

**WORKING TOWARD A ‘CULTURE OF PEACE’ IN WASHINGTON, D.C.
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“Imagine a spirited conversation that results in a new, shared understanding, that creates something that never existed before.” With these words Ronnie Smith, SGI-USA vice general director, opened the daylong seminar “Constructing a Nonviolent Community: The Power of One Person to Build a Culture of Peace.”

Meeting at the “Linus Pauling and the Twentieth Century” exhibition in the National Museum of Health and Medicine (a division of the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology), the seminar brought together representatives from many organizations promoting peace and nonviolence. Drawing on professional and personal experience, panelists from six of these groups explored ways to create a peaceful society in the spirit of Linus Pauling. Dr. Pauling used his stature as a scientist to promote the banning of atmospheric nuclear testing and saw his efforts culminate in a limited nuclear test ban treaty.

Leanne Nurse, moderator, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency editor and domestic violence survivor, started the seminar with concepts from SGI President Ikeda’s 2000 U.N. Peace Proposal.

Panelist Barbara Wien of the U.S. Institute of Peace candidly acknowledged her privilege as an upper middle-class white woman, sparking a heart-to-heart conversation about the violence—passive and active—engendered by race and class prejudice. “The system is unfair,” she said. “The Quakers are right: we have to tell the truth to power. We can’t avoid conflict, but we can redirect it.”

Speaking as a father, SGI-USA member Bob Tansey said parents give children three treasures: the treasure of the storehouse—like a convertible for graduation; the treasure of the body—good health; and the treasure of the heart—how to form human relationships. When living in Asia, Mr. Tansey observed that Asia and the West see human relationships differently.

Representing the Western perspective by a circle half black and half white, he traced the idea that life comprises “black–white” dualities to René Descartes (“I think, therefore I am”). Such thinking creates “us–them” conflicts and today, he humorously observed, referring to “road rage,” Descartes’ maxim is more likely rendered, “I think...and I’m right!” Representing the Eastern perspective by a yin–yang circle, he noted that human relationships are seen in this paradigm as interdependent. Such thinking emphasizes people’s deeply shared common bonds.

Dr. Jonathan Stillerman of the Men’s Rape Prevention Project vividly illustrated this idea. He acknowledged that he cannot counsel rapists if he regards himself as superior to them. Asked if men rape because they feel isolated, he responded that “when we isolate ourselves from our own feelings, it becomes easy to harm someone else.”

Panelist John Stonebraker, a teenage SGI-USA member and actor in the “City of Peace” theater project, revealed the “secret” to conflict resolution:

- 1) Examine the relationship. Define it and see its implications.
- 2) Begin at the end. Examine your goals and work toward them.
- 3) Ask questions that seek change. Don’t just ask for answers.
- 4) Listen.

The conversation turned to social engagement, and Douglas Calvin of the Youth

Leadership Support Network, said that a student dedicated to a particular social issue, who joins with like-minded students from other schools, can start a powerful coalition and, even though young, make a difference.

When a participant suggested that pursuing peace by talking with lots of people is “like planting seeds,” Dr. Paul Kingery of George Washington University’s Hamilton Fish National Institute on School and Community Violence, explained that working for peace calls for “multiple sustained interventions with the same person.” Citing personal experience as a foster parent, he stressed the importance of taking a lasting interest in others.

Ella McCall-Haygan, of Pathways to Freedom at the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self-Development, counseled, “Go where the people are, even though you might get thrown out.” One high school student, she shared, disturbed that her classmates split into ethnic groups at lunch, decided to sit with each group in turn, until she was accepted by every group. “It all depends on you,” Ms. McCall-Haygan concluded.

To an audience member despairing over the difficulty of creating a culture of peace, panelist Tina Smith, mother, peace activist and SGI-USA member, related this story: A man sees thousands of starfish stranded on the beach and starts throwing them back into the ocean one by one. Observing this, a child says: “You’re not making any difference. You can never throw all those starfish back.” The man responds, tossing one more starfish into the water, “I made a difference to that one.” In other words, follow your passion, and you will make a difference.

Seminar chair Constance Huntsman urged, “Through the *World Tribune* and in our relationships at home and in the community, our conversations will further the goals of this conference. Let’s continue on our journey, embracing many creative ideas to construct a culture of peace!”