

The recent murder of Father Eric Freed reminds me that this is not the first time we in Humboldt have been shaken by senseless violence: violence that seems so gratuitous and out of place that begs for explanation. It also begs for something good to be done in order to counterbalance the evil of such wreckless hate.

About 18 years ago the murder of a Humboldt State student by a young man wielding a baseball bat seemed so gratuitous and horrible, that it provoked a couple of clergymen to do something—something creative and wonderful. Most murders are terrible, but this one 18 years ago was especially so because it came on the heels of several homicides of young people, by young people, in our community. So, a small group of clergy, including Rev. Ken Meece and Rabbi Les Sharnberg, rallied a number of people to take a stand against the senseless violence at Redwood Acres. Hundreds, maybe thousands, turned up to say, “Enough! Let us learn to live together peaceably and put a stop to this senseless bloodshed.” Soon after Ken and Les conceived of the idea of emulating the Nobel Peace Prize by starting a similar kind of prize to be awarded locally. They named it the Humboldt County Peacemaker Prize. At the time the Nobel Peace Prize was awarding recipients around 400,000 dollars. They presented their idea to the Eureka Ministerial Association; we figured we could rustle up—about 4,000 dollars. So, we raised the money, put out applications, interviewed our applicants, and behold, in 1996 the Eureka Ministerial Association gave out the first Peacemaker Prize to Yer Thao for his work with gang members.

A few years later the Andrea Wagner Trust generously offered to pay the bill for the Humboldt County Peace Prize, saving us clergymen and women a lot of time and effort. Thank you. Subsequent recipients of the Peace Prize have been Art Eliazaras in 1998, Christopher Evans in 2000, Betty Chinn and Rose Baker in 2002, Russ Shaddix in 2004, Simona Keat in 2006, Sam Oliner 2008, and John Shelter in 2011. I have been at each of the award ceremonies and found the life-work and stories of these recipients to be very encouraging. Not only the recipients, but the many candidates who were submitted for the award, were allowed to make their extraordinary work known to the public. The Peacemaker Prize has made many of us aware that we have a number of people who are in Humboldt County for good: giving guidance to youth, sustenance and shelter to older people, taking in foster children, researching and rewarding altruism, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and I could go on. The peace prize provides good news that counters the bad news we get daily in heavy doses.

This year’s Peacemaker Prize will be awarded at the First Presbyterian Church of Eureka on May 4th at 7:00pm. We have some wonderful candidates coming forth, but if you would like to nominate someone for this award please submit an application soon, real soon. Applications can be obtained by calling 443 4897 and asking for one to be sent to you. Or, you can e mail firstpresbyoffice@yahoo.com.

When bad things happen the best way for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing. The Humboldt Peacemaker Prize is one way to take back our community one good deed at a time.

This Has been Dan Price for Community Comment