

## **A brief history of Culture of Peace Hamilton**

### **The Beginnings: 1999 – 2001**

There was much optimism about world peace in the fall of 1999. In the year 2000, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed it the '*International Year for the Culture of Peace*' and published six pathways of action to suggest how it could be realized. The program was called Manifesto 2000 and worldwide seventy-five million people pledged support.

In Hamilton, a gathering of people from earlier peace groups soon formed the Hamilton Culture of Peace Network, an offshoot of the United Nations Association in Canada (Hamilton branch). It was Millennium Year and for its activities the group was awarded a Millennium medal.



*Taking part in the Gandhi Festival*

Despite its auspicious start, few Western governments provided much publicity for the peace program. Few people in the U.S. or Canada even heard about the Manifesto. In those days, it was generally understood that peace was something that applied to nations, hardly anyone understood that a culture of peace could also be applied locally to towns and cities. After the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks on the New York City World Trade Center, among other sites, and the subsequent American-led invasion of Afghanistan, talk of peace was quickly cut short.

### **The Citizen Protection Project 2001– 2007**

In the frenzy that followed 9/11, Hamilton was subjected to a wave of violence and hate crimes, directed especially against immigrants and vulnerable minorities. A member of Culture of Peace proposed a motion to city council to protect such people. The idea was adopted unanimously, but with no budget.

Nearly two years passed before Culture of Peace obtained a federal grant from the National Crime Prevention centre, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada, to set up a program they called the Citizen Protection Project. This was backed by the City of Hamilton, the Hamilton Police Service, and several other local groups. Following the Neighbourhood Watch model, the program was intended to provide 'safe havens' where persons who felt threatened could go for shelter and limited assistance. Originally the safe havens were expected to be inside large public buildings normally open to the public, like shops and offices. However, because such activity increased the costs of liability insurance, the program never developed as intended. In fact, although some excellent work was done to discover the needs of vulnerable minorities, the only safe havens established were in community centres and community policing offices which were covered by municipal insurance.

During this period, which was constantly clouded by unsettling accounts of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Culture of Peace Network continued to meet regularly with other peace and social justice groups to promote the U.N.'s six pathways and to raise funds to support its many efforts. It developed Peace Dollars and urged the public to 'wage peace' by buying as many as possible at \$1 each. By offering to share Peace Dollars with other faith and social justice groups it attempted to reduce the destructive competition that often occurred when applying for funds from foundations. It hoped to encourage a more democratic source of funding. If everyone in Hamilton had bought *just one* Peace Dollar, more than half a million dollars would have been raised to help the many groups in the city. While some money was raised in this way, the idea was not widely embraced by the public.

However, the Culture of Peace Network was not alone in seeking to make Hamilton a better place. Many social justice groups were also developing excellent agendas. For several years, an annual peace conference was held at McMaster University. These were organized and largely sponsored by Bob Stewart, a former McMaster business graduate and member of Rotary. After one of these conferences he asked the Culture of Peace Network to organize a national Symposium on the Culture of Peace. This was set for October 2008.

### **New Directions: 2008 - 2012**

The three-day Symposium was held in cooperation with the Gandhi Peace Festival, an annual Hamilton event created by members of the South Asian community in cooperation with McMaster's Centre for Peace Studies. Dr. David Adams, a former member of UNESCO who had helped draft the Six Pathways of Peace, was the keynote speaker.

He described how each path led away from a culture of war, and how together they helped to prevent conflict. He suggested the peace pathways could help

moderate such problems as domestic violence, ethnic or religious conflict and disputes over environmental issues. Before city council he floated the idea of a Culture of Peace Commission for Hamilton, whereby the six pathways could be used as a kind of template or standard by which the city could gauge how much cooperation or conflict was occurring at a time. This idea of applying the peace pathways locally and engaging city officials in a Culture of Peace Commission were refreshingly new. But how could such a dream be advanced by a group with such limited financial resources?

To demonstrate credibility, the Culture of Peace committee decided it needed facts to sway city council. From its experience with the Citizen Protection Project it knew the concerns of many social justice groups were often overlooked when important decisions were being taken. But how could this be measured? While there were differences between the groups, there were also many common threads that linked faith groups with environmentalists; those who supported women's shelters with anti-bullying programs and poverty reduction. Though they might not describe their goals as working for peace, all such groups demonstrated what a culture of Peace really means. To prove the truth of this commonality demanded city-wide research.

Planned on academic lines, the Culture of Peace members developed a 'Social Geography Project', and set about finding long-term funding to do a study. They took advantage of grants and invested their own money to pay wages to students and hire a suitable post-graduate research applicant.

Over the following years, a good deal of financial support for this effort was graciously provided by the Hamilton branch of the United Nations Association in Canada. But the money was always too little to secure long-term help. With all the willingness in the world on their part, the task was too enormous for gifted young people to give up their time for long. Even so, the help of a succession of university students on placement reinvigorated the Hamilton Culture of Peace Network, which could bring its ideas to the attention of a city-wide audience when it celebrated the end of the first decade of the Culture of Peace. It changed its name to Culture of Peace Hamilton, and showed off its vigour with a new song, a new logo, fabulous T-shirts and a strong endorsement to continue its work.



### **Solid Gains and New Visions: 2012- 2018**

The positive achievements of Culture of Peace Hamilton have been the outcome of groundwork developed over a decade-and-a-half of effort. Among the tangible results are strong relationships with city hall and the support of many faith, ecological, and social justice groups. With the help of city council, a portion of the grounds at City Hall was set aside as a Peace Garden, with a Peace Pole, and the planting of dozens of white narcissus bulbs, providing a calming space for citizens to find inner peace.



New energy is emerging as more groups are recognizing common goals. Among many promising developments are the Peace Luncheons held once or twice a year, now sponsored by Culture of Peace and the UNAC Hamilton Branch. These gatherings provide a rare opportunity for outreach and dialogue among local peace groups and those who are seeking to end exclusion, reduce violence and build a friendlier city.

In August 2016, Ray Cunnington's book, "Towards a Less Adversarial Culture" was published and is available on Amazon. As of 2017, the United Nations Culture of Peace Fund with the Hamilton Community Foundation reached the \$25 000 mark and is now generating funds to support projects that create a

culture of peace (through the UNA Canada Hamilton Branch). In the fall of 2017 the UNA Canada Hamilton Branch and the Gandhi Peace Festival published “Waging Peace in Hamilton” to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Gandhi Peace Festival.



### What Have We Learned

Much has been learned since 2000 about how to make connections with other organizations and how to influence both elected officials and city staff. We have been fortunate to have both councilors and city staff as advocates over the years. We hope to continue this connection as more people grasp the concept of a *culture of peace*, the six aspects of the Manifesto and their impact on creating what we have more traditionally understood as *peace*. Perhaps the most learning has occurred for those of us who have been integrally involved, as Gandhi challenged us, to “Be the change you wish to see in the world”. To bring about a *culture of peace* in Hamilton, each of us must “walk the talk” – which of course is a spiritual practice and not an easy one. It is also not easy to work on a shoe string when people have big and competing ideas about what is needed and what might work. One of the greatest learnings for the group has been how to address the tendency to have social justice groups compete for scarce resources rather than cooperate to address the roots of the scarcity.

Although it was made very clear by the Nobel Laureates that all six components of Manifesto 2000 need to be addressed simultaneously, the future focus of our work of Culture of Peace Hamilton may be focused on Rejecting Violence in all its forms. Ray Cunningham’s book “Towards Less Adversarial Cultures” addresses this and the fund he started with Hamilton Community Foundation to support Culture of Peace was funded with this work in mind. Many groups in the community are focused on the other 5 aspects of the Manifesto.