

# Desert Voices

The Newsletter of Nevada Desert Experience • Volume 17, Number 1, • February 2004

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## *Pilgrimage Through a Burning World*

### **A Book Review by John Dear**

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“Pilgrimage Through a Burning World: Spiritual Practice and Nonviolent Protest at the Nevada Test Site” by Ken Butigan (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003, paperback, 234 pages, \$21.95.)

**Copies available as a fund raiser to NDE - to order see Order form on page 7.** (They can also be ordered by going to: [www.sunypress.edu](http://www.sunypress.edu) or calling 1-518-472-5000.)

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“Look at the desert today,” Thomas Merton wrote in the early 1950s. “It is the birthplace of a new and terrible creation, the testing-ground of the power by which people seek to un-create what God has blessed.”

“The Nevada desert is the place of the greatest violence in the history of the world,” Archbishop Dom Helder Camara later said at an NDE event in 1991. “It must become the place of the greatest nonviolence.”

For twenty years, the Nevada Desert Experience has been bringing people of faith and conscience to the gates of nuclear testing to experiment with active nonviolence and help spark the disarmament of our world. Ken Butigan has produced a ground-breaking new book about the Nevada Desert Experience and our witness against nuclear weapons testing that I hope everyone who has ever been to NDE will buy, read and study.

“Pilgrimage Through a Burning World: Spiritual Practice and Nonviolent Protest at the Nevada Test Site” is much more than a history of our work for nuclear disarmament. It is a provocative analysis of every aspect of our witness, explaining everything from the roots of Christian desert spirituality to Gandhi’s method of *satyagraha* to offer a powerful reflection and new understanding about our effort for peace. *see Pilgrimage - page 2*

## *Annual Appeal*

We are deeply grateful to all of you for your support over the years, both by your presence at the Nevada Test Site, your prayers for our ministry and your financial contributions.

We are in a period of renewed government spending on nuclear weapons research and development. Although the Bush Administration continues to deny that there are any plans for nuclear testing, experience has shown that whenever weapons are developed, they will be tested, regardless of international treaties and opinions. The Bush Administration is planning to spend around \$25 million to investigate whether testing can be resumed, but with a timeframe of 18 months instead of 36 months. This demonstrates intent to resume testing and to resume it quickly – before the testing can be stopped by outside influences. NDE needs to be ready to meet this challenge with additional presence and protests at the test site.

One of the ways we intend to increase our presence is through our newly created immersion/emersion experiences. This program is a holistic approach to understanding how the designing, building and testing of weapons of mass destruction is not separate from poverty, militarism, racism and environmental destruction. We are also planning for increased presence with our August Desert Witness events in both 2004 and in 2005, which will commemorate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We are excited to have Richard Rohr, ofm, with us for ADW 2004 and plan to have many other speakers for 2005. Please consider joining us for these events.

In the process, Ken Butigan has articulated better than anyone I know what we are trying to do—not only our witness for peace, but the emergence of a new, contemporary desert spirituality that integrates religious ritual and political action in a public effort of truth-telling, active love and global disarmament.

Right from the start, Ken's book surprised me. Instead of a history lesson, he wants to dig deeper into the underlying motivations, roots and spirituality at the heart of the Nevada Desert Experience.

In his preface, Ken outlines five theses for this great book, First that "NDE's faith-based nonviolent action is not simply a form of narrowly defined 'political protest' or 'religious witness' but a contemporary spiritual practice that has engendered a new type of desert spirituality."

Second that "this spiritual practice includes rituals and processes that constitute a form of 'new asceticism,' whose goal is not the disparagement of the body but the transformation of self and society."

Third, that "NDE's antinuclear asceticism stands in contrast to an institutionalized and internalized 'nuclear asceticism.' Fourth, that "just as nuclearism has relied on forms of national ritualization—including civil defense drills and many other forms of nuclear training—a key dimension of NDE's antinuclear asceticism is a ritualization of the dynamics of active nonviolence.

Finally, Ken proposes that "NDE's antinuclear desert spirituality can be fruitfully schematized as a contemporary adaptation of the ancient ascetical practice of the pilgrimage." "Antinuclear pilgrims journeying to the Nevada Test Site have engaged in a pilgrimage of personal and social transformation," Ken explains, "that has often been characterized by at least four simultaneous journeys: the journey to the physical terrain of the top-secret U.S. nuclear proving ground; the journey to a symbolic center of nuclear America; the journey to, and encounter with, the people managing

and protecting the test site; and the journey to a renewed personal and communal vision, commitment, faith and engagement."

"Pilgrimage Through a Burning World" reviews the story of the Nevada Test Site and our nuclear world; the first Lenten Desert Experience in 1982; the formation of the Nevada Desert Experience; the adaptation and creation of new "Stations of the Nuclear Cross at the Nevada Test Site"; the practice and theology of nonviolent civil disobedience at the test site; and finally the growing movement of "Antinuclear Pilgrimage."

Throughout the book, we read excerpts, testimonies and letters from participants, testifying to their vision of peace, their reason for taking a stand and risking arrest in the desert, and the profound spiritual consequences of their antinuclear witness. When brought together like this, we realize that the work of the Nevada Desert Experience not only has born tremendous fruit right now, but that it has the potential to further transform the church, our nation and the world with steadfast, active, loving nonviolence.

In particular, I benefited from Ken's careful study of active nonviolence and Gandhian *satyagraha*, his review of Franciscan and desert spiritualities, the stories of how NDE came to be, and various accounts of civil disobedience at the test site. This book renews my commitment to witness for peace in the desert.

Ken Butigan's new book deserves serious study by all concerned activists, people of faith and conscience, scholars and church people. He has done a great service by helping us to reflect on the years of nonviolent action at the Nevada Test Site.

For the rest of our lives, we must continue to journey to the Nevada Test Site and demand its closing until all nuclear weapons and war itself are abolished. This book inspires us to go deeper into nonviolence and once again, make that holy pilgrimage of peace through our burning world into the Nevada Desert, with the hope and prayer that one day, the fire will be put out.

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*John Dear is a Jesuit priest, peace activist, and the pastor of several churches in the desert of New Mexico. He is the author of 20 books, including "Living Peace," "Jesus the Rebel," "Mary of Nazareth, Prophet of Peace," and "Peace Behind Bars." For info, see: [www.johndear.org](http://www.johndear.org)*

# **We Cry out Peace, Salaam, Shalom**

## **New Year's Event in Las Vegas**

*by*

*Amy Schultz and Paul Colbert*

“We cry out peace, salaam, shalom!”

This past month, several people gathered for the annual NDE New Year's event: “Celebrate the New Year with Interfaith Prayer Services.” On the morning of New Year's eve, we gathered at the mosque in West Las Vegas, Masjid As-Sabur, to begin a 5 mile journey that would wind us through residential and industrial Las Vegas; neighborhoods, down Fremont Street, past the new Federal Building and finally to an Episcopal Church where we gathered with leaders from the Jewish community to end in prayer.

Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb and Abdul Rauf Campos Marquetti of Albuquerque NM initiated the “Muslim-Jewish Peace Walk”. Having successful experiences there, they have taken the walk to other locations, co-sponsored by Fellowship of Reconciliation. The walk was an integral part of this year's NDE New Year event.

The words, “We cry out peace, salaam, shalom!” echo in my ears. They are the most beautiful and appropriate words chosen to usher us into a new year. The year of 2003, like most years, was wrought with violence on all levels – international, local, familial, personal, environmental. Pray, let this new year be different! This message carried us through our two days gathered together in Las Vegas, as we talked and shared, slept and danced.

We gathered together on the evening of the 30<sup>th</sup> to get acquainted. We heard some reflections of one of us who grew up with the bomb in Las Vegas. On the morning of the 31<sup>st</sup>, we gathered at the mosque for prayers and to begin the walk. Despite being a work day for many, there were folks from the local community who were able to join us on the walk, including the head of the local Islamic Society. The walk highlighted contrasts in Las Vegas. We started in the poor, traditionally African-American community. The mosque parking is the site of feeding programs for the local homeless community. Within ten blocks, we were in the heart of the downtown Las Vegas casino district – Glitter gulch – Fremont Street. We stopped in the midst

of the Fremont Street Experience to offer our prayers for tourists and workers caught up in this portion of the City. We continued along Las Vegas Boulevard and came to the new Federal Building. the old building across the street was getting a face lift. We heard Fr. Louie Vitale tell of some of the trials that took place in the old building and offered prayers for the government of the United States and for all caught up in aspects of the legal system. Our journey south took us into other residential areas, until we came to Christ Church, where we offered our final prayers. A local rabbi offered prayers and a joint responsive reading with the head of the Islamic society. Prayers in all these places included the refrain, “We cry out Peace, Salaam, Shalom”.

We brought the feeling and the words of Peace to the gates of the Nevada Test Site. “Peace, Salaam, Shalom”, were key words in our interfaith service, that included prayers from Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, and Native American Traditions. We walked again, a stream of candles in the darkness. As we approached the line, we observed a traditional Buddhist custom of ringing in the New Year, with the bell being rung 108 times to help us purify our thoughts and intentions for the New Year. At the line, some of us crossed the line to risk arrest and others stayed behind to pray, support, and cheer.

The next morning we gathered one last time to reflect on our experience and ways to carry that forth in 2004. Despite our differences in religious background and in the distance we travel, we stand together against the production, testing and use of weapons of mass destruction. We have the opportunity to bring stories of our walking and praying to our families and communities, we have the responsibility to speak against corruption and violence. We will gather again in this new year in Las Vegas and the test site during Lent and in August. Until then, wherever we walk, let our steps reverberate with the meaning of Peace, Salaam, Shalom.

## A Reflection on the New Year's Event

by  
David Lester

The culmination of the Nevada Desert Experience New Year's gathering was the apex of the event. We gathered around a small fire in the middle of the desert to pray, a stone's throw from the entrance to the test site. I do not remember much about the multi-faith prayers that we shared around the fire as we prepared our short journey to the test site. The walk to the base entrance in the dark of the cold desert night is when I really recognized God's presence. We were in a line of no more than 50 people tripping our way through the brush of the desert led only by the flickering flames of our candles. I was sandwiched in the middle of the line of people and was truly moved to look in front and behind me and watch this line of candles make its way to the bright floodlights of the base line.

The words do not do justice to that moment, but the feeling of peace and hope still fills my heart when I think back. I also could not help but imagine what it would be like if our numbers were 10 or 100 fold larger. I think my heart would burst with joy and hope. The 50 of us or so that made the short walk to the base in many ways made this statement to no one but ourselves, the sheriffs, their dogs, the animals of the desert, and to God. It was a small gesture in the grand scheme of finding an end to the testing, use, and existence of nuclear weapons, but this gesture gave me a renewed energy to spread the good news of the future world without nuclear weapons.

As a person new to the Nevada Desert Experience it was comforting to see people who have a history of working for an end to nuclear weapons. I hope that as time passes more people will be able to open their eyes and hearts to the work of abolishing nuclear weapons. The Nevada Desert Experience New Year has allowed me to pursue this goal with new vigor. Next year I hope to find more opportunities to increase the sense of peace, joy, and hope in my heart.

## A Prayer for Social Action

We cannot merely pray to God to end war;  
For the world was made in such a way  
That we must find our own path of peace  
Within ourselves and with our neighbor.

We cannot merely pray to God to root out prejudice;  
For we already have eyes  
With which to see the good in all people  
If we would only use them rightly.

We cannot merely pray to God to end starvation;  
For we already have the resources  
With which to feed the entire world  
If we would only use them wisely.

We cannot merely pray to God to end despair;  
For we already have the power  
To clear away slums and to give hope  
If we would only use our power justly.

We cannot merely pray to God to end disease;  
For we already have great minds  
With which to search out cures and healings  
If we would only use them constructively.

Therefore we pray instead  
For strength, determination, and will power,  
To *do* instead of merely to pray  
To *become* instead of merely to wish;  
That our world may be safe,  
And that our lives may be blessed.

*This prayer by Jack Reamer was used as one of the concluding prayers of the Peacewalk on New Year's Eve.*

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*Thanks Andy!*

**We are extraordinarily grateful to Andy Lichterman of Western States Legal Foundation (WSLF) for his authorship of an information bulletin titled, *The Nevada Test Site: Desert Annex of the Nuclear Weapons Laboratory*. This bulletin covers the history of nuclear testing (including the names and dates of all the 1000+ US nuclear tests since 1945), testing on indigenous lands, other military uses of the test site, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and U.S. nuclear policies. It is available through the websites of NDE and WSLF. If you would like to receive a hard copy, please contact one of our offices.**

Apocalypse is easier to visualize with nuclear weapons and waste than it is with other environmental issues. The speaker at the environmental conference did note that the word “Chernobyl” translates into the English word “Wormwood”, referenced in the Christian Scriptural book – the Revelation or the Apocalypse. Even without full scale nuclear war, nuclear fallout from testing, nuclear exposure to workers in the various nuclear-related industries is wreaking havoc on our environment and affecting peoples health. We are all paying the costs through additional cancers. These cancers do not just impact the individual suffering from disease, they have a major impact on the health care system, the economy, and most of all on the lives of the families and communities living with the victims. This is not the overt warfare and apocalypse we have come to expect. It is a silent attack and is successful because it is seen as an individual problem, not a societal problem.

As hard as it is to deal with Addiction and Apocalypse, Asceticism may actually be the toughest one for us to deal with. We have levels of denial about our addictions and the ways in which apocalypse is upon us. Asceticism calls on us to have discipline and to change our ways and respond to the first two aspects. And let’s face it – change is hard! It is one thing for me to write and try to change you – it is entirely another thing for me to really be willing to change myself and overcome my addiction to the local culture and to challenge its tenets. Changing my way of life and gaining courage to challenge my neighbors and their addictions requires that I have some credibility and am taking charge of my own life. May God give us all grace and strength to do it.

For the peace movement and the anti-nuclear movement to succeed, we all need to show up at the events and we all need to contribute to the causes. We all need to vote and make our voices heard, locally and nationally. However, it ultimately comes down to choosing the proper way of life – to choosing the right jobs – to making other choices in our lives that will transform our society and overcome the poor choices made in the past. The Buddhist tradition speaks of right speech, right actions, and right livelihood as representing part of the way we transform our lives.

As we continue in this New Year, may we find the asceticism, the self-discipline, to amend our ways of life and overcome denial about the apocalypse silently occurring in our midst and about our addictions to nuclear weapons and the cultural addictions that go along with the military-industrial-academic complex that supports nuclearism.

## Hope Against Darkness

### *The Transforming Vision of Franciscanism in an Age of Anxiety*

With  
**Richard Rohr, OFM**  
**Founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, NM**

A weekend commemorating the 59<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, co-sponsored by the Nevada Desert Experience (Las Vegas) and the Center for Action and Contemplation (Albuquerque), August 6-8, 2004, to be held in Las Vegas and at the Nevada Test Site

**Hope Against Darkness** is an experiential weekend in the spirituality and practice of transformative nonviolence through prayer, presentations, discussion, and ritual. Richard will make use of his book *Hope Against Darkness*, presenting themes of reconstruction, eco-spirituality, and the “third way” as contemporary examples of the ever recurring Franciscan view of reality. As we contemplate our violent culture, we will call upon the lives of those like Francis of Assisi, who show us the “third way” of nonviolence.

Saturday night will be an open lecture for the Las Vegas public.

**Richard Rohr, OFM, a Franciscan Friar of the New Mexico Province is an internationally known speaker and author on themes including scripture as liberation, the integration of action and contemplation, comm-unity building, peace and justice issues, male spirit-uality, the enneagram and eco-spirituality.**

*See Appeal - continued on page 6*

*Annual Appeal - continued from page 1*

Although we have been able to add Amy Schultz to our staff as Youth Coordinator and Outreach Director, we have had to cut back to half time on the Office Manager and Program Director position in Las Vegas.

We are combining our appeal with the newsletter this year, because times are tough and we are trying to reduce costs wherever we can. Our funding comes from the events we organize at the test site and from other fundraising events in the Bay Area and Las Vegas. We have two Bay Area fundraising events in 2004: one with John Dear, SJ on February 19<sup>th</sup> and the second with Richard Rohr, ofm, on November 16<sup>th</sup>. Both of these events will take place at Christ the King Catholic Church in Pleasant Hill, CA. Please call the NDE Berkeley office at 510-849-1540 for more information. We are busy applying for grants to the few foundations who would consider funding an organization such as ours. Support from our donor base is one of the primary ways we receive funding. We rely on your generosity to keep us going.

A \$10 donation from everyone on our mailing list would provide us with \$40,000, which is nearly half our operating budget for one year. We recognize that not everyone is able to contribute, and so we ask those of you who can to be generous.

Thanks for your help and support.

In Peace,

Anne Symens-Bucher and Erik Thompson, Co-chairs  
Paul Colbert and Amy Schultz, Staff

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### ***Nuclear Whistleblower Mordechai Vanunu scheduled for release!***

Israeli Nuclear Whistleblower Mordechai Vanunu is scheduled to be released from Ashkelon Prison on 21 April 2004. He has served over 17 years of imprisonment. Vanunu was a nuclear technician working in Israel's nuclear industry who became aware that his work was part of a bomb program and exposed the program to the world. For more information on Vannu go to [www.nonviolence.org/vanunu](http://www.nonviolence.org/vanunu) or contact the US Campaign to Free Mordechai Vanunu, POB 43384, Tucson AZ 85733.

## **Upcoming NDE Events**

One of the key components for NDE is the experiential aspect of bringing people to the desert for spiritual rejuvenation. We have several events planned to bring folks to Las Vegas and the Test Site. *Events listed in italics are not held in Las Vegas.*

*Speaking Event with John Dear, sj. February 19, 2004 at Christ the King Catholic Church, Pleasant Hill CA. Proceeds from this event will go to NDE. Contact 510.849.1540 for more information.*

The **United Methodist Lenten Desert Experience** will take place during Holy Week on Thursday April 8 and Friday April 9. The event will begin in Las Vegas on Thursday and end with greeting the Peace Walkers on Friday at the test site for worship and action. For registration and information, contact the NDE office or Board Member JoAnn Fukumoto at [Joumc@aol.com](mailto:Joumc@aol.com).

The **Holy Week Peace Walk 2004** is scheduled to begin April 4, with many participants arriving on April 3. Walkers begin their trek from Las Vegas on Sunday and conclude the walk on Good Friday, April 9 at the Nevada Test Site.

**August Desert Witness 2004** will be held August 6-8, 2004 in Las Vegas and at the Test Site. Co-sponsored by the Center for Action and Contemplation, Richard Rohr, ofm is scheduled to be with us. The topic will be "Hope Against Darkness: The Transforming Vision of Franciscanism in an Age of Anxiety"

*Speaking Event with Richard Rohr, ofm. November 16, 2004 at Christ the King Catholic Church, Pleasant Hill CA. Proceeds from this event will go to NDE. Contact 510.849.1540 for more information.*

We are building up to the big event of **ADW 2005**, August 5-7, 2005, which will look at 60 years of living with nuclear weapons. We hope to be able to gather people from all over the country to protest our continued reliance on nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, while criticizing others for their possession of similar weapons of mass destruction.

# Registration Form for NDE Events

## Book Order Form

PO Box 46645  
Las Vegas NV 89114-6645  
702.646.4814 (phone)  
nde@peacenet.org  
www.NevadaDesertExperience.org

- ^ UMC event. April 8-9, 2004  
Cost \$20 or register at Joumc@aol.com
- ^ Holy Week Peace Walk 2004 April 4-9, 2004  
Walk from Las Vegas to the Nevada Test Site  
Cost \$50 (waived if the walker uses this as a walkathon)
- ^ August Desert Witness 2004, August 6-8, 2004  
Cost
- ^ Send me \_\_\_\_\_ copies (y) of Ken Butigan's book  
Cost \$24.00
- ^ number of people attending \_\_\_\_\_
- ^ enclosed is \$\_\_\_\_\_ for these people
- ^ I plan to arrive in Las Vegas on \_\_\_\_\_ (date)
- ^ Please send information about local hotels
- ^ I will need floor space or housing with locals.
- ^ I will make my own housing arrangements.

Please send one form for each event.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

email: \_\_\_\_\_

Best way to reach you: \_\_\_\_\_

### NDE is moving its Las Vegas Office

The sad news is - the Franciscan Friars are leaving Las Vegas. The friars are consolidating their operations in the Western US and Fr. Mike and Br. David are leaving Las Vegas.

The glad news is - NDE will be joining other Franciscan Ministries (Pace e Bene and Poverello House) with office space at the old friary on Bartlett Ave. Francis House will host the offices for all three groups and will still maintain some guest space for those coming through town.

NDE plans to use some of the guest space on a regular basis as we host the immersion experiences. Students coming for the immersion experience will be able to work with the nearby Catholic Worker and with Poverello House in their ministries to the homeless and make connections with the poverty of West Las Vegas and the expenditures on nuclear issues at the Test Site and Yucca Mountain.

While we will miss the direct Franciscan presence in Las Vegas, we are grateful for these three special works that will continue in their spirit and for the ability to use the property left behind.

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**UPCOMING EVENTS**  
**SEE PAGE 4**

Nevada Desert Experience is a non-profit group, with 501 c 3 status, so your donations are tax-deductable. If you need a receipt for your tax records, please don't hesitate to ask! We are happy to provide receipts upon request for your donations.

**Nevada Desert Experience**  
**P.O. Box 46645**  
**Las Vegas NV 89114**

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**A View from Vegas**

*by*  
*Paul Colbert*  
*NDE Program Director*

Several years ago, I attended a faith-based conference looking at environmental issues. One of the speakers talked of the three A's that people of faith needed to explore for dealing with environmental issues. They were – Addiction, Apocalypse, and Ascetics – a strange combination to be sure.

I am not sure that we really want to deal with any of those three items. Of course, denial is one of the first aspects of addiction – being unwilling or unable to admit that we are addicted. As a culture, we are still addicted to the bomb. We depend on the whole military-industrial-academic complex to keep our economy alive, so many are willing to keep their denial alive. “The test site creates jobs and stimulates the economy and provides academic studies, so it can't be a bad thing or addictive, can it?” Or, “nuclear power is not the same thing as the bomb, it is not causing

any problems!” - ignoring or neglecting the whole issue of “ultimate” disposal of nuclear wastes and byproducts. No, we keep on getting deeper and deeper into our addictions.

I am afraid that those of us who are making the connections and opposing the nuclear industry still have a ways to go in our recovery. Our friends in 12-step recovery programs speak of going to any lengths to break addiction. If you used to travel 50 miles to join your friends and get a drink, you should be willing to go 50 miles to get to a meeting to be with those trying to recover from addiction. The peace movement in the US has a lot of support, but we all need to encourage one another to take the next steps in voicing our opposition to nuclearism.

*see View - continued on page 5*