

At a Cultural Crossroads

The choices we make today define the legacy we leave to future generations. What kind of world do we really want to leave our children and grandchildren? As we attempt to answer that question, we find ourselves at a critical junction marked by the intersection of two distinct cultures. A *culture* is a set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors that characterize a particular society. As we journey into this new century, we Americans are at a cultural crossroads.

On one hand, we can choose to continue along a path marked by:

- Individualism that diminishes the common good;
- unrestrained capitalism that deepens the gap between rich and poor;
- irresponsible economic development that denigrates Earth's eco-systems;
- a racist western worldview that assumes its superiority over others;

This path is driven by the politics of *manifest destiny* and *empire*. But those who can see beyond the illusion of the dominant culture believe that it will bring us into continued conflict among competing interests. This path marks the ***culture of violence***. We go down it with great risk and cost to the social and economic security of our children and grandchildren, the rest of the global community, and indeed, all life on planet Earth. Its final terminus is the tragedy of war and environmental destruction.



But there is another path that can be taken at the crossroads. It is a path that leads to security and well being of our children and grandchildren. It is the path toward an emerging ***culture of peace***.

U.N. Declaration on *Culture of Peace*:

“a set of values, attitudes, modes of behavior and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups and nations.”

This culture of peace is more than simply the rejection of war and violence. It is a proactive way of being and living that values the common good and recognizes that we are dependent on each other for our mutual well being.

It cuts through the fabric of our mindset, our lifestyle, our spirituality, and all our social institutions. Ultimately, it advances a just and equitable global economy that assures the security of all peoples. It is a path blazed with actions that reconfigure all our social relationships and institutions.

Unlike the politics of *empire* that asserts control and dominates, a culture of peace elicits a politics of *community* that opens in expanding circles of participation. That path is marked by:

- compassion and solidarity with all people, especially the poor;
- an appreciation of difference that respects & celebrates diversity;
- respect for all life on this planet Earth, especially human life;
- the equitable distribution of human and material resources;
- advancement of racial justice;
- sustainable economic development that protects ecosystems;



The Web of Community

If we take the path toward a culture of peace, we have certain maps and guideposts that help us navigate through overlapping circles of human relationships. We find that the crossroads cut through our local communities in countless ways. They impact our relationships in family life, in our neighborhoods, and our workplaces.

The path toward a culture of peace forges new meaning about how we understand moral values. Those values are grounded in principles of equity, justice, participation, and social responsibility. They have to do with issues that address healthcare, education, employment and labor practices, housing, transportation, and a host of socio-economic indicators that impact our civil society and define the quality of our lives.

These concerns are common to all of us, regardless of where we live on the planet. The maps that link our communities create a web of relationships that make the global, local -- and the local, global.

“We all live with the objective of being happy; our lives are all different and yet the same.” –Anne Frank

An Invitation To Community Dialogue

Mahatma Gandhi, the great prophet of peace of the former century, tells us that if we are to make a difference in the world, we must become the change we wish to see. Many of us find ourselves walking a path that is increasingly resistant to the dominant culture. Whether motivated by religious faith or a secular moral commitment to the development of humanity and the life of the planet, we find ourselves etching out new ways of living and working that reflect a culture of peace.



Some of us are teachers who strive to model these attitudes and behaviors in the classroom. Some of us are health and human service providers, and these values shape our practice as caregivers. Some of us are farmers, factory workers, retail workers, truck drivers, dock loaders, and countless others, whose labors contribute to the commerce that impacts a culture of peace. We strive to make possible the just and equitable production and distribution of material goods that meet genuine human needs.

Some of us are business leaders who believe that people are more important than profit and practice that in their dealings within the marketplace. Whether we work in the private or public sector, we look for ways to emulate a culture of peace. Some of us may even be elected or appointed community leaders who bring these concerns forward into the political discourse of the public square. And there are those of us who are poets, writers, and artists who portray a culture of peace in our creativity. Though some of us may take to the streets in forms of political advocacy and direct action, our truest engagements with a culture of peace are in the ordinariness of our human relationships among friends and family, and in the context the day-to-day work we perform within our local communities.



Regardless of how one expresses these dispositions, we know that we are not alone. As the Hopi Elders beckon us, we have entered into this “river flowing fast,” trusting in the power of our collective actions in community to keep our head above water. Indeed, we have come to believe that truly, **“we are the one’s we’ve been waiting for.”**

We invite you to join with others in your own community who have entered these waters. In the coming months, the **Florida Coalition for Peace & Justice (FCPJ)** will convene a series of regional gatherings around the state. We begin in the Spring of 2005 with community dialogues and focus groups planned for Gainesville, Jacksonville, Tallahassee, Orlando and Tampa. Similar gatherings will take place in

the Fall for communities in Southwest Florida, Ft. Lauderdale, and Miami. Within each community, we hope to gather a diverse composite of groups and individuals whose work and values emulate dimensions of a culture of peace; Each gathering will take the form of a 3-hour session, open to all interested parties, concluding with a shared meal. There is no registration fee, though donations will be accepted to defray costs of the meal. A smaller sub-set of participants in each community may be invited to participate in related focus groups.

4 Purposes of the Dialogues:

- 1) To engage participants in vibrant conversation about the meaning of a *Culture of Peace*; What would it look like? Would we know it if we saw it?
- 2) To map the organizational infrastructure of the *culture of peace* within a given community;
- 3) To interpret the particular “culture of peace” agenda for a specific community, by identifying issues and constituencies that connect to the particular needs, history and circumstances of that community;
- 4) To introduce an emerging vision for a “peace and justice” education, research, and training center in north central Florida and to invite constructive feedback;



About Our Vision for A Peace and Justice “Center”

In the mid 1990s the FCPJ was given title to 13 acres of land near the town of Graham, in Bradford County in north central Florida. We came to call that land *The Teaching Farm*, and eventually constructed a multi-purpose meeting facility. The land has since served as a location for workshops and events sponsored by the Coalition including peace camps for youth and an annual Fall music festival. The facilities have also been rented to outside groups. In February of 2004, members of Coalition gathered for a visioning retreat to re-focus its future work. Throughout that conversation, no issue evoked as much energy as did the subject of the emerging role of the “Land in Graham.” In subsequent months, we have begun to articulate how the Land might better serve the web of communities across the Florida and the Southeast. We imagine programs and services that provide opportunities for the following:

- **Learning new skills** – a rich variety of educational programs that address content areas relevant to peacemaking and social/environmental justice;
- **Civic Discourse** – opportunities for diverse persons in civil society to dialogue about the social and political issues of the day, in open space free of labels, modeling the dynamics of vibrant participatory democracy;
- **Hospitality** – welcoming independent groups to pursue their own agenda, whether they be church groups, business organizations, health and human service providers, educators, or public service entities, so long as their activity on the land is reflective of our collaborative efforts in promoting a culture of peace grounded in social justice;
- **Personal Growth** – opportunities for nurturing the well-being of mind, body, and soul through individual and group retreats that facilitate intellectual, spiritual and emotional development;

And so we have taken steps to move that vision forward through a planning process that attempts to glean insights of citizens across the state who take part in the community dialogues. By the end of 2006, we hope to have a viable strategic plan to accomplish the following:

Physical Facilities: sleeping accommodations, improved meeting and dining facilities, a peace education research library, improved camping facilities, and enhanced forest trails;

Comprehensive Education Curriculum: training in community organizing, conflict resolution, the theory and practice of nonviolence; programs addressing environmental justice, racial justice, spirituality, health and nutrition; expansion of youth peace camps; promoting best practices; and research in partnership with Florida’s state universities, private colleges, and community colleges;

Enhanced Human Resources: Professional and support staff to serve the operational needs of the “center” on the land, including an expanded network of volunteers and affiliated organizational partnerships;

Development of related industries: These might include agricultural enterprises, a plant nursery, gift shop and bookstore, and art studios;

Legacy: A place to memorialize Floridians whose lives have given us witness to a culture of peace, and to provide an archival depository for the writings and memorabilia of such persons;

Fund Development: Establishment of a *Capital Campaign* to underwrite the costs of developing the Land and the programs that emanate from it;



Our Dream for the Land:

The land feeds the bonds of solidarity that bind us together. The land is a tangible sign of what we hold to be most dear. It both symbolizes and effects a *culture of peace* that it evokes from those who gather there. It has become a sort of spiritual, intellectual and emotional “home” for artisans of a culture of peace.

The Land will be a hub that connects to the web of communities sprouting around the world who share the vision for a culture of peace.

The Land will accommodate an energetic flowing of the comings and goings of people for purposes of education, renewal, celebration, and community building;

The Land will serve a multiplicity of educational and community purposes by advancing a comprehensive and sustainable peace and justice education curriculum that will impact our social institutions;

The land will be a gathering place that serves the needs of local communities, organizations, and individual citizens by supporting, resourcing, and empowering their efforts to promote a culture of peace grounded in social, environmental, and economic justice;

-- Revisioning Retreat, 2/04

Where are you living? What are you doing?
What are your relationships? Are you in the right
relation? ...

It is time to speak your truth.
Create your community. Be good to each other.
And do not look outside yourself for the leader.
This could be a good time!

There is a river flowing now very fast, ...
Know that the river has its destination.
... We must let go of the shore, and push off and
into the river.
Keep your eyes open, your head above the water.
See who is in there with you and Celebrate! ...

Gather yourselves!
Banish the word struggle from your attitude and
your vocabulary.
All that you do now must be done in a sacred
manner, And in celebration. ...

We are the ones we've been waiting for !

-- The Elders, Hopi Nation, Oraibi, Arizona

How Can I Get Involved?

- Participate in one of the community dialogues about a *Culture of Peace* in or near your area;
- Respond to the "Culture of Peace" on-line survey at www.fcpj.org;
- Pass along word about this outreach to friends, family, and colleagues;
- Learn more about the Coalition's strategic planning process at www.fcpj.org;
- Read the report of the Coalition's Feb. 2004 *Revisioning Retreat*, on-line at the Coalition's website;
- Subscribe to the FCPJ newsletter, *Just Peace*;
- Make a tax-deductible contribution to the FCPJ Capital Campaign;

Who We Are

Founded in 1982, The **Florida Coalition for Peace & Justice** is a community of diverse persons who hold a common belief that change is possible and that we can be a channel of that change. We are a community of communities across the State and a living laboratory to explore, model and advance a culture of peace within the larger dominant culture. Our community is diverse, inclusive and multifaceted, as it expands in circles of commitment across geography, race, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, education, profession, and socio-economic status. Working together, our members and affiliate groups promote a more just, human, and nonviolent world through education and action.

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What Kind Of World Will We Leave Our Children And Grandchildren?



*Your Invitation to a
Community Conversation*

Mapping a Culture of Peace In Florida

***A Project of the
Florida Coalition for Peace & Justice***



