
Global Peace Services USA

...an idea whose time has come

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Elders for Peace: GPS Goes to San Antonio

Global Peace Services is planning an educational event this fall designed for both local participants and others from around the country. Personnel from the San Antonio Peace Center as well as others from GPS will provide a rich and diverse program. As the title suggests, we see elders as persons with special gifts to bring to peace service; we note that AARP is open to persons fifty years and over. We also welcome persons who are interested in working with older adults; in short, we welcome persons of all ages.

The conference will have two phases with common threads running through both. While we hope that most participants can remain for both phases, they may register for one only. Educational approaches will include lectures, discussions, scenario building, case studies, videos, and field trips. Singing, poetry and stimulating mealtime conversations with other participants will create other learning opportunities.

In Phase One we will develop the notion of elder as understood in various settings. One setting is the religious one, and we will consider definitions of elders in different religious contexts. Given our concern for the situation in the Middle East as well as the stimulus of September 11, 2001, we plan to focus on the gifts of Judaism, Christianity and Islam in our meditations on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.

We will also spend time reflecting on many facets of peace and the human search to achieve peace from the innermost life of the individual to worldwide organizations. We will

also work on understanding the elements and sequencing of events in the development and resolution of conflicts. There will be opportunity to test these insights and skills on conflicts close to the lives of participants as well as case studies drawn from elsewhere, e.g. Rwanda, Sri Lanka, and El Salvador.

In Phase Two participants will build on these insights and experiences. A panel will reflect on the effect of September 11 and our national response as individuals and as persons in interfaith relationships. This panel will be composed of local members from Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions. We anticipate that others besides the panelists will have rich local interfaith experiences to share that reveal the many ways people are seeking to understand their neighbors and contribute to peaceful communities in our increasingly pluralistic society.

A second focus of Phase Two will be on mass media as educator and social conditioner. Through the use of music, film clips and Internet examples, participants will examine the ways in which our mass media continuously expose us to violence and condition us to accept violent behavior as normal in human life.

Participants will also explore the Alamo as an example of the kind of symbol that celebrates violence in a parochial fashion. With the insightful assistance of those whose perspectives are not ordinarily considered, the group will be reminded of the almost mythical portrayal of the Alamo in the history of the

United States. In the process, participants will sharpen critical skills for visits to comparable sites in the future.

Phase Two will conclude with examples of the way nonviolence is expressed in personal and collective ways. Participants will review opportunities to serve as peacemakers through

various forms of service; they will be encouraged at various points throughout the gathering to offer suggestions about what can be done to diminish, and, where possible, eliminate violence both where they live and in the wider world. Thus, we hope that there will emerge a strong sense of Elder Power and a felt need to express it in the cause of nonviolence.

Elders for Peace

Where: La Casa Retreat Center, San Antonio, Texas.

When: 5:30 p.m. October 25 to 1 p.m. October 30, 2002.

Cost: \$250 for program, room, and board.

Participants will cover all travel expenses to and from San Antonio. Rooms may be available for additional days for those who wish to extend their stay. Limited scholarship assistance based on need may be available.

For further information or to receive a registration form contact registrar Clara Doyle, (703) 356-8023 at any time or Jean Martensen, program coordinator, (301) 871-0503 until June 12 and after September 5. See also www.globalpeaceservices.org for the registration form.

Electronic Colloquium

For the past year, GPS has been putting in place an electronic colloquium. This promising project is coordinated by Molly Wallace, a volunteer who has given many hours to this new endeavor. Molly recently graduated from Mount Holyoke College with a degree in Peace and Conflict Studies. Currently she is on the staff of the Institute for International Mediation and Conflict Resolution in Washington, DC.

Molly first researched more than 50 peace organizations as possible participants in the colloquium. Of these, 11 were chosen as the first invitees. They are located in Belgium, England, Nepal, Sweden, South Africa, and the United States. Included in the group is a Jewish Peace Fellowship and a Muslim Peace Fellowship.

We envision the colloquium as akin to a graduate seminar, and therefore have decided to keep it small. It is designed not for the sharing of information someone already has, but for sharing research and reflection on topics that are central to peacemaking efforts. Our hope is that the colloquium will provide participants with material to share with their own membership, always with the permission of the author.

Our next step will be the circulation of an essay to the members of the colloquium, with questions for discussion based on each participant's study. We are consulting with members of GPS and others in the preparation of this important essay. Meanwhile, those who have joined the project on our maiden voyage of discovery have been getting acquainted with each other.

An Action of Hope in a Time of War

The violence ripping through the world since September 11, 2001 has been devastating. And people of goodwill have been struggling since then with how to respond to the cycles of tragedy and revenge. Global Peace Services, as a movement committed to nonviolence, believes that the depth of the violence requires an equally enormous counterbalance of faith and hope. So we offer the following suggestion for action.

A proposal by U.S. Representative Dennis Kucinich of Ohio to establish a Cabinet-level Department of Peace is a far-reaching act to begin building a culture of peace in our country. Therefore, we urge you to contact your own Congressperson and invite him/her to become a

co-sponsor of House Resolution 2459. The bill currently has 43 co-sponsors. Go to www.house.gov/kucinich/action/peace.htm to read more about the "To Establish a Department of Peace" bill.

We have included a postcard to send to your U.S. Representative. Simply sign your name and address on the card and fill in your congressperson's name on the front of the card, add a 23-cent stamp and mail it.

We firmly believe that a groundswell of support can serve as a reminder to Congress that the will of the people is to build peace through nonviolence.

Workbook on Compassionate Listening

Compassionate Listening: An Exploratory Sourcebook about Conflict Transformation is a workbook by Gene Hoffman, Cynthia Monroe, and Leah Green. Drawing on years of their experience, the authors provide descriptions of compassionate listening projects in the Middle East and among Alaskans. These accounts are followed by lesson plans for a course in compassionate listening.

There is an introductory session dealing with an evocative approach to teaching and learning, followed by seven sessions on specific aspects and skills of compassionate listening. Included is an explanation of Thich Nhat Hanh's approach to the art of listening, exercises for class and personal use, and suggestions for further reading.

There is a session each on compassion, hatred, denial, forgiveness, and reconciliation. The method uses quotations from those who

have thought deeply about the topic and grappled with it in their own lives, followed by questions for reflection and sharing. Members of Global Peace Services who participated in Gene Hoffman's classes on compassionate listening during our Peace Power 2000 program will find here a manual that they can use to refresh and develop what they experienced there.

The book is published on the web site of The Institute for Cooperative Communication Skills. Though copyrighted, permission is granted for reproduction and distribution of single or multiple copies of the sourcebook in whole or in part by individuals or organizations, provided the copyright notice is included and the copied material is not sold. The sourcebook is available on-line in PDF format free of charge at www.coopcomm.org/listening. There is a wealth of material in this practical work that can be easily reproduced in whole or in part.

Peace Service Project in Chicago

Board member Aura Martinez recently organized and conducted a meeting of some 30 members of the Chicago parish where she works. The group identified more than 30 kinds of injustice and violence in their neighborhood. From this initial meeting a small number committed themselves to social analysis of their situation. They have chosen a focus issue and are planning ways of working on the problem. Careful documentation of this project will help develop ways of peace service in the inner city in informal educational settings.

A Parting Thought

If we could read the secret history of our enemies,
We should find in each person's life
Sorrow and suffering enough
To disarm all hostilities.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Global Peace Services USA

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