

The Union Leader

RELIGION

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'Day of Interfaith Dialogue' Session To Explore Inter-Religious Conflict

CONWAY — Like John Lennon once envisioned in his song, "Imagine," Eileen L. Epperson also hopes for the day when "all the people are living life in peace."

And until there's an end to religious violence, Epperson said, there won't be world peace.

That's why Epperson, a Presbyterian minister from Marlboro, Mass., has dedicated her life to "creating profound relationships between people of different religions and points of view . . . There's just a potential for healing that's staggering with people of religious convictions coming together and joining hands. It can just ripple out everywhere."

It happened at the eight-day World Parliament of Religions last September when 6,500 people from across the world, along with 150 spiritual and religious leaders, met in Chicago to get to know each other in ways that could lead to future collaboration for world peace, relief of suffering and preservation of the planet.

And it'll happen again, on a smaller scale, Saturday, Nov. 20, at the Sheraton White Mountain Inn in North Conway. And the Rev. Epperson will be here as the keynote speaker.

"A Day of Interfaith Dialogue" will bring together 16 speakers who, with audience participation, will discuss Christian, Hindu, Taoist and Native American traditions as they relate to today's problems.

Hosted by The Meeting Place Inc., a nonprofit educational center in Snowville, N.H., the day will include adult and children's programs, all relating to the theme of peace and non-violence.

"The community is the birthplace of change," said Bette Snow, Meeting Place director. "We believe it is paramount for people of all ages to meet and explore solutions to the inter-religious misunderstandings that are contributing to war and tension."

Snow — together with a small group of volunteers — last spring conceived of the event as an opportunity for those who could not travel to Chicago to take part in the kinds of issues raised there. It was also designed as a forum for New England people to start networking in their own communities, she said.

The day will begin with Rev. Epperson, founder/director of the Massachusetts-based Religious Freedom Project, discussing what happened at Chicago's 100th Anniversary World Parliament, where she — along with His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh, and Mother Theresa — spoke.

In North Conway, Epperson will be followed by speakers, including author and Jungian therapist Rev. Michael Dwinell of Cape Elizabeth, Maine; DH. Manjuvajra, member of the Western Buddhist Order in Newmarket; Medicine Story, Wompanaug Elder from Greenville; and Dr. A. Cader Asmal of the Islamic Center of New England in Quincy, Mass.

Snow said conference speakers will address what their respective faiths teach regarding relations among those who differ in belief, culture, race and gender, in addition to what alternative visions faiths can contribute to the goal of world peace.

"This day is not meant to be some one-shot pedantic parade of dogma and opinions," Snow said. "It will be a fresh and frank dialogue to act as the beginning of long-range discussions between all people."

After lunch, adult participants will break into 12 afternoon workshops, including "Chanting for Peace," "East (Taoism) Meets West (Christianity)," "Misconceptions About Islam and Muslims in the United States," "Healing Racism" and "Practical Non-Violence."

Children will be in their own day-long program that includes stories, songs, crafts and creative writing. The conference will conclude with an evening celebration of multicultural music and song with time for reflection and thanksgiving for all.

The day will run from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. and cost \$50 for families of four, \$25 for adults, \$10 for students and \$5 for children under 13. For brochure, send to The Meeting Place, Brownfield Road, Snowville, NH 03849.

For more information, call Bette Snow at (603) 447-5314.



REV. EILEEN EPPERSON