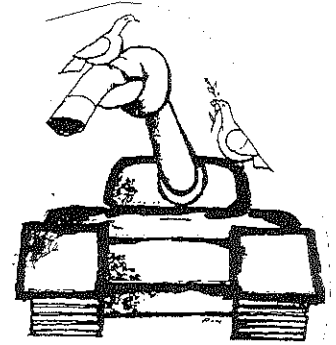
☪ The **LEPOCO Book Group** will hold their last meeting at the present LEPOCO Office, 1705 W. Broad St., Bethlehem (18018), on Tuesday, April 2nd, at 6 pm. At that meeting the group will discuss "My Song: A Memoir of Art, Race, & Defiance," by Harry Belafonte with Michael Shnayerson. A complete list of the books being read and discussed in 2024 is available from LEPOCO. (You can read about the LEPOCO move elsewhere in this newsletter.)

☪ A report published by the **Costs of War Project** at Brown University's Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs shows that since 2021, the U.S. military has conducted counterterrorism operations -- including training and assistance, military exercises, combat and detentions, and air and drone strikes -- in at least 78 countries. Source: 78-Country Map Rebuffs Claim That U.S. 'Not At War,'" November 29, 2023, at commondreams.org.

☪ The exhibit, "**Joan Baez: Musician & Artist,**" will be at the Martin Guitar Museum, 510 Sycamore St., Nazareth, through April 30. It presents a journey through Baez's work, her early interest in the arts and her

impact on popular music, civil rights, the anti-war movement and humanitarian causes. See martinguitar.com for more information. The exhibit is open 9 am to 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday. Admission is free, but a \$5 donation to the Martin Guitar Charitable Foundation is welcomed. To confirm that the museum is open, call 610-759-2837.

☪ The **Essentials Café** is now open at 418 Third Ave., Bethlehem, near West Side Moravian Church. It is the first pay-what-you-can café in the Lehigh Valley (as far as can be determined). We are sorry that some of the information in the piece about the café in the last newsletter was not correct. The café receives high ratings from all of those who eat there. The café is part of the One World Everybody Eats organization. You can learn more at www.essentials.cafe.org.



Support LEPOCO!

- Enclosed is a donation to LEPOCO of \$ _____.
- I would like to support LEPOCO's work with a _____ monthly / _____ quarterly pledge of \$ _____.
- I'm especially interested in the following issues:

Name _____

Phone # _____

e-mail _____

Address _____

City/Town _____

Zip _____

Send to: LEPOCO Peace Center, 1705 W. Broad St., Bethlehem, PA 18018, or donate through PayPal at www.lepoco.org



Lehigh-Pocono Committee of Concern

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LEPOCO Annual Gathering

Saturday, April 6, 4:00 pm (doors open at 3:30 pm)

Featured Speaker: The Rev. Dr. Chris Ney

"Friendship As Peacemaking"

Lehigh Valley Friends Meeting, Bethlehem
4116 Bath Pike, (on Rt. 512, 1/2 mile north of Rt. 22)

(See enclosed flyer for more information.)

Weekly Peace Vigils (Thursdays)

March 7, 14, 21, & 28

4:00 - 5:00 pm

3rd & Wyandotte Sts., (south) Bethlehem

Ceasefire Israel-Gaza war.

End the wars. Witness for peace.

Call LEPOCO, 610-691-8730, for more info.

Save the Date

Peace Camp 2025

July 22-26

Look for the flyer in your mailbox soon.

Call LEPOCO, 610-691-8730, with questions or to volunteer.