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MARTIN LUTHER

KING JR. 2008



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Local Peace Activists Inspired by King's Work

Goals come with sacrifice, struggle

BY CHARITY PRATER
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Another year has passed and one of the great memorialized holidays of the New Year will soon be here, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Commemoration Day.

The civil-rights leader's words and accomplishments are true inspiration for a group of local peace activists campaigning for a proposed U.S. Department of Peace that would work beside the Depart-



ment of Justice to reduce violence and advocate for equality issues in this country and others.

As Dr. Martin Luther King has said, "Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable... Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals."

One of those tireless and passionate volunteers to today is Ken Bryan, the volunteer coordinator for the Peace Department campaign in the Portland-metro area.

"I have been volunteering for the effort on an average of 10-15 hours a week for over two years," says Bryan, "I got involved because I feel like my generation failed in a big way. My son's world is more threatened than mine was and I didn't make the effort to get involved when I was younger."

A U.S. Department of Peace would be put in place to assist the government with issues like prisoner rehabilitation, gang violence, global conflicts like the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, protecting and distributing resources, educating children and many other means for violence through

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PHOTO BY CHARITY PRATER/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Ken Bryan (left) and Connie Saylor are activists working to reduce violence in the United States and other countries by the creation of a U.S. Peace Department.



Local Peace Activists Inspired by King's Work

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peaceful negotiation and conflict resolution techniques.

The effort is aimed at creating practical programs and principles of peace-building, to take the field of peace-building from the margins of political and societal dialogue and make it a factor in policymaking, investment and understanding. The department would achieve this primarily through a massive public-education, outreach and citizen-lobbying effort.

"Dr. Martin Luther King's teachings about civil rights and equality took time to root into our culture. It didn't happen overnight. Some didn't believe it would happen at all," says Bryan, "this effort is possible but it will take time and participating people to achieve."

The campaign is aimed at the inequality that is still in our society today, issues that include economics, social prejudices and the environment.

"We are approaching peace in the same way as Dr. King did, by working to lift up the poorest among us so that our neighbors are secure economically and resources are shared. There can't be peace unless equality is among all of us," says Bryan.

One of Dr. Martin Luther King's famous quotes is being echoed by the Peace Alliance and peace-

makers today, "A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual doom."

The Peace Alliance effort has a network of volunteers in all 50 states working to urge lobbyists, help fundraising efforts, get donations, speak to the public and spread the word through outside organizations and schools. The grassroots movement is growing rapidly. Its website

"take a look around you and imagine what it would be like to have equality in the way that Martin Luther King dreamed. No matter what your race, age, gender, economic standpoint is, everyone wants to live in peaceful neighborhoods, have their children safe at school and not have to build their houses into fortresses. We all can agree with that and make it a platform for discussion to begin making a change."

Now is a great time to rise up and demand change...take a look around you and imagine what it would be like to have equality in the way that Martin Luther King dreamed.

— Ken Bryan, campaign coordinator for the creation of a U.S. Department of Peace

is receiving 60,000 to a million hits per month. There are 42,000 supporters of the movement nationwide and supporters of the organization have sent over 25,000 letters to a variety of members of congress, not counting postcards, phone calls and emails.

"Now is a great time to rise up and demand change," says Bryan,

To learn more about how to get involved in the Peace Alliance you can visit their website at www.thepeacealliance.org and click on Act Now! or visit dopcampaign.org. Ken Bryan can be contacted at kendbryan@yahoo.com for information on volunteering and events in the Portland area.