



Global PeaceWorks

report from the 2004 Peace Among Religions Project

As the year 2004 ended with many unresolved violent conflicts among religious communities, a group of volunteers of diverse faiths gathered in New Delhi, India to prove that peace among religions is indeed possible.

The group, called Global PeaceWorks, "Created a sense of family among strangers of different national, cultural, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds." Said volunteer Melissa Alvarez, a student service specialist at Penn State University in the United States. It was a journey that was "life changing, perspective shifting, heartwarming, and rejuvenating," reported Alvarez who was joined by volunteers from India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Japan, Taiwan, Kenya, Iran and the United States.

While some service organizations distance themselves from religion, Global PeaceWorks focuses on religion as an essential component of human betterment. "Religion and spirituality help cultivate compassion and foster our sense of interconnectedness as a human family. We have to go beyond the small minded 'my religion is better' thinking and work together, honoring all sacred traditions, to solve global problems." says program director Eric Wenzel of New York.



Khorrum Omer, Global PeaceWorks India project director, has been working in service and interfaith programs for two decades. Omer observed "There are interfaith groups that celebrate diversity and honor different religious traditions with discussion, conferences or prayer meetings, but Global PeaceWorks is different. We don't just shake hands and say a prayer together. At Global PeaceWorks we say, "Hey, these children need our help - Let's go and serve them... together. We are different faiths offering service together."

In fact, when the Babri Masjid was being torn down in 1992, Omer, a Muslim, was working with an interfaith group to restore a Hindu temple in Vrindaban. Though Omer continues to be deeply involved in his Muslim community and has Qu'ran lessons taught in his home most days, he knows no boundaries when it comes to service.

In 2003, Omer led Global PeaceWorks in East Delhi where the group helped build a community center in a communally challenged neighborhood. For 2004, Omer chose Amar Jyoti, a special school for physically and mentally challenged children as the service site. The service work was to carry thousands of bricks up four flights of stairs to help with construction - an arduous task.



Robai Khamasi of Kenya entertaining children of Amar Jyoti

"I picked up the first brick," realized Pinaki Chakraborty, a child rights advocate and senior at Delhi University, "Day after day, children are carrying these bricks on their heads and in their hearts. They might just keep on doing that if no action is taken." The thought energized Chakraborty who worked tirelessly for hours on end. "The rewards are spiritual" commented Durga Khadka, a volunteer from Kathmandu, Nepal.



Volunteers from Tehran, Iran and New York, USA working together

The experience was enhanced by a visit to the Fatehpuri Mosque in busy central Delhi and dialogue with its Imam, Dr. Mufti Mukarram Ahmed. An afternoon at the Bahá'í Lotus Temple, conversations with Sikh leaders, and a trip to Vrindaban, home to 5000 Hindu temples were also included.

The event made a lasting impact on the participant David Norenberg, a creator of student interfaith programs at St. Lawrence University in New York, who said, "I don't think I

will look at a globe or a map the same way... The world has become infinitely more personal." Christa Reynolds, who served as a group leader for the program and is the creator of 'Enlighten' the game of World Religions, called the experience "wonderful adventure" in spiritual discovery and service.



Dr. Deepali Bhanot, a professor of Sanskrit at Delhi University and one of the programs leaders, remarked that the uniqueness of the program was in the willingness of the volunteers to serve while learning about each other's culture. "It was my best new year experience ever!" Shared Robert Hu of Taiwan, who holds the title of Mr. University from an international contest he attended earlier in the year. "We visited temples, mosques and churches and listened to their stories, discussed their beliefs, histories and offered prayers. Harmony could be felt everywhere."

Global PeaceWorks is now accepting applications for its next Peace Among Religions projects in New Delhi to be held from Dec 30, 2005 to January 7, 2006.

See www.globalpeaceworks.org for more information including ways you can be involved.