

## Ministry Fund Project: Peacemakers 2006

Peacemakers set out to “provide a space and experience where children can explore the meaning, history and vision of peacemaking but actually work together to make it happen.” I believe we did provide such a space. As one parent expressed in her evaluation, “The children could not wait to come. The activities were fun and peaceful for them. She really enjoyed spending time with the Peacemaker team.”

About twelve 8-14 year old students and their families participated in Peacemakers for six Fridays after school for one hour and a half. Seven University of Scranton students from the counseling, education and nursing schools were our mentors on the Peacemakers Team.

Our planned goals of focusing on the reality of peace as being much more than conflict resolution were met. We experienced together focusing prayer, looking within, centering, and being still. We wrote in our journals each week. One participant on the last day remarked that she was going to continue to write in her journal. We focused on Mattie Stepanek, a 13-year old role model for looking within one’s heart and becoming a global peacemaker. Mattie was a young boy suffering from a genetic muscular disease, much like muscular dystrophy. Mattie’s siblings had died from this disease and Mattie knew he probably would not have a long life. He had become a friend of Jimmy Carter and Oprah Winfrey before he died a month before his 14th birthday. Mattie was adamant about being a peacemaker in our world and was gifted with deep insights that he shared in his poetry. It was because of the grant that we could purchase his writings and our own personal journals.

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We learned together peaceful ways to treat our bodies, from yoga to proper nutrition. We experienced peaceful ways to be together as we played, sang, talked, snacked, prayed and worked. The grant gave us the freedom to purchase arts and crafts supplies, healthy snacks, a parachute, music and games, all which helped us experience together the effects of peaceful cooperation.

We learned that Earth Mama was calling for us to be peacemakers also. We introduced ourselves to SAGE, The Scranton Area Garden Exchange, which is an organic and sustainable community garden project operating in a collaborative way between the community and the University of Scranton. We contributed to the garden

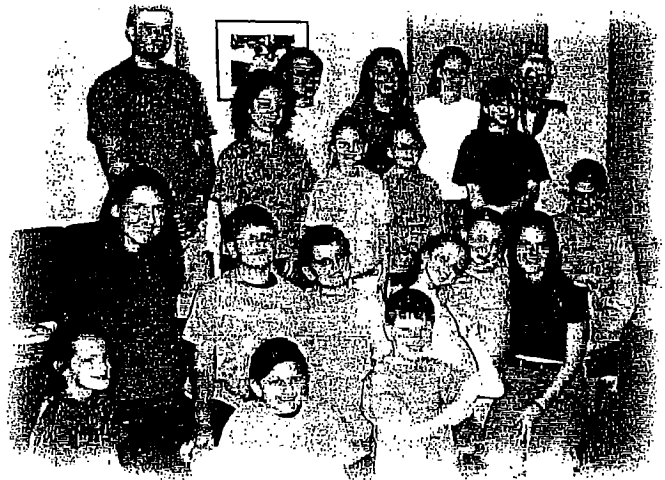


Photo by: Mary Anne Foley, CND

*Sr. Ann Perrin with Peacemakers 2006 showing off their hand decorated peace shirts.*

financially and planted some tomato seeds, learning more about the project. Hopefully because of what we shared some families of our peacemakers will visit the garden again during the summer months and maybe even become active participants. After our experience one of our mentors volunteered her time to help out at the garden for this coming summer!

The goal of family education was accomplished by weekly newsletters which included not only a brief summary of what we did that day, but also some games or ideas for the family to participate in our weekly peacemaking focus. We sometimes sent home notices of local events, resources or web addresses that would strengthen our focus for that week.

It turned out that almost all of the 12 or so participants were from the same school and from the same backgrounds. At first, I was disappointed in that reality but upon further reflection, I believe this 6-week experience for these particular children was in a sense a “preparation of the soil.” I believe the project did advance the Mission Orientation of the CND to “participate actively in the transformation of society for a more just world.” The children became aware that peacemaking is more than “not fighting.” They noted they were using peaceful words even when they were angry. Our collaboration with SAGE brought them closer to Earth Mama and they came to realize many ways to be peaceful with the earth. I believe the college mentors were changed as well as they helped provide a peaceful atmosphere and learned to listen to children, some even expressed the desire to continue their centering prayer.

Everyone finished the 6 weeks hankering for more, feeling positive about peacemaking and energetic. The only complaint from the participants was that they had to wait until next spring to come again! ☺