

Everyone Can Do Something

A report on Ecumenical Advocacy Days for Global Peace with Justice

By Christina Schoenwetter, First Congregational UCC, Madison

Imagine a culture of peace. No violence. Loving and treating others as brother and sister. In today's society and in our world, I find imagining a culture of peace to be extremely challenging. Random, senseless shootings on highways and in neighborhoods and businesses; home invasions; human rights violations; violence directed toward those different from ourselves; domestic, sexual, and gender-based crimes; foreign wars; racial profiling investigations; police brutality; manipulating and pitting one another against each other--the list goes on. When do we hear about peace-building initiatives? Is a culture of peace obtainable?

This past March, when looking online at the National UCC website for a resource, I stumbled across a scholarship opportunity to attend **Ecumenical Advocacy Days for Global Peace with Justice in Washington D.C.** The focus of the event caught my interest: Resisting Violence, Building Peace. I decided to apply for the scholarship, and much to my surprise, was a recipient. Nearly 1,000 people of different faiths from as far away as Alaska and Sri Lanka gathered to learn, reflect, develop advocacy skills, network, learn about other denominations, worship in different styles, and participate in liturgical art design.

My days started early in the morning and went well into the evening hours. My head hit the pillow shortly before midnight each day. Learning about all of the injustices in today's world was exhausting. Networking and planning grassroots peace initiatives was equally exhausting.

The opening keynote speaker, Rev. John Dear, was captivating and inspirational. He leads by example through his actions, sermons, writings, demonstrations, and speeches. He has spent over three decades fighting for peace and justice. Listening to his experiences struck my core and ignited a fire in my soul. Through his many encounters, Archbishop Desmond Tutu claims Rev. John Dear to be the full embodiment of a peacemaker. I'd have to agree.

Workshop breakout sessions covered a wide variety of topics. To name a few: legislative and corporate attacks on workers and wages; community safety, racial profiling, and immigrants' rights; restorative justice; foreign relations; drones; peace force in South Sudan; military and economic competition in Asia and the Pacific; building peace from the ground up in Columbia; reducing gun violence in Mexico; discussing violence in Syria; Bristol Bay and the proposed Pebble Mine in Alaska; and climate conflict. The plenary panels focused on justice and peace, gun violence and the politic, transforming violence into the path of peace, restorative justice practices, and taking a Christian message to Capitol Hill.

The last day of Ecumenical Advocacy Days was a Lobby Day on Capitol Hill. I met with Senator Ron Johnson's legal counsel, an aide from Senator Tammy Baldwin's office, and Tom Petri, my Congressman. The focus of each meeting was gun violence and reducing outsized military spending and imagining a culture of peace, all of which I dug deeply into the days prior through workshops, plenaries, and my own personal reflection.

I am grateful for the opportunity and experience I had in attending Ecumenical Advocacy Days for Global Peace with Justice because of the United Church of Christ. I wept in Washington D.C., as Jesus wept in Jerusalem. I was active in Washington D.C., and will continue to be, as Jesus was active. I was reminded that no one can do everything, but everyone can do something. I encourage you to "do something" in the realm of nonviolence and peace and justice. Pick something you are passionate about and do that. Through all of this, it is clear that nonviolence is a vision of the heart that sees everyone as sister and brother. **Imagine a culture of peace.** We can never, ever give up the struggle for justice and peace.

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