

NORTHERN OHIO MEMBERS PARTICIPATE IN INTERFAITH EVENT AT GRAFTON CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION

Drums in tow, seven members of the World Peace Rhythm Project and their director, Fred Goodnight, rushed out of the Northern Ohio Area Community Center all revved up from the morning's World Peace Prayer Meeting. It was Sunday, Oct. 3. Destination: Grafton Correctional Institution, where the vibrant group of percussionists were the featured performers at a unique gathering of inmates and visitors.

The first of hopefully many such meetings focused on two questions: What and how does your faith's perspective respect the dignity of life? And what steps does your faith take to achieve this in society? Each of the six religious faiths that practice within the prison chapel had a representative respond to the questions.

Mr. Goodnight gave the SGI perspective, and Michael Baker, a longtime SGI member and Grafton inmate, answered audience questions.

The attendees engaged in dialogue, which enabled them to learn a little about one another's beliefs. After being served a light snack by Grafton inmates, everyone got to meet one another on a one-to-one basis and discuss faith further.

The entire program was videotaped, and the warden's office will monitor inmate interactions to see if, as a result of this event, there is a lessening of tension in the prison. If the answer is yes, a recommendation will be made to repeat this program in other Ohio State Prisons.

Since limited space allowed less than 150 attendees — out of a total institution population of more than 1,500 inmates — there's a good chance that the first prison the program would be repeated at is Grafton itself. Then, the people who were unable to attend the first time will have an opportunity to do so.

Estelle Goodnight, a member of the World Peace Rhythm Project, verbalized the feelings everyone in the group had about the visit to Grafton: "I was so excited about being part of this program and being able to bring something new into people's lives. I think what we all did today is truly what kosen-rufu and our mission is all about."

— MURRAY I. SINGER