

Leadership

Social Contributors and the Interfaith Movement©

Interfaith Youth Core
Chicago, IL USA



This call for a worldwide fellowship that lifts neighborly concern beyond one's tribe, race, class and nation is in reality a call for an all-embracing and unconditional love for all men. This often misunderstood and misinterpreted concept has now become an absolute necessity for the survival of man. When I speak of love, I am speaking of that force which all the great religions have seen as the supreme unifying principle of life. Love is the key that unlocks the door that leads to ultimate reality. This Hindu-Moslem-Christian-Jewish-Buddhist belief about ultimate reality is beautifully summed up in the First Epistle of Saint John: "Let us love one another: for love is of God: and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God."

From "The World House" in *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* 1967.

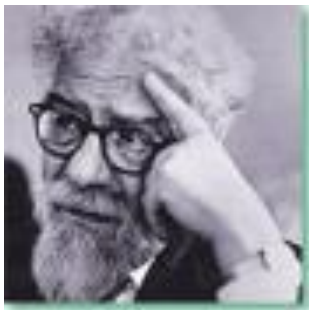
Mahatma Gandhi



Mahatma Gandhi was a Hindu whose concept of *satyagraha*, or love force, helped India gain its independence from British colonial rule in 1947. Although the British authorities repeatedly jailed Gandhi and his followers, his calm commitment to loving his enemies while resisting them nonviolently, never wavered.

I have not the shadow of a doubt that any man or woman can achieve what I have, if he or she would make the same effort and cultivate the same hope and faith. Work without faith is like an attempt to reach the bottom of a bottomless pit.

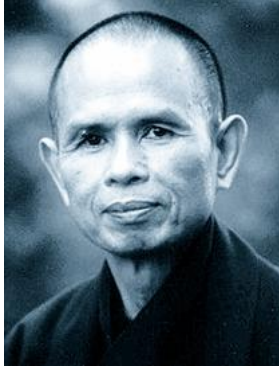
Abraham J. Heschel



Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, a Jewish theologian and leader of the Conservative Movement sought to transform the United States through the concept of *Tikkun Olam*, or to heal the world. Born in Poland, Heschel studied theology in Germany but eventually fled to the United States when the Nazis came to power. The Holocaust, which eventually killed six million Jews, convinced Heschel that the leaders of all faith communities must expose social injustice. He also believed that God called on all people of faith to work together in confronting and defeating social injustice.

The way we act, the way we fail to act is a disgrace that must not go on forever. This is not a white man's world. This is not a colored man's world. It is God's world ... We have failed to use the avenues open to us to educate the hearts and minds of men, to identify ourselves with those who are underprivileged ... Repentance means a new insight, a new spirit. It also means a course of action.

Thich Nhat Hanh



In Southeast Asia the Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, was using the principles of compassion and nonviolence to stop the war in Vietnam. Hanh believed that people of faith, especially youth, couldn't remain silent in the face of social injustice. They must work together to heal the world. He founded the School of Youth for Social Services in Saigon, a grass roots relief organization that rebuilt bombed villages, set up schools and medical centers, resettled homeless families, and organized agricultural cooperatives.

I must be true to my conviction that I share with all men the calling to be a son of the living God. Beyond the calling of race or nation or creed is this vocation of sonship and brotherhood, and because I believe that the Father is deeply concerned especially for his suffering and helpless and outcast children, I come to speak for them.

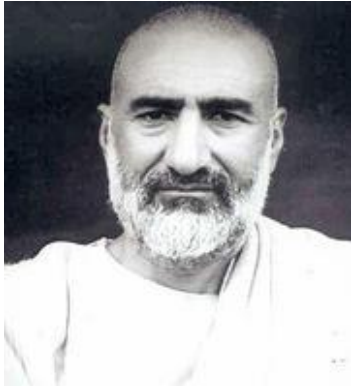
Dorothy Day



Dorothy Day was a journalist turned social activist and devout member of the Roman Catholic Church. She became known for her social justice campaigns in defense of the poor: forsaken, hungry and homeless. She founded the Catholic Worker Movement in 1933, espousing nonviolent action and hospitality for the impoverished and downtrodden. She opened a "house of hospitality" in the slums of New York City. The movement quickly spread to other cities and today well over 100 communities exist.

What we would like to do is change the world— And, by fighting for better conditions, by crying out unceasingly for the rights of the workers, of the poor, of the destitute...we can, to a certain extent, change the world; we can work for the oasis, the little cell of joy and peace in a harried world. We can throw our pebble in the pond and be confident that its ever widening circle will reach around the world. We repeat, "there is nothing that we can do but love, and, dear God, please enlarge our hearts to love each other, to love our neighbor, to love our enemy as well as our friend."

Badshah Khan



Abdul Ghaffar Khan, later known as Badshah Khan, was a Pashtun (Afghan) political and spiritual leader known for his non-violent opposition to British rule during the final years of the Empire on the Indian sub-continent. He was a lifelong pacifist and a devout Muslim. Education as a means of social advancement was a central ideal throughout his life.

I am going to give you such a weapon that the police and the army will not be able to stand against it. It is the weapon of the Prophet, but you are not aware of it. That weapon is patience and righteousness. No power on earth can stand against it.

Martin Luther King Jr.



Today, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is known most widely as the Baptist Minister whose faith journey inspired the U.S. Civil Rights movement. His deeply held belief that all people are created in God's image inspired Dr. King to embrace the wonderful diversity of religious beliefs and to struggle non-violently for social justice around the world. His heartfelt conviction that God called on all people of faith to confront social injustice encouraged Dr. King to reach out to all communities of faith in creating a Beloved Community of shared values, mutual understanding, and positive social action.

We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now ... We may cry out desperately for time to pause in her passage, but time is deaf to every plea and rushes on. Over the bleached bones and jumbled residues of numerous civilizations are written the pathetic words: "Too late." ... We still have a choice today: nonviolent coexistence or violent co-annihilation.

Discussion Guide

Step 1: What is a faith leader?

Before reading the quotes out loud tell the participants a story about leader (or faith hero) that has inspired you and why.

Then ask that each participant tell a story of a leader (or faith hero) in their life; one that has inspires them.

Step 2: Interfaith Leaders

Ask for volunteers to read each of the quotes out loud.

Ask if there is anything they...

- don't understand.
- have a strong positive or negative reaction to.
- think would be important to emphasize in the discussion.

Discuss their answers.

Describe for participants:

The relationship between these interfaith leaders was so important to their work.

- *Dr. King was inspired by Gandhi's non violent methods and brought that to the United States Civil Rights Movement.*
- *Abraham Joshua Heschel joined Dr. King in the march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama during one of the most critical points in the Civil Rights Movement.*
- *Dr. King built a relationship with Thich Nhat Hanh that eventually led King to nominate Hanh for a Nobel Peace Prize.*
- *Dorothy Day and Dr. King both dedicated significant portions of their efforts to improving the lives of the disenfranchised in Chicago.*
- *Dr. King and Malcolm X worked together despite differences in strategy and methods.*

Step 3: What are the attributes or characteristics of an interfaith leader.

Ask the participants:

- What did these interfaith faith leaders (or heroes) contribute to all faith communities?
- How did their faith inspire their contributions?

Step 4: What can we do as interfaith leaders?

Ask the participants to tell a final story:

- Have you ever made a contribution to your community? (i.e. story of service)
- How does faith inspire your contributions?
- Have you ever worked with someone of a different faith tradition to serve the community?
- Why is it important to work together with others of different faiths to serve the community?
- How could you do this here in your community?