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‘Peace is the way’

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Allison Hammerly



Participants in 2015's Peace Day plant a peace pole in Lansing's Potter Park. This year's event stretches nine days with events all over Greater Lansing.

Courtesy Photo

We're halfway through September, and 2016 is already a doozy. Acts of mass violence pepper newspaper headlines, alongside stories of global tensions and sharply divided and bitter political races.

"There's so much attention to violence and violent responses," said Terry Link. "Making people aware of alternatives is the heart of what we're trying to do."

Link is one of the organizers behind Peace Quest 2016, a nine-day period in which local organizations are teaming up for seminars, talks and activities about replacing violence with nonviolence. The events are centered around the United Nations' International Day of Peace, Sept. 21, and are hosted by religious communities, activist groups, academic societies and more. Two groups, the Peace Education Center and the Greater Lansing chapter of the United Nations Association banded together to organize much of the event.

Last year, Peace Quest was a one-day event, a march at Potter Park Zoo attended by over 250 people.

"We wanted a day to celebrate peacemakers, people who work towards reducing conflict in a peaceful way," explained Jim Detjen, another Peace Quest organizer who also planned last year's event. "We felt that the day was successful, so we wanted to expand the activities to at least a whole week."

The series of events kicks off Friday at noon at the Capitol with a rally celebrating the fifteenth anniversary of the weekly peace vigils held by the Greater Lansing Network Against War & Injustice. The vigils have been held every week since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

Nearly every day of Peace Quest features one or more peace-related events during Peace Quest — see the calendar at greaterlansingpeacequest.org for a full list of events — but one of the more important days is Sunday, Peace Quest's Day of Action. Several local churches plan to hold special peace-related services in the morning and Missionary Baptist Church, 500 S. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. in Lansing, hosts a series of community activities in the afternoon. The day also includes a peace walk, live music, speakers, information from activists and art projects for honoring historical peacemakers, such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi. The activities are family-friendly, with special activities planned for children.

Other Peace Quest events include talks and workshops from organizations like the Immigrant and Refugee Resource Collaboration, as well as religious leaders from local Christian, Islamic and Jewish communities who will talk about dealing with conflict resolution on a public and personal scale.

“It’s important to bring people together to create a dialogue,” Detjen said, “both people of different faiths and people who don’t have spiritual beliefs, to get them to understand each other through education and dialogue.” Okemos Community Church screens acclaimed documentary “Inside Peace” 6:30 p.m. Wednesday. The film showcases the stories of Texas inmates preparing to re-integrate into society.

Many Peace Quest events focus on large-scale conflicts, but organizers hope that through discussion and commitment, attendees can think of how to transfer what they learn to their own communities and lives.

“It’s a very personal practice, when you think about these ideas,” Link said. “I think there’s a personal transformation in people, as much as thoughts of political policy. There’s a quote I often use from 20th century leader in nonviolence, A.J. Muste, ‘There is no way to peace; peace is the way.’”

Peace Quest 2016 Friday, Sept. 16-Sunday, Sept. 25 Events across Greater Lansing, see web site for complete list peacequestgreaterlansing.org