



Reverent Father Charles Peter Dougherty

Recipient of Jamnalal Bajaj Award for Promoting Gandhian Values Outside India - 2009

Born: 22nd August, 1934

Nationality : United States of America

Academics : B.A. Philosophy –Detroit (1957); B.A.Theology Plymouth (1961); M.A.

Education –University of Detroit (1966); M.A. Psychology –University of Detroit (1972).

Reverend Father Charles Peter Dougherty is a Catholic priest, peace activist and specialist in non-violence. He co-founded the Covenant for Peace, Great Lakes Life Community, Michigan Faith and Resistance and the Michigan Peace Team. He currently serves on the Michigan Peace Team Board of Directors, with co-founders Jasiu Milanowski and Sheri Wander. Father Dougherty serves in the Diocese of Lansing, Michigan.

Father Peter Dougherty's peace and justice work began dramatically in 1970. At that time, he became a campus minister, ministering as a priest to university students and families at Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti, Michigan. The Vietnam War was on and many young men were demonstrating against it in the campus. Moved by this, he began to see the systemic violence not only of that war, but of U.S. foreign policy with its many military interventions and the resultant issues of poverty, wealth, greed, and consumerism in the US. It changed his life.

During the summer of 1972 he went to California to learn about the issue of poor farmer workers and the courageous work of Cesar Chavez. He stood in solidarity with the United Farm workers on the strike line.

That was where he first seriously began to understand nonviolence and its power. After the experience in Ypsilanti, Michigan, he began to organize demonstrations at stores calling on shoppers to boycott grapes sold there, in support of the United Farm workers' cause to obtain just wages and working conditions.

He co-founded, over the years, non-violent organizations involved in non-violent resistance to nuclear weapons, including Covenant For Peace, Great Lakes Life Community, and Michigan Faith and Resistance.

During the campaign, Michigan Circuit judges who were hearing the cases began ordering Father Dougherty and other arrested non-violent resisters to either promise not to do their acts of non-violent civil disobedience again or stay in jail until they do promise.

The jailed resisters filed a legal case against that unjust sentencing practice, and it was argued before the Michigan Supreme Court which ruled that indefinite incarceration to enforce a promise of compliance was illegal.

Over decades, Father Dougherty has spent about two years in US jails for non-violent civil disobedience. While in the jails, he assisted illiterate prisoners by writing letters dictated by them to their family; by persuading their negligent court-appointed attorneys to do their job of defending them; by counseling the prisoners.

At one trial, Father Dougherty's religious leader, the Bishop of the Diocese of Lansing, Michigan, was a character witness for him. He said on the witness stand: "I consider Peter Dougherty the

conscience of the Diocese.”

At some trials, Father Dougherty and others had internationally renowned persons as expert witnesses on the witness stand. They included Ramsey Clark, former U.S. Attorney General under President Lyndon Johnson. He testified to the illegality of cruise missiles under international and US law.

Three other major campaigns were focused on ending the deployment of nuclear weapons at K I Sawyer and Wurtsmith Air Force Bases, and termination of Project ELF, a first strike communication system for Trident nuclear submarines. All the three were located in Michigan and have been closed down.

In 1993, Father Dougherty and others formed the Michigan Peace Team (MPT), and he became the Co-ordinator.

Mahatma Gandhi had conceived of the idea of Shanti Sena – Peace Army. He envisioned the possibility of thousands of trained Satyagrahis intervening in military invasions and preventing or stopping such violence in other situations as well. He died before he was able to bring this idea into reality.

MPT's vision states “creating a non-violent alternative to militarism and violence through empowered peacemaking”. It also states that “we foster the spirituality of non-violence, namely, nurturing the interconnectedness between all people and all things.”

Father Dougherty is one of the original “non-violence” trainers, and continues in this role. MPT has conducted many non-violence training workshops for diverse groups of people.

The concept of intervention in conflict and war zones is called Third Party Non-violent Intervention (TPNI). Intervention includes strategies such as interposing oneself or the team to prevent or deter violence, verbal de-escalation of tension, observing and documenting human rights abuses, and accompaniment of individuals whose life and well being are being threatened.

MPT, with Father Dougherty as a main inspiration, has placed domestic (i.e., within the USA) violence reduction teams as well as international teams.

Since 1995 MPT has placed teams in the Palestinian Occupied Territories, both in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Palestinians say that this presence of internationals does reduce violence committed by Israeli soldiers and Israeli settlers who have taken over Palestinian land. For example, Israeli soldiers have the instructions that if they see internationals in a demonstration they are not to fire live bullets.

From 1996 to 1999 MPT sent violence reduction peace teams to Chiapas, Mexico, where the Mayan indigenous people were being persecuted by the Mexican military and paramilitary death squads. These people were calling for human rights. As one example, the military would not come into the town of La Sultana because three MPT internationals were camped there.

MPT also places domestic teams. In the USA, number of hate groups is on the rise; some resort to violence too. MPT places teams in a variety of situations. The National Green Party will have its national convention in Chicago in 2008, and has asked MPT to place a peace team there because of fear of violence.

At a racist Ku Klux Klan rally in Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1998, MPT placed 105 peace team members, organized in affinity groups of five, with overall co-ordination by a team of three, communicating with walkie-talkies (“today we use cell phones”). Four hundred people against the racism and hate of the Klan were there, some intent on driving them away with violence.

MPT held its ground with them, interposing themselves between the crowd and the Klan and the police. The chief of police, at the end of the day praised the peace team, relieved that the violence was greatly reduced from what was expected.

A major responsibility of MPT is speaking to groups as witnesses of the violence against Palestinians (or other international situations where teams are placed) to educate people about the violence being done and call them to participate in the peace making effort to end that violence.

Nonviolent Violence-Reduction Peace Teams are the direct result of Mahatma Gandhi's vision of Shanti Sena – Peace Army. Michigan Peace Team embodies that vision and its creation was inspired by it.

In teaching non-violence, Mahatma Gandhi and his teachings, the campaign in India for self-rule, the campaigns for women's rights, Untouchables' rights, are presented as examples and inspiration for how we all must be involved in personal and social transformation.

Over the last 33 years, Father Dougherty's commitment has grown in support of abolition of nuclear weapons, forming Shanti Sena to go into conflict zones in Bosnia, Middle East and Central America. In the US, Father Dougherty is known, among the Peace and Social Justice Community as the conscience keeper. He is one of the foremost Gandhians of the North American Continent.

Awards and Honours

Pax Christi USA Pope Paul VI Teacher of Peace Award; National Peace Action of Michigan Peace Award; Detroit City Council Citation Award; Pax Christi Michigan Purple Ribbon For Peace Award, Groundwork For A Just World Peacemaker Award, Detroit – State Peacemaker Award; Diocese of Lansing Regional Award.

On the occasion of the 36th anniversary of the East Lansing-based International Service Society-A Humanitarian Service of Vaishnava Center for Enlightenment, and in celebration of Gandhi's 139th birthday, Peter Dougherty was presented with a Lifetime Achievement Award for Peace.

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