

The blessedness of striving for peace

From The Peace Commission of the Diocese of Bethlehem

[April 2006] Holy Week has just passed, calling us to ponder the miracle of divine peace and forgiveness that has overcome the violence in all of us.

At this time we should note that an organization that flourished a few years ago in the Diocese of Bethlehem, our diocesan Peace Commission, has been revived. The commission was re-established by vote of delegates from all our parishes at the annual diocesan convention last October.

Heeding Jesus' promise that striving for peace makes one blessed, and recalling his life of nonviolent, compassionate peacemaking, in the coming months the members of this newly formed commission will be planning and implementing a number of activities – both educational and public-advocacy projects – for promoting peaceful resolution of conflict in our personal lives, in the life of this diocese, and in our lives as citizens of the United States.

Our first effort will be to find ways to effectively promote a current movement, now gaining momentum across the nation, to establish a U.S. Department of Peace and Nonviolence, a cabinet-level office parallel to the departments of State, Education, Defense, etc.

Congressman Dennis Kucinich of Ohio has introduced House Bill 3760 and Senator Mark Dayton of Minnesota, Senate Bill S1756, both of which would accomplish this. The department's primary function will be to research, articulate and facilitate non-violent solutions to domestic and international conflicts. Part of the mission would be "to encourage the development of initiatives from local communities, religious groups and non-governmental organizations."

This proposed legislation is not the toothless, negligible document one

Inform yourself more thoroughly about the proposed legislation to establish a cabinet-level U.S. Department of Peace and Nonviolence. Go to www.thepeacealliance.org/main.htm.

might expect. Backed by over 60 Congresspersons (prompted by a host of tenacious ordinary citizen-lobbyists), the bill requires funding for the department at a level equal to two percent of the budget of the Defense Department – a sizable sum, considering only the billions so far sunk in the current war.

Perhaps most striking is the provision under this department for an Interagency Committee on Peace and Nonviolence, charged with coordinating the work of other federal departments (including, apparently, Defense!) with the purposes of this Department of Peace and Nonviolence.

Journalist Walter Cronkite, who is backing the proposal, has rightly noted the opportunity it presents for initiating a profound change in our society: "It's not a matter of simply getting another department of government. You're speaking of an entire philosophical revolution."

Our purpose here is to share our sense of the possibilities awakened across our land for so positive a change in our national life – a change that could, with sufficient backing from citizens, actually occur.

We also want to request your prayers for this project and to ask that, when invited, you seriously consider working with us in our efforts to take concrete action (however small and incomplete) to follow the great Peacemaker.

A first step you can take is to inform yourself more thoroughly about the proposed legislation. This can be done quickly by going to [\[alliance.org/main.htm\]\(http://www.thepeacealliance.org/main.htm\). There you'll find a copy of the bill, endorsements by such persons as Representative Kucinich, journalist Walter Cronkite, Senator Mark Dayton, and founder of the movement Marianne Williamson.](http://www.thepeace</p></div><div data-bbox=)

That website offers also an update from last year's conference in Washington for Peace Department advocates, a video from the conference, one of a conversation between proponents Cronkite and Kucinich, and names and email addresses of Pennsylvanians engaged in this movement – one as near as Allentown.

The Peace Commission's first request to you, a member of this diocese, is to read about this compelling proposal on the web and to reflect on its potential engagement with your calling as a peacemaker.

Bishop Paul has laid upon us a compelling question: "When will the system stop doing its worst? Will we ever learn to see around us the opportunities to stop the killing? ... Do my day-to-day words and acts bring death or life to this world?"

The Peace Commission seeks your feedback, ideas, and participation in the ministry called peacemaking. Please send your comments, suggestions, and ideas that this article may generate to Tom Lloyd, tbl0@lehigh.edu. (That's tb, letter l and zero.)

Whose names come to mind in this season of peace? Jesus Christ, Desmond Tutu, Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King and... YOU.

In PEACE,

The Diocesan Peace Commission