

Global Peace Services USA

...an idea whose time has come

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Summer 1999

Compassionate Listening: Core of Peace Service

An Interview with Gene Knudsen-Hoffman by Sr. Mary Evelyn Jegen

Gene Knudsen-Hoffman of Santa Barbara, California, conducted a session on Compassionate Listening at our March Convocation in Washington, DC. The session was built around a video, *Children of Abraham*.



ME: Your work in Compassionate Listening has taken you to Alaska twice this year. Can you tell us about that?

GKH: In April I presented Compassionate Listening to a large group in Alaska. The invitation came from Judith Kolokoff, director of the American Friends Service Committee for the Pacific Northwest. I was invited to return in July to speak at the Friends (Quakers) Yearly Meeting. This is the annual gathering of Friends from the area. They are working for reconciliation between a group of indigenous people and professional and recreational hunters and fishers.

ME: What is involved in the Compassionate Listening training you offered them?

GKH: It is largely about developing constructive attitudes towards the others with whom there is a disagreement or conflict. The steps, which are applicable on the

individual level as well as in international training, are these four: 1) Listen to each side; 2) Tell each side about the suffering and grievances of the other side; 3) Facilitate each side's telling the other of their own pain and grievances in the situation; 4) If appropriate, move to win-win negotiation with the help of a mediator.

ME: I notice that you use the word "suffering" of those in the conflict? Why not talk simply about a problem or conflict?

GKH: My experience over the years convinces me that in every serious situation there is deep suffering on both sides; both sides are wounded. "Compassion" means "to suffer with". The point of compassionate listening is to enable that suffering to find expression in a healing context.

Conflict is about much more than solving a problem. Dealing well with conflict often involves healing of deep hurts on both sides. It is a mistake to think first in terms of who is right and who is wrong; first, we need to listen sensitively to the pain carried by all parties to a conflict. We have to listen for the grievances, how people hurt; we have to open ourselves to listen to their anger. Some terrorists, for example, think that they will never get a hearing, that their grievances will not be

addressed; so they turn to violence.

ME: What kind of training do you see as needed for those who want to grow in skills of Compassionate Listening?

GKH: Training should involve role playing with feedback from observers. The four steps I mentioned earlier can be practiced through role play.

Most basic is training in attitude. Here, practice in reflection on our own behavior is important. Do I see something of the divine in each person? Can I listen with a "spiritual ear" for that depth dimension in the other person as well as in myself? Can I hear some truth on both sides of a dispute or conflict? Do I respect the right of persons to differ as they are trying to work through conflict?

ME: The video, *Children of Abraham* is dedicated to you because of your work in Compassionate Listening. Tell us about that.

GKH: The video tells the journey of 22 Jewish Americans to Israel and the Palestinian territories as part of the Compassionate Listening project. The video was produced by Leah Green, director of Mid-East Citizen Diplomacy, a nonprofit organization dedicated to Jewish-Palestinian reconciliation.

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Global Peace Services USA invites anyone concerned with active peacemaking

to participate in PEACE POWER: TRAINING PEACEMAKERS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY, to be held at Centro Maria in Washington, DC, June 4-30, 2000. This series of week-long workshops has three primary goals: 1) to provide deeper reflection and skill training for those who are or who plan to be engaged in peacemaking activities; 2) to serve as a pilot project in developing programs eventually to be offered in American colleges and universities relevant to a wide variety of professional preparations; and 3) to join in the worldwide momentum for peace through non-violence. The workshop themes will be:

- June 4-9: Introduction to the Basics of Peace Service
- June 11-16: Interpersonal Skills and Development and Team Building
- June 18-23: Understanding and Working with Conflict
- June 25-30: Societal Dimensions of Nonviolence and Social Reconstruction

*Watch for details
in future editions
of this newsletter!
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There are many ways to multiply GPS efforts, consider:

- Participating in "Peace Power" and passing the word*
- Making a financial contribution to GPS-USA*
- Praying for worldwide openness to the ideas and actions of GPS*
- Becoming a Partner on one of the Working Groups*
- Sending us names and addresses of potential new members*
- Inviting your organization to become a GPS Associate or Partner*
- Sending us your ideas for the growth of GPS-USA*
- Distributing the GPS brochure or newsletters at your local community organization.*

All of our contact information is on page 3.

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Join us June 4-30, 2000!
See details above

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every village, no matter how small. Thus, these communities constitute a truly remarkable communications network through which to build a culture of peace.

Not surprisingly, there were differences of opinion that emerged. Most prominently, we were exposed to very different analyses of the Kosovo situation. There was also a protest that the preoccupation with Kosovo and lack of attention to current and more deadly situations in Africa represented the continuing Eurocentrism of the world peace movement. A more massive cultural critique was frequently raised by representatives of "indigenous peoples" campaigning for the elimination of the current millennium-oriented calendar -- for them a powerful symbol of colonialism and western hegemony -- and its replacement by a "more natural" 13-month lunar calendar. Vatican action to rescind a set of 500-year-old papal proclamations was sought for similar reasons. And there were also other vigorously expressed differences.

But my dominant memory is nevertheless one of an enormous outpouring of conviction and energy, all focused on enlarging the areas of peace in our world and in our souls. Often, this was expressed through the arts, all of which were represented. To sample only the musical presentations, they ranged from Judy Collins singing "Amazing Grace" to a marvelous African song, dance and rhythm group to a chamber orchestra composed of "Musicians for Peace" drawn from major symphony orchestras. I hope that some of you readers were present, and wish that all of you could have been. ■

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ME: I know from viewing the video and using it with university students how deeply moving and instructive *Children of Abraham* is. It brings home to viewers what Compassionate Listening is all about, and how fundamentally it can change attitudes and perceptions. Is the video being well received?

GKH: Leah has told me that they receive orders daily. Some people from Stanford University are going back to Israel and the Palestinian territories for further filming. They hope to make a longer documentary that will air on public television.

ME: You have also done work in Compassionate Listening with Vietnam War Veterans. How did that come about?

GKH: Thich Nhat Hanh is a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, peacemaker, poet and teacher. He was exiled from Vietnam during the war because of his advocacy of nonviolence. He is one of my teachers of reconciliation and he asked me if I would organize a retreat for a group of Vietnam War veterans. He gave the retreat in Santa Barbara and presented me an example of Compassionate Listening. The hope was these veterans who had severe psychological wounds from their participation in the war could come back to society as creative people.

During the retreat we talked about suffering we had experienced personally. One veteran had killed 12 children in a village, and he had not left his room since, until he came to the retreat. Transforming healing took place during that retreat. I still keep up a correspondence with two of the veterans.

ME: How do you see the relationship between Compassionate Listening and Global Peace Services USA?

GKH: The bedrock of peace service is compassion. Listening is a most fundamental practice of compassion. All further peace service flows from that. ■

Children of Abraham (34 minutes) can be ordered for \$29.95 from: Mid-East Citizen Diplomacy, P.O. Box 17, Indianola, WA 98342 Ph.: (360)297-2280 Web: www.mideastdiplomacy.org

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: John Eriksson, Mary Evelyn Jegen, Bill Price, Mindy Reiser, Tricia Sullivan and Harry Yeide. We welcome contributions and comments. To contact us:

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Hague Appeal for Peace and GPS: Shared Visions

by Harry Yeide

Many of you will have already read many articles on the 1999 version of the Hague Appeal for Peace (HAP). It seems as if every newsletter I receive from peace-oriented organizations has a report on the May 1999 meeting in Holland. If you have been reading them, you may have been surprised at the variety in the reports. Every event will be experienced somewhat differently by different participants. But in this case, there are structural reasons as well. While a few of the meetings were called "plenary sessions," there were in fact no occasions in which all 10,000 participants were in the same room; the majority "attended" the plenary sessions via TV hookup in a gigantic exhibition hall. Furthermore, there were over 400 sessions on an unbelievable variety of themes over the several days of the gathering; even those who never played hooky could sample only a small portion from this enormous menu.

One reason for the large numbers of both participants and programs was the fact that some 700 organizations participated in the planning of the program, and over 300 of them set up information booths at the meeting. Indeed, a major emphasis of several speeches was the contrast between the first Hague Appeal for Peace -- issued by diplomatic representatives of nation-state governments -- and the 1999 version -- proclaimed by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from all over the world.

The planning was, of course, chiefly done by a smaller central committee so that

some of these organizations clearly had a stronger voice than others. However, there were frequent reminders that the 1999 Appeal was an agenda in process, and all groups are invited to help introduce new ideas and/or necessary revisions in continuing discussions. (The plans for such discussions seemed less developed than the commitment to them; I met with a USA group to think about this, but we really did not get beyond a list-serve.)

Many of the featured themes of the meeting are relevant to GPS's future. Indeed, the critical mass of such persons, groups, and themes confirms our notion that we are working with "an idea whose time has come." Here is the ocean on which our boat floats. The central document distributed at the meeting is titled: *The Hague Agenda for Peace and Justice for the 21st Century*. It contains 50 action imperatives. Most GPS-USA members will find their heads going up and down in affirmation as they read through the list for most items. One of them sounds as if it was submitted by GPS-USA. The 31st item reads:

Promote the Training of Civilian Peace Professionals. The demand for civilian peacebuilders, be they election monitors, human rights workers or general observers, is growing fast; the pool from which such special trained civilians can be drawn is not. There is a strong need to further promote the specialized training of civilian women and men in the techniques of conflict resolution, mediation, negotiation, etc., and to promote their deployment in conflict areas in order to carry out peacebuilding

tasks. The long-term aim should be the development of an international body of specially trained "civilian peace professionals" that can be called upon to intervene in conflict areas at short notice.

While we might have used language that includes more than international issues and emphasizes service more strongly, it is clear that we have allies among those who put together this Agenda.

While GPS-USA has no religious test for membership, it is clear that an interfaith vision of how the religions contribute to peace animates much of our discussion and activity. The 11th Agenda item of the Hague Appeal reads:

Enlist World Religions in Transforming the Culture of Violence into a Culture of Peace and Justice. Religions have been a cause of war but also have the potential to enable the development of a culture of peace. They must be engaged to implement paths of peace.

While relatively few of the formal sessions dealt with this Agenda item, I attended several sessions in which the activities of the World Conference on Religion and Peace were displayed. They are entering a new phase in their history and are involved in convening inter-religious groups organized by region rather than along nation-state lines. They reported some interesting success stories in Africa, and some promising beginnings in the Balkans. This may be a group with which we should enlarge our contact. In many parts of the world, the religious communities are the only ones that gather frequently and in

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