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NEWS RELEASE

A DECADE AFTER DAYTON PEACE ACCORDS: COMMUNITY FOCUSES ON INTERFAITH DIALOGUE AS WAY TO SUSTAIN PEACE

DAYTON, Ohio — Can Dayton become recognized as a city that brings people of different religions together to promote peace and justice on the global stage?

Organizers of two interfaith religious events that will be held Nov. 13-14 think the 10th anniversary of the Dayton Peace Accords is a perfect time to explore ways to use religion to sustain peace regionally — and internationally.

Legendary civil rights leader the Rev. C.T. Vivian will lead an interfaith worship service, "To Heal the Nations," at 2:30 p.m. on Sunday, Nov. 13, at the Masonic Temple, 210 Wolf Ave., as part of a series of events this month commemorating the anniversary of the historic accords. It's free and open to the public.

The Rev. James Heft, S.M., chancellor and professor of faith and culture at the University of Dayton, will moderate a "Religious Roundtable on Reconciliation" luncheon at 11:30 a.m., Monday, Nov. 14, at Beth Abraham Synagogue, 1306 Salem Ave. Christian, Muslim and Jewish leaders from Dayton and Bosnia and Herzegovina will take part. The cost is $10. Contact Mea Greenwood at (937) 229-3557 or mea.greenwood@notes.udayton.edu to make reservations.

The events are supported by funding from The People Speak 2005, a series of discussions this fall across the world to raise awareness about international policy and the role of the United Nations. The initiative's more than 30 partners include the United Nations Foundation and Religions for Peace-USA.

A Baptist minister and associate of Martin Luther King Jr., Vivian has spoken out for civil rights, racial justice and democracy throughout nearly 60 years.

"He continues his activism today by organizing religious leaders to focus on the rebuilding of New Orleans and tirelessly working for the civil and political rights of all people," said Gary Percesepe, coordinating director of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America.

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Religious leaders from Bosnia and Herzegovina will participate in the worship service, which will feature an original performance by the Dayton Contemporary Dance Company and the Kettering Children's Choir. Cellist Linda Katz will begin the service at 2:30 p.m. with musical selections once played by Vedran Smailovic, principal cellist of the Sarajevo Opera Orchestra. He took his cello to the crater left by a deadly blast and, amidst the sniper fire, played for 22 consecutive days, one for each of his friends and neighbors who had been killed.

Why the focus on interfaith dialogue? "In many countries, religious hierarchies cling to traditional authoritarian models that mirror authoritarian political regimes rather than calling for their transformation. Such approaches are more of a hindrance than a help to democratization," Percesepe observed. "Bosnian and Dayton religious leaders and parishioners share the dream of peace rooted in justice for all. Religious or not, we are all called to engage in critical self-examination when we exchange our dreams for the myth of redemptive violence."

In the roundtable discussion, Heft will ask religious leaders from Bosnia and Herzegovina to share the most powerful and painful lessons they've learned during the last decade and what they would do differently.

"Hindsight is 20-20. There were lapses in judgment, opportunities missed and unintended consequences, but deep relationships were able to sustain themselves in the midst of the calamities of war," said Heft, editor of the 2004 book, Beyond Violence: Religious Sources for Social Transformation in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. "Those are lessons you can't learn theoretically. Ten years later we're bringing together the religious leaders from Ground Zero, so to speak, to tell us how religious traditions can be a source for peace, justice and reconciliation."

A decade after the brokering of the Dayton Peace Accords, religious violence continues to dominate the headlines in war-torn regions, such as Iraq. "If you don't see and think through the role religion plays, you will never be able to imagine the role it could play healing and putting a nation back together," Heft said.


For more information, see http://www.dcowa.org/celebratepeace/events.htm.

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For media interviews, contact Gary Percesepe at (937) 323-6946 and Father Jim Heft, S.M., at (937) 229-2105.