

When I was a child and asked my mother certain types of questions, she would tell me to go look it up. When I hesitated or protested with a “Can’t you just tell me?” her invariable response was, “Where’s your intellectual curiosity?”

Reading through the early drafts of Gerry Vanderhaar’s memoirs, one realizes that intellectual curiosity is another of the characteristics fundamental to Gerry’s way of being in the world. I doubt intellectual curiosity was encouraged by the parochial schools he attended growing up in Louisville, KY in the 1940s or by the training he received prior to being ordained as a Dominican priest in the Communist-fearing 1950s. Yet, while assigned to a clerical position at the Vatican, Gerry took advantage of his vacation time to travel in Europe. While staying with a fellow Dominican in Germany, he wanted to visit Salzburg, the city of his parents’ favorite musician, Mozart. Because of a lack of the proper papers, he couldn’t take the borrowed car there, so he checked the map for another nearby city and decided to go to Dachau.

At the time, the World War II concentration camp was bustling with activity. The women hanging their wash on clotheslines were refugees from Hungary who were being housed there. Gerry joined a group to tour the concentration camp. Walking to the parking lot after the tour, numbed by the travesty of the holocaust, Gerry heard himself saying, “Never again”. A second later came the awareness of the imminent threat of thermonuclear war. Not long afterward, Gerry added another vow to those he had taken in the Dominican order: he would work for peace.

Fortuitously, he was in Rome at the beginning of the Second Vatican Council and, because he was working at the Vatican and a member of the Dominicans, he was privy to inside information about the conference. But it was a fellow member of his Order who, during a train ride in the Netherlands, explained to him a different vision of salvation, the vision that the Second Vatican Council would embrace, at least on paper. Called “World Theology” at the time, and explored in books such as Harvey Cox’s *Secular City*, the revised view was that salvation was no longer solely dependent on strict adherence to the rules of the Church – exact practice of prescribed rites and rituals – but on the way we treat others. Gerry describes it as a change from the vertical model to the horizontal. If God was judging us, it was in terms of how we treated, how we loved, our fellow humans.

He was transferred from the Vatican back to the United States. At the airport before his flight back, he saw a magazine, *Soviet Life*. Gingerly, he thumbed through the magazine. After all, it was forbidden fruit: full-color photographs of the “godless, atheistic Communists” showing them to be like any other people in the world – farmers, family members, school children, merchants, workers in industry. While part of him dismissed it as propaganda, another part of him – the intellectual curiosity that had lead him to pick up the magazine – was opening to the humanity of all peoples. For Gerry, the purchase of the magazine was probably like committing a sin, but purchase it he did. That magazine was another fissure in a wall of insularity. His mind, his heart, and his vision continued to open out.

When the lay faculty at St John’s College in New York City staged a sit-in, he supported them and told a New York Times reporting covering the story that he did. That resulted in a guest slot on a talk radio show. One of the callers asked him why he was doing this when there was a war going on. Gerry took the question to heart. Why indeed? Had he not vowed to work for

peace? He joined other clergy protesting the war in Vietnam. And with that, Gerry began publicly fulfilling his vow to work for peace. With the work came a deepening understanding of nonviolence, of the necessity of social and economic justice.

By the time I invited him to speak to the local chapter of N.O.W. on Conflict Resolution in the early 1980s, he was teaching at Christian Brothers College, had helped found Pax Christi USA, Pax Christi Memphis, and was assisting in the creation of the Mid-South Peace and Justice Center. Surprised to be invited, and undaunted by the organization's media-propagated man-hating, bra-burning, vitriolic image, Gerry made his presentation humorously, earnestly, concisely, charmingly. I think he found us to be pretty ordinary women, and a few men, concerned about the same things he was concerned with.

During the last two years, I served with him on the Pax Christi Planning Team where his insight and organizational skill shone particularly brightly. All four team members would come to the meetings with long disparate lists. Like Michelangelo sculpting, Gerry would chisel away all that wasn't the human form. Gently, with good humor. And he always laughed at my jokes.

At the luncheon following the mass for Gerry and in our remembrances at the Memphis Pax Christi meeting in August, Clare Tiffany remembered him when he was a child running and playing in Louisville. Tom Kirchberg told of long conversations about Carl Jung's concepts. We listened to music Gerry had chosen: selections from Verdi, Mozart, Dylan, Seeger. He chose *To Dream the Impossible Dream* to represent the theme of his life.

Underlying all is the partnership of equals Janice and Gerry created in their 35 years together as they became the faces of the peace movement in Memphis. And isn't that what Gerry brought? Isn't that what he was saying and doing, writing and practicing – that we are all part of what he came to call The Mystery, that we are all threads in the fabric of being. We are equal partners in the creation of peace. Peace is where we *all* can live and flourish.

-Linda Raiteri