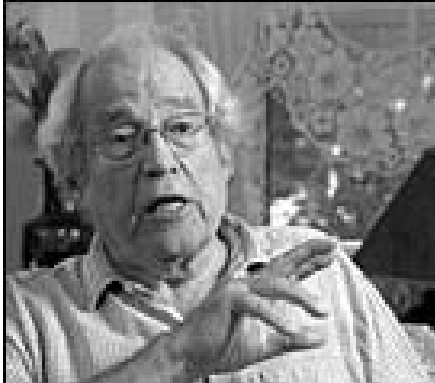


# RPEC NEWS

The newsletter of the Richmond Peace Education Center

September/October 2005



William Sloane Coffin

## *Profiles in Peacemaking*

### **William Sloane Coffin: Social Justice and the Heart of the Gospel**

Judy Bennett

A *Publishers Weekly* review of *A Holy Impatience*, a biography of William Sloane Coffin, notes that “from the mid-20th century until now, Coffin has served as the prophetic conscience of a nation divided by race, war and economic injustice.”<sup>1</sup> Considered by many to be one of the most influential religious figures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, by many others as a rabble-rousing radical, Coffin may be the last great representative of a vanishing breed - - the liberal Protestant minister preaching to the nation’s faith and conscience. Past eighty and diagnosed with chronic heart failure after a series of strokes, he now lives in Strafford, Vermont where he responded to medical advice with characteristic grit by writing two more books, *Credo* and *Letters to a Young Doubter*.

Coffin was born in New York City on June 1, 1924 into a family of wealth and privilege, but also of social conscience. They were, he said, people “who have had remarkable insight as to what was wrong with the society from which they had derived considerable financial profit.”<sup>2</sup> He sees his service in World War II, which he saw as a just cause at the time, as formative. He rejected pacifism as “irrelevant righteousness”, contending that “those who want to keep their hands clean end up with no hands.”<sup>3</sup> By the end of the war, however, he recalls being “very chastened by all the violence . . . well aware of the problems that seemed absolutely overwhelming at the end of the war,” because “solutions cause problems, and the solution of war caused all kinds of problems.”<sup>4</sup>

The post-war years saw his graduation from Yale University in 1949, then a year at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, then withdrawal when the Korean War broke out, renewing his interest in fighting communism and leading him into service in the CIA as liaison officer with the Russian army in Europe. It was here he concluded that “Stalin was the only person around who occasionally could make Hitler look like a Boy Scout.”<sup>5</sup> He acknowledges that while his assessment of the Soviet Union as evil was correct, he was “a little bit too optimistic about my own country.”<sup>6</sup> This country saw itself as vastly superior to the Soviets but given the number of US invasions after World War II, beginning with overthrowing Mossadegh in Iran in 1953, then the elected government in Guatemala, “we outdid them in imperialism.”<sup>7</sup>

Back in seminary by 1953, he completed his studies at Yale Divinity

*(Continued on page 3)*

#### **In this issue**

**Profiles in Peacemaking**

**Reflections from the Board Chair**

**William Sloane Coffin: Too Dangerous for Anything but Truth**

**Happenings at the Center**

**Conflict Resolution Training**

**Breath of Peace Movie & Speaker**

**RPEC Auction Set for November 11**

**Two New Ways to Support RPEC**

**UKROPS Expanded Golden Gift Program**

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## Reflections from the Board Chair

Wendy Northup

We have a lot happening at the Peace Center right now. It has been a busy summer for me as Board Chair, but it is also a time of great promise.

The most exciting news is that we have hired a new executive director who starts on October 5. Adria Scharf came most recently from being the editor of *Dollars and Sense*, a 30-year old nationally recognized magazine devoted to in-depth analysis of the U.S. and global political economy from a progressive perspective. She has been involved in a number of advocacy efforts in both Seattle and Boston. She worked at a small research and consulting company that trained worker-owned firms in democratic organizational skills. In 1993 she interned and then worked at the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, D.C. Over the years, she has been active in housing and poverty, economic development, race, and environmental issues, as well as peace work. Her resume and experiences are extensive, but even more impressive are her energy and her commitment to the things that the Peace Center has stood for now for more than 25 years.



Adria Scharf

And we couldn't have picked a better time for new energy and commitment. We are looking at a continuing, disastrous war in Iraq, a proposed new nuclear policy that officially allows a preemptive strike in case of discovery of WMD (and we know how much we can trust our government to have accurate information and to share it openly!), and the remnants of Hurricane Katrina which has left so many homeless and destitute, many of them poor people of color. While there are a lot of things happening in the Richmond region, the Peace Center needs to be more integrally involved in all of these things and needs to be seen taking a leadership role.

As we get ready for our next Annual Dinner and our second annual Peacemaker of the Year Award, we are pulling together themes that have been important to us for all these years. We will have Steve Hodges with us—the inspiration and founder of the Richmond Peace Education Center. And we give the award to Congressman Bobby Scott, who has worked tirelessly for many years to bring to the disenfranchised the rights they deserve and who has steadfastly opposed our adventures in Iraq.

This is the time for each of you, our members, to renew your energy and commitment to making peace a reality in our community and in our world. Get involved. Become a volunteer. This newsletter is full of opportunities for each of you. Welcome Adria by getting to know her and reacquainting yourself with the mission and programs of the Peace center. Since we were children, fall has been a time of new beginnings, with new crayons and notebooks. Now as adults, let's make this fall also a time of new beginnings. Read through this newsletter and find a way to get active in the things that really matter.

# Profiles in Peacemaking

(Continued from page 1)

School in 1956. From 1958 to 1975 he served as Chaplain of Yale University, which became his base for the anti-war and civil rights activism for which he is known today. At Yale in the early sixties he assumed a prominent role in the Freedom Rides challenging segregation laws in the South. Jailed many times, his first conviction was overturned by the Supreme Court. In 1962 he joined SANE (The Committee for a SANE Nuclear Policy), later becoming its leader.

While Coffin himself was an inspiring speaker, he also opened his pulpit to others who espoused the same causes, among them Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela. The Vietnam years often found him speaking from the same anti-war platform as his friend and fellow activist, Howard Zinn. By 1967, preaching consistently on civil disobedience, supporting young men who turned in their draft cards to protest the Vietnam War, Coffin urged Yale to declare its chapel a sanctuary for war resisters, or a possible site for a large demonstration; the university refused. In January, 1968 he was indicted along with several others by a Federal grand jury for conspiracy to counsel, aid and abet draft resistance; they were convicted but the verdict was overturned on appeal in 1970. At the close of 1975 Coffin left Yale; by 1977 he became senior minister at New York's prestigious Riverside Church, broadening his influence to a national audience.

He soon found opportunity to meet with world leaders and to travel abroad, including to Iran and Nicaragua, to protest US policies. By the early 1980s he was recognized as a leader in the anti-nuclear arms movement; in 1987 he left Riverside Church to work full time on disarmament activism, soon as the president of SANE/FREEZE (now Peace Action), at the time the largest peace and justice organization in the country. He retired as president emeritus in the early 1990s but continued to teach and lecture across this country and abroad.

Coffin is also an accomplished pianist, although he no longer plays in public. Of music he says, "In times of utter desolation, God alone has comforted me more; and when the world seems bent on madness, its music as much as its literature reassures me of its sanity."<sup>8</sup> He was immortalized by fellow Yale classmate Garry Trudeau as "the Rev. Sloan" in the *Doonesbury* comic strip. Asked once by an interviewer if he had entered the ministry because it was a door to political involvement, he replied that he was compelled by scripture, "but social justice is at the heart of the Gospel."<sup>9</sup> The world, he often said, "is too dangerous for anything but truth and too small for anything but love."<sup>10</sup>

1. *Publishers Weekly*, quoted in "Editorial Reviews," accessed online 9/13/05.

2. *An American Patriot: William Sloane Coffin*, transcript of filmed

interview, <<http://www.cdi.org/adm/Transcripts/821/>> accessed online 9/13/05

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Buchanan, John M., "Holy impatience: often a critic of the church, Bill Coffin still takes it seriously," *The Christian Century*, 2004, [http://www.findarticles.com/particles/mi\\_m1058is\\_13\\_121/ai\\_n6159247](http://www.findarticles.com/particles/mi_m1058is_13_121/ai_n6159247), accessed online 9/13/05

9. *ibid*

10. *ibid*

## For Further Reading and Viewing:

Goldstein, Warren, *A Holy Impatience*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2004

Coffin, William Sloane, *Credo*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 2004

Coffin, William Sloane, *The Heart Is A Little to the Left: Essays on Public Morality*, University Press of New England, Dartmouth College, Dartmouth, NH, 1999

Coffin, William Sloane, *A Passion for the Possible: A Message to U.S. Churches*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Westminster John Knox Press, 1993

Coffin, William Sloane, *Letters to a Young Doubter*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 2005

Coffin, William Sloane, *An American Prophet* (video)

## William Sloane Coffin: Too Dangerous for Anything but Truth

Judy Bennett

William Sloane Coffin was a teller of truth as he saw it, a man who understood power and knew how to wield it in the cause of justice and peace. As Coffin was completing theological studies SANE (The Committee for a SANE Nuclear Policy) was founded by Coretta Scott King, Albert Schweitzer, Dr. Benjamin Spock and others alarmed by the nuclear arms race and US policies on nuclear weapons. The new organization placed a full-page ad in *The New York Times* in 1957, evoking a nationwide response and enlarging the membership to 25,000.

In the early days volunteer members of SANE worked for nuclear disarmament through public education programs and political advocacy. Coffin joined the movement in 1962, as SANE was in the midst of organizing opposition to the Vietnam War. SANE endorsed Eugene McCarthy as Democratic presidential candidate in 1968, and led efforts to secure passage of the War Powers Resolution. Later, in the 1980s, it opposed US military intervention in El Salvador and pressured for the end of military aid to Nicaraguan Contras.

In parallel fashion the Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign began in 1979 with the release of a document, "The Call to Halt the Nuclear Arms Race," by the Institute for Defense and Disarmament Studies in Brookline, Massachusetts. Two years later US peace groups and arms control experts held a national conference to approve a bilateral nuclear weapons freeze strategy. Some 350 persons representing thirty states agreed to work together to lobby for a comprehensive freeze between the US and the Soviet Union. Dozens of major national religious, civic, and political organizations were early endorsers of "the Freeze" and continued to sponsor educational activities and actively promote the movement.

The Freeze opened a national of-

fice in St. Louis in December, 1981, with long-time peace activist Randy Kehler as its national coordinator; the office quickly became the information clearinghouse for thousands of local Freeze groups across the country. A national "Disarmament Week" was inaugurated, with local groups sponsoring a range of activities, and a national "Call-In" was held on October 26, 1981, urging President Reagan to propose a mutual freeze to Soviet leadership. A bipartisan Nuclear Freeze Political Action Committee formed in April, 1982, endorsed candidates, more than fifty percent of whom were elected. In the Fall of 1982 "in the closest equivalent to a national referendum in the history of American democracy," thirty percent of the electorate voted on a freeze proposal on local ballots across the country, and the proposal won by a 60-40 percent margin.<sup>1</sup>

In 1987 the Freeze and SANE merged to form SANE/Freeze and became one of the main US opponents of the 1991 Gulf War. By 1993, under Coffin's leadership, the merged group again changed its name, this time becoming Peace Action. Twenty years ago, when the Freeze and SANE were separate organizations, historian Lawrence S. Wittner reminds us, Ronald Reagan had been elected President and "the hawks were riding high."<sup>2</sup> They were committed to a vast military buildup and new weapons programs, and they spurned nuclear arms control and disarmament treaties. President Reagan opposed every nuclear arms control measure negotiated by his predecessors of both parties, the Republican Senate was in solid support, and the public was "whipped into a nationalist froth by the Iranian hostage crisis" and supported new military priorities.<sup>3</sup> Yet, says Wittner, "the hawkish consensus quickly unraveled"<sup>4</sup> in the face of the mass movements represented by SANE, the Freeze, Physicians for Social Re-

sponsibility, and others. Together these groups "had a substantial impact upon mainstream politics," especially the Democratic Party,<sup>5</sup> even as comparable movements emerged around the world. By October, 1983 Reagan was backing off earlier stands; in a major policy address in January, 1984 he proposed an end to the US-Soviet military standoff. A year later Mikhail Gorbachev, deeply influenced by the peace and disarmament movement, unilaterally halted Soviet nuclear testing and took other steps to end the confrontation.

If this dramatic reversal could be produced under the Reagan administration, says Wittner, present-day activists should take heart. William Sloane Coffin and his colleagues, through the mass movements they nurtured and led, offer a model worthy of our study. At the moment, Wittner contends, "the Bush administration's militaristic approach to world affairs seems triumphant," between preemptive wars against "evil" nations, scrapping arms control treaties, and developing new nuclear weapons, the "would-be warriors are having things pretty much their way,"<sup>6</sup> but the witness of Peace Action and its predecessor organizations prove that the present situation can be reversed.

1. "National Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign", *Western Historical Manuscript Collection*, University of Missouri-St. Louis, <<http://www.ratical.org/co-globalize/whm0454.html>>, accessed online 9/18/05

2. Wittner, Lawrence S., "What Activists Can Learn from the Nuclear Freeze Movement," <<http://hnn.us/articles/1636.html>>, accessed online 9/18/05

3.. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

# Happenings at the Center

## OPPORTUNITY TO BECOME A CONFLICT RESOLUTION VOLUNTEER

### Training Being Offered on October 29, 2005 Free to Those Who Will Help

As you can see from the enclosed Annual Report, one of the top priorities for the Peace Center this year is to spread our expertise in conflict resolution. This is an important part of our programming and is integral to our underlying philosophy of nonviolence. It provides people of all ages and situations with an opportunity to learn practical ways to resolve the conflicts that we inevitably have with one another.

In the past, the Peace Center has had a number of trained conflict resolution trainers who offered the services of the Peace Center throughout the community. Many of our trainings were offered on a voluntary basis to those places that needed it and could not afford to pay. When we were offered paying jobs, those who had volunteered were given first opportunity to be paid to do these trainings. For a number of reasons, we no longer have an active groups of conflict resolution trainers and we are intent to rebuild this program.

So on Saturday, October 29, 2005, from 10:00 AM until 4:30 PM we will offer a one-day introductory training course for those who might be interested in becoming conflict resolution trainers. This training is free (though it will be limited to 20 people) and all we ask of you is that

you seriously consider becoming a trainer volunteer with RPEC. There will be a fee of \$20 to cover the costs of lunch, snacks and handouts. This will need to be sent in in advance. It will be held at the Berryman Center at 400 W. 32<sup>nd</sup> Street. On October 29, we will explain what this commitment entails in terms of future trainings and volunteerism. **Please call the Peace Center at 232-1002 to reserve your space in this training.** Though we are offering it at no charge, we do ask you to make the commitment seriously, since we are only able to train 20 people at this time.

### Breath of Peace Movie & Speaker

RPEC and Richmond Friends Meeting are co-sponsoring a showing of the movie Tau Te Mauri--Breath of Peace followed by speaker Ruth Greenaway. The showing is scheduled for 7:00 PM, November 9 at Friends Meeting .

Tau Te Mauri-- Breath of Peace is a 72 minute film on the history of the peace movement in 20<sup>th</sup> Century New Zealand. It received the first Sonja Davies Peace Award, presented in November 2004 by New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clarke and Governor General Dame Sylvia Cartwright.

Although a small country, New Zealand has a disproportionate number of international peacemakers. This film tells some of their stories. Among those whose stories you will hear are a Maori leader of

the Indigenous People's Peace Initiative, a conscientious objector imprisoned throughout WWII; a leader of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in the 1950's; the man who organized a flotilla of small boats to blockade the path of a nuclear aircraft carrier; a crew member of the Rainbow Warrior; and a Ploughshares activist who helped damage two B52 bombers.

The stories are woven together with stunning footage of whales, dolphins, albatross, and white herons to show the Maori understanding of wholeness – the oneness – of all living things. The entire web of nature is part of peacemaking in a troubled world. The sea birds fly, and the whales and dolphins swim, as people march together, sail their small boats across the bow of a giant American warship, ride bicycles to deliver press releases in the middle of the night, and sail into forbidden waters to stop French nuclear testing.

Following the showing, film interviewer Ruth Greenaway will be available to answer questions. Be sure to join us November 8 for this terrific opportunity to learn more about the experience of being a peacemaker!

### RPEC Auction Set for November 11

Last year, a group of RPEC members decided that our major fundraiser, the Annual Dinner and Auction, needed some new energy. We initiated the Annual Peace-

*(Continued on page 6)*

# Happenings at the Center

*(Continued from page 5)*

maker of the Year Award, given to Bishop Sullivan, sought out a professional auctioneer, Karen Murphy, engaged a caterer to provide a buffet meal, and brought in Jim Bennett with his jazz quartet to provide musical entertainment. It was a great evening and a major financial success!

This year, as we celebrate 25 years of peacemaking in the Richmond area, we are planning another great evening.

**Friday, November 11, 6:30 PM  
St. Paul's Episcopal Church, 8<sup>th</sup>  
& Grace**

As you know, Congressman Bobby Scott is this year's honoree as Peacemaker of the Year, and we look forward to his remarks. Steve Hodges, RPEC's founding Director, will join us. And you will have an opportunity to meet our new Executive Director, Adria Scharf. Jim Bennett and his quartet will be back, as will Karen Murphy – auctioneer extraordinaire! We will continue the buffet format for making “heavy hors d'ouvres” and beverages available throughout the evening, but will be sure that there is plenty of food for everyone.

We are well into the process of collecting items for the auction and you can see the list of items on our website. Once again we will have several vacation weeks and home cooked meals for your bidding enjoyment. This year we hope to post a list of winners of silent auction items soon after that part of the auction is closed (computer technol-

ogy willing!).

And we will try our best to handle the checkout process smoothly and efficiently.

Ticket prices will remain the same as last year. In advance (call the office before Nov 7) the charge is \$20 for adults, \$12 for youth 6-12, and kids under 5 are free. All tickets at the door will be \$25. There is parking in St. Paul's garage (entrance on 8<sup>th</sup>) at a cost of \$5 per car. As an incentive to get your payment in early, we will provide free parking passes for those whose checks get to the center by November 7 (one pass per family).

So join us as we celebrate our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary and bring your friends. It will be a great party.

## Time is as Important as Money

As important as your financial contributions are to keeping RPEC running, we also need your time. Our most recent fundraising appeal (mailed shortly before this newsletter) included a member volunteer survey. Please take the time to consider how you can support the work of RPEC with your time, and send this in with your contribution. Whether you are interested in socializing with members while stuffing envelopes; getting out in the community and providing training; gaining experience in website maintenance; planning and organizing program-, membership- or fundraising events, WE NEED YOU! Even if you can't contribute financially right now, let us know how you can

volunteer by sending in the form. **(Right now, we especially need some technically savvy volunteers who can help us with our website. If you can help, please call Ruth Anne Young at 230-1626.)**

## TWO NEW WAYS TO SUPPORT RPEC

### Commonwealth of Vir- ginia Campaign and other Workplace Giving Cam- paigns

Are you an employee of the State of Virginia? A Federal Employee? Does your office participate in any other workplace giving program like the United Way Campaign. If so, you have a terrific opportunity to help the Peace Center. The Commonwealth of Virginia Campaign (for State Employees) will be held from October 1 – November 30. RPEC has been approved as a participating charity in this program. If you designate RPEC as the recipient of your pledge, RPEC will receive 100% of your donation. In addition, we will receive an extra donation of approximately 8% due to “matching,” or undesignated dollars.

If your employer has a workplace giving program, whether it's the CVC, the Combined Federal Campaign, the United Way Campaign, or some other program, please be sure to designate RPEC as your chosen charity.

*(Continued on page 8)*

# CALENDAR

## Meetings of Local Groups

|                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| <b>Every Sunday</b>       | <b>Food Not Bombs Richmond-Meal Sharing</b> , 4:00 P.M. in Monroe Park. Hotline # 359-4880 for details  |
| <b>Every 3rd Wed.</b>     | <b>Amnesty International</b> , University of Richmond campus. Contact Ray Hilliard at 289-8289  |
| <b>Every 3rd Friday</b>   | <b>Sufi Dancing: Dances of Universal Peace</b> , 7:30-9:30 PM except Oct. Round House, Byrd Park. 353-4901  |
| <b>Every Thursday</b>     | <b>Richmond Organization for Sexual Minority Youth (ROSMY)</b> , 7:00-9:00 PM. Call support line: 353-2077 for more information; 353-1699 for the administrative line.  |
| <b>Every 3rd Saturday</b> | <b>Equality Virginia</b> , 12:00 noon at the office. A political advocacy group working towards equal rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender citizens of Virginia. Open to the public. Contact number is 643-4816. |
| <b>Every 4th Saturday</b> | <b>Pax Christi Peace Community</b> - Call Paula Powdermaker for details - 355-7395  |
| <b>Every 3rd Sunday</b>   | <b>The Richmond, Virginia Buddhist Peace Fellowship</b> - holds a meditation vigil for peace in Monroe Park at 1:00 PM.   |
| <b>Every 2nd Saturday</b> | <b>Walk for Peace</b> - 9:00 AM - 10:00 AM. Meet at the Boulevard entrance of the Virginia Museum. Wear black.  |
| <b>Every Friday</b>       | <b>Protest the War on Iraq</b> - Noon til 1:00 PM at 10th and Main Streets.   |
| <b>Every 3rd Thursday</b> | <b>Richmond Chapter VADP</b> - 7:00 PM at St. Marks Episcopal Church.   |
| <b>Every Sunday</b>       | <b>Ginter Park Presbyterian Church peace forum</b> - "What the Bible Says About Peace" - 9:30 AM  |

## UPCOMING EVENTS



James Gordon

## Concert to Benefit the Richmond Peace Education Center

James Gordon, Canadian folksinger, songwriter and political satirist, will be playing a show on Thursday, October 6, at Poe's Pub, 2706 E. Main St. with sets expected to begin at 8 and 9:30 PM. Gordon will be performing with fiddler Marion Linton. Come on out and enjoy the food, the humor and the music while you support RPEC.

|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| <b>October 2 &amp; 3</b> | <b>Aubry Brown Memorial lectures by Jonathan Barton</b> , "The Kingdom of God vs, The Human Empires", both at 7 pm at Ginter Park Presbyterian Church   |
| <b>October 24</b>        | <b>"Take Back Your Time Day"</b> - Information at <a href="http://www.timeday.org">www.timeday.org</a>  |
| <b>November 3</b>        | <b>In the Stillness, Bread and Joy, A Retreat for Women</b> - Kathleen Kenney & Judith Fagalde Bennett, Retreat Leaders - 5:30-9 PM at St. Mary's Catholic Church - 9505 Gayton Road, Richmond - For information: Kathleen Kenney, 804-227-3691 or Judy Bennett, 804-358-8306 |
| <b>November 9</b>        | <b>A showing of the movie <u>Tau Te Mauri-- Breath of Peace</u> followed by speaker Ruth Greenaway</b> - 7:00 PM at Friends Meeting . Call 232-1002 for information.  |
| <b>November 11</b>       | <b>RPEC Auction</b> - 6:30 PM, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, 8 <sup>th</sup> & Grace. Call 232-1002 for info.  |
| <b>December 1</b>        | <b>World's AIDS Day</b>   |
| <b>December 2</b>        | <b>25th anniversary of the murder of the 4 North American Church Women in El Salvador</b>   |

## Happenings at the Center

(Continued from page 6)



### **UKROPS Expanded Golden Gift Program**

Are you a UKROPS shopper? If so, here's another easy way to donate to RPEC. Beginning October 1, UKROPS customers can register for the expanded year-round Golden Gift program powered by Benevolink. Look for details at

Ukrops to register and designate RPEC as your recipient group.

Once you've registered, whenever you use your UVC card, RPEC will receive a donation for any of the Ukrop's branded products that you buy. These include: Full Circle natural and organic products, World Classics, Food Club, Top Crest, Top Care, and Paws, as well as any Ukrop's branded items from their bakery, kitchen, deli, meat & seafood, or produce departments.

Just sign-up once, and you don't have to think about it again. The donations will simply come to us as rewards for the shopping choices you were already making! What could be easier?

### **Did you Know? – RPEC has a Listserve!**

Did you know that RPEC has a listserv? This is an e-mail service that supplements our newsletter. Sometimes events come up after the newsletter deadline, but before the next issue. Sometimes there are current events items that might be of interest, but we don't have room to run them in the newsletter. And other times we need to send out a call for volunteers on short notice. If you don't want to miss out on all the news you can use for local, national or international peacemaking, be sure to sign-up. To sign up, just send an e-mail to [rpec-subscribe@lists.riseup.net](mailto:rpec-subscribe@lists.riseup.net)



### **Richmond Peace Education Center**

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