

Dr. George W. Willoughby

Recipient of Jamnalal Bajaj Award for Promoting Gandhian Values outside India-2002

Born: 9th December, 1914

Ph.D. in Political Science, State University of Iowa

Dr. Willoughby has been drawn to Gandhi's teachings since his student days. When studying Political Theory, he was advised by one of his professors from Bengal, to study the writings of Gandhi and particularly his philosophy of non-violence. George recalls writing a paper on "The Political Relevance of Gandhian Non-violence" and having to defend it before a graduate student and faculty seminar.

Though George was a member of United States Navy, he resigned from it when the World War II broke out because he believed that there was no moral basis for war. Since then he declared himself as a conscientious objector and has been consistently one to this day. A total believer in pacifism and non-violence he has consistently opposed war as a method of solving the problems of the nations.

He undertook various forms of protest against nuclear weapons including organising public meetings, a Prayer Vigil on the steps of the National Capital in Washington, sailing a small unarmed vessel into the US nuclear bomb test area to protest against the American nuclear bomb tests and discussing strategies for conflict resolution through non-violence with Vinoba Bhave and Jayaprakash Narayan in 1960.

He undertook a long Peace March from San Francisco to Moscow in 1961-62. He formed a World Peace Brigade and in 1981 the Peace Brigade International was established. This operates teams in Guatemala, El Salvador, Colombia, Indonesia and the USA. George also participated in the Delhi to Peking Friendship Padayatra in 1964.

With a view to giving a practical shape to his ideas of non-violent resolution of conflicts, he has established the Upland Institute of Social change. It attracted many social change workers from all over the world. The study courses conducted in the institute included non-violence theory and practice, strategy and tactics, history of non-violence with particular reference to Gandhian experiments in South Africa and India, non-violence in the United States and case studies from European experience. The Institution granted certificates upon completion of the one year programme and a Master of Arts in Social Change upon completion of the two year programme.

George also took the initiative to create the "Philadelphia Life Centre" with a vision of a caring community of learning and support committed to non-violence. The Life Centre Community expected able bodied persons, teachers, students and others to work part time to support themselves and fund expenses of the community. Teachers and students devoted at least half of their time to study and for engagement in non-violent social change. These Life Centre participants, as and when they gained experience, were called to England, Europe, Japan and India to demonstrate through workshops their experiences of non-violent action.

When the United States responded to the attack on Twin Towers on 11th September, 2001 by declaring "holy war" on Afghanistan, George not only spoke against war but also took the initiative in organising a peace march of thousands of citizens of the United States who journeyed to Washington calling for a halt to the destructive war and the initiation of peaceful response to the cries of millions for freedom and economic justice.

George in his earlier years accepted the teachings of Jesus to love one another and return good for evil. From Gandhi, George learnt concrete, compassionate and reconciling actions as powerful responses to violence. Gandhi's experiments in non-violence in South Africa and India have provided the firm foundation for which George and many others continued to explore non-violence as a way of life.

Reflecting on his experiences George says: "When I am 87 years old, the challenge to live and advocate the way of non-violence is stronger than ever. With the support of family, friends and a faith-based community, I continue to witness for a world community based on nonviolent relationships between individuals, between groups and nations committed to democracy, equality and compassion. Gandhi, King, the Buddha, and Jesus light the way into the tomorrow and I continue living each day walking the non-violent path."

