

Gerry Vanderhaar was a friend, a mentor, and a model for me. When I first met Gerry in 1996, I was a candidate for a teaching position at Christian Brothers University. Gerry was retiring, and this created the opening for which I was being considered. Gerry graciously welcomed me to CBU when I came to interview, and when I was hired, he welcomed me to Memphis. Gerry introduced me to the small but lively group of activists in Memphis who engage in the struggle for peace and justice. Gerry built relationships between people through many introductions and mutual encouragement.

Gerry embodied in his life the peacemaking that he advocated. He was consistently calm, careful in his thought and words, critical when needed, and compassionate at all times. He was adept at seeing the other person's point of view and at mediating conflict in a manner that led to just resolution. When serving with Gerry on the Board of the Mid-South Peace and Justice Center, I saw how Gerry could organize and direct a meeting in a way that was efficient without being authoritarian. He encouraged robust and respectful discussion and he led through questions and comments designed to enlighten shared deliberation. He was always organized, able to identify the key issues and the alternatives available.

To be in Gerry's presence was to enjoy his warmth, smile, and gentle humor. Gerry embodied graciousness. Whether I met him at a meeting or at his home or at a demonstration, his welcome always made me and any others who gathered feel welcome. On the many cold mornings of vigil against the war in Iraq, Gerry carefully greeted each person who came, and dutifully collected signatures to send a daily letter to elected officials. To stand next to Gerry was to enjoy conversation with him that could range over theology, politics, sports, and how to peacefully respond to drivers who were less than enthusiastic about our position against the war.

Gerry was a person of integrity. His words and actions were of one piece. His was always honest, a truth-teller without self-righteousness. His writings clearly came from his personal experiences and struggles with practicing the peacemaking of Jesus. His style was true to who he was: accessible, humane, intelligent, faithful.

Gerry was a person of resurrection. His life expressed hope in the power of love and justice. Gerry knew that the power of sin and death to do violence and to claim control of the world could not last. Gerry knew from a deep faith that humanity could and would overcome those powers. He knew and based his life upon the faith that history was headed toward a new heaven and a new earth, where every tear would be wiped away and there would be no more death or mourning. I pray that Gerry now enjoys the peace that is promised for God's faithful followers, and that I might continue to share that faith and to live up to what I have learned from Gerry about how to live.

-Pete Gathje