



FALL/WINTER
2009

Multifaith Education Project Newsletter

" I realized how one person really can make a difference. Peace spreads from one person to another."

Natanel Herstig, age 13,
student at Hebrew Day School

Dear Louise,

If ever there was a time to keep hope alive, it is now. The world is very much with us these days with so many critical issues right up on top.

We'd like to think that our project keeps hope alive. The MEP offers an opportunity to view the world through less than jaundiced eyes. In fact, it offers a view of the world through the prism of possibility.

What do we do that's so special?

We make the stranger into a friend.

We teach respect instead of fear.

We hold sacred one another's rituals and traditions.

We get to know one another.

We cannot guarantee the long term results, but we know what we'll get if we do nothing. By doing the work of the MEP, we can be assured that the future will be different than if we hadn't done anything.

Shalom,salaam and peace to you,

Louise Sheehy

and the team of the MEP

ANNOUNCEMENTS

by Article
Author

For 5 years, **Orangewood Christian School** has brought its special spirit and presence to the MEP, but now reorganization at their school has made it difficult for them to continue with the MEP project.

The MEP is proud to announce that a new Christian School will be joining us this year, **THE GENEVA SCHOOL**. The school is located in Winter Park on SR 436.

We had a wonderful meeting with their Headmaster, Rev. Robert Ingram and Faculty member, Dr. Michael Beates, a specialist in Dialectic and Rhetoric, during which Lucy Roberts and I shared our project's philosophy and goals. It was clear that **THE GENEVA SCHOOL** shares our vision of creating friendships and understanding happen between kids who might not know each other without our project.

This year's curriculum will focus on **Service**, through which we hope the students will develop deeper and more significant relationships. We are happy to welcome the students from **THE HEBREW DAY SCHOOL, LEADERSHIP PREPARATORY SCHOOL** and now **THE GENEVA SCHOOL** into our 2009-2010 programs.

The first gathering of the three schools will take place in January at the Hebrew Day School. Speaking to the students that day will be Sr. Ann Kendrick, SND., Director of the Hope Community Center in Apopka which works closely with the farmworker and migrant communities.. Future sessions will be held at the Leadership Prep. School. and The Geneva School. As we have done for five years, we will conclude our year together by planting trees in the local community.

Watch this space for reports and photos of the project's time and work together.

MORE ANNOUNCEMENTS

The MEP was invited to tell our story and display the students' Peace Quilt at the following gatherings:

The Global Peace Film Festival at Rollins College
The First Unitarian Universalist Church of Orlando
The Interfaith Youth Core in Chicago
The Millionth Circle in Orlando

Call the Director to arrange for a speaker to address your group.

In case you missed it, there was a fine article about one of our teachers and four of the youth who live in southwest Orlando. . The article is full of good quotes. A picture of the Peace Quilt, a project that the Jewish, Christian and Muslim students engaged in last year, follows the story. The article was researched and written by MEP good friend Annette Gluskin-Habin. The text of the article is reproduced here for all to read.

Group Helps Build Multifaith Connections Annette Gluskin-Habin

by

The colorful peace quilt presents a strong statement, a graphic symbol assembled from squares made by more than 100 local Muslim, Christian and Jewish middle school students, each square depicting their own views of peace. The quilt is just one of the activities sponsored by the Multifaith Education Project, a nonprofit organization for sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders, that allows students to learn about each others' religious traditions and share experiences - both fun and educational.

"Real change must come with the younger generation," said MEP Director Louise Sheehy. "As they get to know each other, become familiar with each others' customs and traditions, and respect each others' differences, the students grow up to be more tolerant, which hopefully leads to greater peace in our world."

Summerport resident Dana Vitarelli is a social studies teacher at Selznick Middle School at the Hebrew Day School in Maitland, and her students have participated in MEP activities for several years.

Students were: Arielle Bloom of Glenmuir, Jamie Sheer of Vizcaya, social studies teacher Dana Vitarelli of Summerport, Max Klein of Turtle Creek, and Natanel Herstig of Falcon's Trace reap the numerous benefits of the Multifaith Education Project.

"I've learned that the students are really interested in learning about each others' differences, and they like to share information about their own religions with others," she said. "It is great to see that even though each religion worships differently, there are many commonalities that unite us, including a hope for peace."

By visiting each others' places of worship, learning about religious practices and holiday celebrations, and participating in activities

together, students deepen their understanding and develop friendships, leading them to overcome stereotypes and change misconceptions.

Some of their activities together have included planting trees in the community, developing and selling a cookbook of traditional family recipes and stories called *Breaking Bread: A Celebration of Three Faiths*, writing essays for an annual contest, and creating the peace quilt.

"The more you know and understand about other groups, the less likely you are to misunderstand them and their traditions, and hopefully this will lead to peace," Vitarelli said.

Max Klein, 13, of Turtle Creek has participated in MEP activities for two years.

"I've learned a lot about other religions, planted many trees and made new friends," he said. "It's been amazing. I can see how everyone is basically the same - not that different when you really think about it.

"I learned that I really didn't know anything about the Muslim way of worship. I knew that Jews and Christians were similar in some ways, and through this program, I learned that Muslims also have a similar background. I now have a greater knowledge about other religions."

Jamie Sheer, 13, of Vizcaya also has learned a lot from participating in MEP.

"I had the chance to visit a mosque, which was interesting, and I've learned more about the holidays and customs of other religions," she said.

Like Sheer, 13-year-old Natanel Herstig of Falcon's Trace, who has been involved with MEP for two years, enjoyed the new experience of visiting a mosque and learning about other religions and their celebrations.

"Part of my family is Christian, in addition to Jewish, and I began to understand more about Christian traditions, as well," he said.

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Glenmuir resident Arielle Bloom, 12, expected the mosque to be more

ornate than it was and learned a great deal through a demonstration of prayer by a young Muslim boy.

"I've had Christian and Jewish friends, but, through this program, I learned more about the Christian holidays and traditions and more about the Muslim holidays besides Ramadan," she said. "I have a greater understanding of what other people believe."

"Meeting people face to face is so much different than just studying about them," Sheehy said. "These personal connections help you see others as human beings like yourself, not just stereotypes."

Her dream is to spread the benefits of this program to other locations.

"If we do this in other states, and young people can have this experience, we will be the new generation that will change the world," Klein said.

For more information about the Multifaith Education Project, call 407-644-5504 or visit www.multifaitheducationproject.org on the Web

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