



## Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting of Friends

# NEWSLETTER

JUNE 2011

IN MEMORIAM:

## Anthony Prete, 1937-2011

Our member Tony Prete died on Wednesday, May 25 after a long and debilitating illness. Since joining CPMM in the 1990s, Tony had taught Bible classes at our meeting and elsewhere, while earning a master's in Old Testament Studies from LaSalle University. He was a contributing editor for *The Other Side*, a radical Christian magazine published in Philadelphia, until its demise. See page 3 for an excerpt from his 2006 plenary address at Pacific Yearly Meeting. – Ed.



*Tony Prete (left) and David Testa at the spring  
"Insider's Guide to the Bible" class  
Sketch by Narcissa Weatherbee, Woodbury MM*

Drawing by Narcissa Weatherbee, late member of Woodbury MM, during one of Tony's Bible classes. Courtesy of the Salem Quarter newsletter.

It has been a life altering experience to be with Tony frequently across the last four years as his body deteriorated, out of his control, while his mind stayed so sharp. Tony wrestled with life; for the longest time he wrestled with death. His wife, Trish, and other family members were so relieved that, when Tony's breathing slowed and then stopped on Wednesday, he died peacefully. Naomi was in the Prete home when Tony died and said, after I'd arrived half an hour or so later, that Tony was surrounded by a golden glow, an aura. I think he went, finally, gently into the Light. — Sandy Rea

Tony Prete led a Bible study series on the Psalms years ago for CPMM members, not too long after he had made the transition from Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Camden to CPMM. I was part of the group that met in the Martin Luther King Room; Karen Winner, Janet Lowe, O, plus others also participated. A word we kept coming back to in the Psalms we studied was the Hebrew *chesed* or steadfast.

The word appears again in my favorite Bible verse, Isaiah 54:10. "For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you." [RSV] Tony knew that was my favorite verse and sent me a bookmark about five or ten years ago with the verse printed on it. Then when Stephanie and I got to Sacred Heart Church in Camden on Friday for the funeral mass for Tony, there was the verse again, printed on the prayer card next to the guest register. It was one of Tony's favorite passages too.

(Page 1 and 3 extracted here.)

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# Sabbath -- Much More Than Just “Rest”

by Tony Prete

Following is the conclusion of the plenary address by Tony Prete at the annual sessions of Pacific Yearly Meeting, August 2006. The full address is online at: <http://www.pacificyearlymeeting.org/2006/yearly-meeting-docs/sabbath-much-more-than-just-rest-by-tony-prete-at-pym-2006/>

AS PEOPLE IN EXILE, we do not have the luxury of dabbling in this trend, or that new idea, or some clever thought that catches our fancy. As people in exile we need to ask ourselves what it is that we really cherish. So I ask:

Is it time to question whether we have settled for the cheap grace of developing our personal potential over the cry of a the marginalized world of undeveloped human potential? (For on the text says “love your neighbor as yourself,” not “hold off loving your neighbor until you love yourself.”)

Is it time to ask ourselves whether we have created God in our own image, a soft teddy bear God who would never condemn in the face of evil, would never hold accountable those who flaunt the ways of righteousness, would never not mete out justice and even the punishment of allowing us to experience the consequences of what we do or don't do?

Is it a time to ask ourselves whether dissecting every nook and cranny of our Quaker structures and processes is worth more than the scrutinizing the boot print that Empire leaves on the earth?

Perhaps, dear Friends, we can incorporate into our rich Quaker ways—worship, fellowship, committee and business meetings—some of those questions. Is our personal journey distracting us from humanity's forced march? Is ours a laissez-faire God who comforts the afflicted but it will not afflict the comfortable? Is our Quaker microscope keeping the wider world out of focus?

I ask these questions because I fear we live in a nation that is under the judgment of God. I believe this nation has flaunted and abused and puffed up its place as one of God's creatures. It has ripped the land from its original inhabitants and then wreaked ruin on them; it has enslaved a whole people, first in the chains of forced labor, then in the chains of forced poverty; it has gorged itself on the world's resources and left others to scramble for the scraps from its table, even as they choke on its belching and flatulence; it has brushed aside the convictions of other world cultures, and demanded—frequently at gunpoint—that they kneel before the idols of capitalism and democracy, that they adopt a way of life that increasingly marginalizes those who lack wealth and influence, even as it barricades and protects those who have. It markets a culture that elbows aside the weak, the elderly, and disabled with its emphasis on strength and beauty and power, a culture where rights triumph over duties and where privilege trumps poverty.

For these many reasons, I fear that this country is under the judgment of God. And I believe that each of us, in our discernments and in our activities, will have to answer the old question — voiced first by exploited coal miners, then by civil rights workers, and pacifists, and conscientious objectors, and modern-day prophets— “Which side are you on?” This is not a question to be answered with songs and letters and protests and proclamations. It is a question that is answered by what Friends believe, how they live their lives, how much each of us is part of the covenant and how much we are part of the Empire.

The Sabbath rest is a time of re-mem-bering, a time of renewal, a time of repositioning. It recalls the ancient Hebrew word *shuv*, to turn, to be transformed—not just what you turn your back on, but what you turn your face toward.