

## **Culture of Peace Commission: Peacebuilding is a way of life**

**By Dot Maver Ashland Culture of Peace Commission**

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It all started at age 13. My anger exploded at my brother and then dissolved as I “saw myself in other.” I swore off anger. Years later, while coaching softball, I realized my essential desire was to put an end to violence. I discovered a means to do so through sports, using a shared-responsibility, shared-leadership model based on cooperative competition. Competition and striving together to improve: the basis of the Olympics.

Peace education became of interest as an integral component of every curriculum, not something separate. Peace is living in harmonious relationship with self, others, and all life. The very skills of peace building are those social-emotional and communication skills that we know are better indicators of success than IQ. Let’s face it, we have the shared responsibility of taking a whole systems-caring approach to all life on Earth. Attitudes that separate us are not serving us well.

My path of peace education led to my co-founding of The National Peace Academy 2009. NPA is now affiliated with George Mason University School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution (S-CAR) Point of View, a civilian Camp David dedicated to conflict resolution. The academy’s work and point of view, in particular, can help communities beset by violence find ways to come together through community dialogue, restorative justice, empathy, and conflict resolution — and to understand that unmet needs drive behavior.

A few years ago, I was part of the founding of the River Phoenix Center for Peacebuilding. We are taking a comprehensive approach to resolving conflict through healthy communication in relationship, thereby breaking the cycle of violence. Our police-youth dialogue process is a highlight as we all work together for a safe community.

Humanity is experiencing an all-systems breakdown. Peace building is part of an all-systems breakthrough. A culture of peace is clearly emerging. All over the world, global citizens are speaking and acting out in this moment of crisis that represents both danger and opportunity. The danger is doing business as usual; the opportunity is intentionally building a world that works for everyone.

Efforts to realize a Culture of Peace take many forms: local peace building work like the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission; NextGen initiatives; the Seed Movement; organic, local food and Crop Swap; WeDay.org; Earth Guardians and 350.org; peace initiatives throughout Africa, including a National Peace Academy in Rwanda and Democratic Peace Committees in Kenya; films such as “Fambul Tok” and “Pray the Devil Back to Hell”; businesses taking corporate responsibility; International Cities of Peace; [www.peacecast.tv](http://www.peacecast.tv); a shift from punishment to restoration; and so much more!

What can we do as global citizens on this pathway to a culture of peace?

- First, we can take personal and shared responsibility for being the change we wish to see in the world.
- Second, we can encourage and express goodwill — love in action — and begin naming and appreciating the signs of goodwill everywhere.
- Third, we can seek out others who are inclined to a spirit of cooperation and who demonstrate a willingness to work for what they want instead of fighting against what they do not want. With an attitude of positive peace, we know that we get more of whatever we focus on.
- Fourth, we can offer our unique contributions on behalf of the common good, knowing that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

When we live the New Story into our communities, a culture of peace becomes inevitable. Let us continue to sacrifice personal differences, bridge ideological cleavages, and harmonize polarized schools of thought — personally, socially and among countries. As Dag Hammarskjöld said, “The pursuit of peace and progress cannot end in a few years in either victory or defeat. The pursuit of peace and progress, with its trials and its errors, its successes and its setbacks, can never be relaxed and never abandoned.”

When we connect, not convince, we touch hearts and minds. Although we cannot force a change of mind, a change of heart may occur, leading to a willing change of mind. When attitudes shift, behaviors change and cultural norms shift. Ultimately, policies are instituted that more truly reflect our essential values.

Thank you for your comprehensive investment in peace, Ashland. You give us hope!

*Dot Maver is a trustee and boardmember of the National Peace Academy  
([www.nationalpeaceacademy.us](http://www.nationalpeaceacademy.us)).*



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