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# Global Peace Services USA

*...an idea whose time has come*

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## Promoting Alternatives to War

*We asked Paul Knitter and John Halpin to discuss the significance of the September 11 terrorist attack for Global Peace Services USA. Professor Knitter is a theologian who teaches in the Peace Studies program at Xavier University. John Halpin, who graduated from Xavier University last year, was a student in the Peace Studies program.*

**John:** I think one of the challenges now in both the United States and around the world, given the recent events, is that many people, in all parts of the world, are calling for violence. To sell the idea of a peace service as an effective means of resolving conflicts will be harder now than ever. People in the United States are saying, "How do we respond other than with violence when something of such horrific magnitude occurs?" People will want to know how we, as a peace service, would react to the current situation, and we must provide them with answers.

**Paul:** It certainly is more difficult than ever, but maybe this situation gives GPS a hearing that we would not have received before. People in the United States are more afraid than ever, seeing that we are vulnerable. This is a terrorism not based in any one nation, and perhaps people are starting to ask themselves if we can really protect ourselves by responding to violence with violence.

**John:** I also think people need to start asking themselves these questions, but a lot of people, instead of developing thoughtful responses, want to lash out. How do you think we try to reach these people and get them to think more deeply?

**Paul:** I would want to suggest two approaches. One is more pragmatic or rational, to say to people "Responding with violence which may kill innocent civilians is going to cause

more anger toward the United States and a greater sense of helplessness among the Muslim poor." Instead of violence, GPS must urge people to see the value of listening. We must tell those who embraced violence that we want to listen and understand the reasons for their feelings towards us and the pain that caused them to embrace this violence.

This would be the practical approach. But Global Peace Services is also based on spiritual and religious values. I think, in this context, those members of Global Peace Services who have a more explicit religious background can appeal to the American people as what most American people claim to be, and that is Christians. If we believe in a savior who calls upon us to love our enemy, this means we will never hate the perpetrators of this violence. While we will pursue police actions against those who have done deeds we consider immoral, we also want to listen to them, as to what they would suggest would be necessary so they would no longer consider themselves our enemies.

**John:** I do think it's important for Global Peace Services to work with religious communities and urge them to be a voice for nonviolence in the present time. I haven't seen as many religious leaders calling for truly nonviolent responses as I would like to have seen. How do you think people can influence

their religious leaders to take a more vocal stance for nonviolence?

**Paul:** I think an activity for GPS might be to provide parishes or congregations with some "expert" help...people who have studied the message of nonviolence. They could help small groups discuss what Christianity's response to the current situation should be, and perhaps later these groups could become action groups, going to their pastor and asking to address the larger congregation or publish something in their parish bulletin about the results of their discussions.

**John:** I like this idea because Global Peace Services wants to make systemic change in the world, and I think we can, but ultimately it has to be a grassroots movement that starts on a local level, such as in a parish. Only when we have a large number of people that have had the change of heart within themselves to embrace nonviolence, will we have the power to make systemic change. I also think at this time it's important for people to have a safe forum to explore these issues because a lot of people might be afraid to speak out against violence.

**Paul:** I think that one of the biggest challenges to us now is to remember how important religion or spirituality is to the whole program. To be a faithful member of GPS now will require us to be more counter-cultural than ever. It is really hard to speak a message of resistant active nonviolence in a nation swept up by a patriotism or nationalism that believes violence is redemptive. To speak against this is going to call for a real inner strength that very often comes from what we may call God or Spirit.

But beyond this personal spirituality, Global Peace Service really has to study the war and peace-making capabilities of religion. When people say this has nothing to do with religion, I don't think that's correct. It does have to do with religions. Some say this is the exploitation of

religion, and it is, but the question GPS members must ask is, "Why is religion so exploitable?"

**John:** Why is it?

**Paul:** I think, and this gets touchy, that while we see violence perpetrated in the name of all religions, there is a greater amount perpetrated in the name of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. All of these, in some form, have had the notion that they have the only truth or the best version of the truth that God wants to deliver to humanity. This opens the door to people who want to exploit religion and to say, "This is the place where we apply our superior truth." This allows both sides to say, "You are evil and we must fight you in the name of our God."

**John:** I think other factors play into the degree to which religion can be exploited, one of those being poverty. When people lead lives of desperation, they are more likely to cling to their religion as absolute truth because it is something solid to hold onto.

**Paul:** If the poverty and injustice weren't there, I don't think it would be possible to exploit religion to perpetrate such violence. Poverty is the kindling; religion is the match.

**John:** So then another big challenge for GPS is to address the poverty that exists in our world.

**Paul:** Our training programs must certainly include an analysis of our global economic and political systems. But I don't think it will do a lot of good to work with governments, because I think governments have been disempowered by the global markets. I think we have to find other NGO's and form networks with which we can cooperate. It's going to come from the level of the people, from civil society.

**John:** I agree. We have to organize on the level of the people. If you organize people and educate them, there will be power in numbers.

We have to give people the tools to be economically and socially empowered, particularly those who are the most disempowered now. If people are empowered, they won't be as susceptible to messages that use religion to justify violence.

**Paul:** While there is a need to look at how religion is used to promote violence, we must also study how all religions can be even more powerful instruments of peace. If you look at the religious traditions of the world, there are messages of nonviolence in all of them - that human beings can live together in love and solve problems in a compassionate way. In my work

with the Interreligious Peace Council, a group of religious leaders who visit places of conflict, I've seen that even in areas of violence there are communities of people who really act out of their religious convictions of nonviolence. GPS needs to be aware of and to be able to connect with these groups because they are some of the most committed, courageous, and convinced people. They remind us that amid all the political, social, and environmental work that we must do, we must be aware of religion, not only in its ability to justify violence, but in its even greater power to create peace."

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## Global Peace Services Holds First General Membership Meeting

### *Together We Are Making a Difference*

Global Peace Services held its first annual general membership meeting on Saturday, October 27, 2001, at Church of the Saviour in Washington DC. President John Eriksson welcomed members from near and far to this long-awaited event. As the participants introduced themselves, the rich diversity of their lives and careers and their unified resolve to contribute to a more peaceful world through active nonviolence were evident.

John Eriksson opened the meeting with a "State of GPS" message. He spoke of our core mission -- to contribute to the creation of professional peace services by promoting education and skills training for women and men based on a philosophy of active nonviolence-- and the gains that have been made toward this goal with our 2001-2002 program plan.

- ✍ In fostering peace service programs in U.S. colleges and universities, John visited Xavier University in Cincinnati last spring to support ongoing efforts to establish a peace services major. GPS Board member Harry Yeide has initiated a dialogue on peace service with George Washington University in Washington, DC, where he is a faculty member.
- ✍ In fostering peace services education events in different parts of the country, Peace Service gatherings were held in Fairfax, VA, in March and in Cincinnati in April.
- ✍ In maintaining linkages with organizations in the U.S. and abroad that have goals complementary to ours, GPS is initiating an Electronic Communications Project with 15 such groups to generate reflection and discussion on topics of mutual interest and concern.

## **Department of Peace Legislation, H.R. 2459**

### ***Small Group Discussions***

On July 11, 2001, Representative Dennis Kucinich (OH) introduced legislation to establish a cabinet-level department in the executive branch of the Federal Government dedicated to peacemaking and the study of conditions that are conducive to both domestic and international peace. GPS played a significant part leading up to this announcement. To contribute to the understanding of the role a Department of Peace would have, the participants at the general meeting were given questions for consideration in small group settings. The Department of Peace legislation, its impact on the nation in the light of September 11th, and its significance for GPS engendered the following ideas and suggestions.

GPS should provide information about H.R. 2459 to key constituencies, to family and colleagues throughout the country, and to the public through Letters to the Editor. A Department of Peace would have required the President to consult with the Secretary of Peace as well as with other cabinet members about the best response to the September 11 terrorist attacks. Alternative approaches to forming a military coalition could have been brought before the President and possibly have produced a different U.S. response. For example, world political and religious leaders might have been called upon to address this horrendous crime against humanity with the Taliban leadership. The Taliban's cooperation in bringing the terrorist leaders to justice could have been sought. The need for planning a long-range response to the very real underlying causes of the terrorist attacks of September 11 could have been recognized and acknowledged.

A Department of Peace would promote peace education at every level of American society, working to develop and train human potential for peace service. Grants to develop peace education curricula would be available. The need to "educate the educators" in regard to peace and conflict resolution would be emphasized. The importance of securing the involvement of regional and local expertise to support the development of conflict prevention and resolution initiatives would be recognized. GPS expertise would be valuable in training in post-conflict reconstruction, as well as in support of country and regional conflict prevention and resolution using local expertise. It would work to begin to transform the military-industrial complex to a peace-industrial complex.

GPS must call upon the United States to work with the United Nations. GPS must provide information to the public through the media about the value of peace-building versus war-making. GPS should cooperate and develop links with other agencies and organizations that call for promoting programs that protect the environment and provide jobs during the current downturn in the economy. GPS should possibly plan joint activities with other groups and consider making linkages with socially minded corporations.

## **GPS Holds First General Membership Election**

### ***Expansion of GPS Board to 9***

The election results for three new members to the GPS Board were scheduled to be announced at the General Membership Meeting on October 27. However, the closing of postal facilities in the Washington, DC area due to the anthrax scare caused a delay in mail delivery and therefore in the counting of the ballots. We are

pleased to announce the new board members at this time. They are John Halpin, Jean Martensen, and Aura Martinez.

John Halpin graduated in May 2001 from Xavier University in Cincinnati with a major in social work and a minor in peace studies. During his college years he was an active volunteer with a low-income housing cooperative and with a city coalition for the homeless. He now works for the National Homeless Civil Rights Organizing Project. John says that the riots in Cincinnati this past year have made him even more aware of the need for a professional peace service.

Jean Martensen has recently retired and returned to the Washington area from Chicago. She has a doctorate in Social Psychology/Women's Studies from the Union Graduate School. Her professional experience includes working as the Director for Peace Education and later as the Director for Studies and Leadership Development in the Commission for Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Jean has traveled widely on peacemaking delegations, including the UN Conference on Women in Beijing and study trips to the Soviet Union, Ireland, and El Salvador.

Aura Martinez is in her fourth year as the Director of Religious Education in St. Mark parish in Chicago where she works with a diverse community in a mostly Hispanic neighborhood. She has an M.A. in Theology from McCormick Theological Seminary and a M.A. in Religious Education from Loyola University, Chicago. Aura brings cultural diversity and pastoral experience to the GPS Board.

We heartily welcome these new board members, all of whom we first met as participants in Peace Power 2000. Their enthusiasm and individual talents will contribute much to the efforts and achievement of our hard-working board.

## Very Special Moments

### *A Bright Shining Star*

The General Membership meeting was a fitting occasion to pay tribute to a founding father of GPS, Bill Price. Bill has dedicated his life to active nonviolence and the pursuit of peace. In her moving tribute to this fine man, Mary Evelyn Jegen SND traced his role in the history of GPS from its conception to its actual birth. As a board member, Bill has brought an immense wealth of experience and knowledge to our organization. He has been especially engaged in the religious-military dialogue. Bill was joined by his wife Betty, his daughter, and his grandson as he witnessed the gratitude and admiration expressed by the GPS membership.

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### ***A Life in Peace Service***

The evening's program concluded with an eloquent presentation by our guest speaker, Mary Lord. Mary currently serves as the Coordinator of the No More Victims Campaign of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) and is overseeing their response to September 11th and the war in Afghanistan. Mary spoke with a quiet passion about her life in peace service, the truths she has come to know, and the questions that continue to challenge her.

Mary's address inspired her listeners to enter into conversation with her at the conclusion of her remarks. We ended the evening with a renewed hope and determination that each of us must and can contribute to a culture of peace in our daily lives.

We thank all those who prepared for and/or attended this first annual general membership meeting of Global Peace Services. It was a watershed event, one that we can rejoice in. We look forward to a productive year ahead as we proceed with our 2001-2002 program plan. And, we look forward to next fall and the second annual GPS general membership meeting!

## **What We Can't Do Alone, We Can Do Together**

Here are three suggestions for simple ways busy people can contribute to GPS. Become involved by:

- Making a financial contribution to GPS USA;
- Asking for more brochures to distribute; and
- Visiting our web site at [www.GlobalPeaceServices.org](http://www.GlobalPeaceServices.org)

### ***Global Peace Services USA Newsletter***

Editors: Clara Doyle and Mary Evelyn Jegen

The newsletter of Global Peace Services USA is published quarterly. GPS-USA is incorporated in the District of Columbia and is tax-exempt. Current Board members are: Clara Doyle, John Eriksson, John Halpin, Mary Evelyn Jegen, Jean Martensen, Aura Martinez, Mindy Reiser, Tricia Sullivan, and Harry Yeide. We welcome contributions and comments. To contact us:

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