

WFWP Montana Celebrates UN International Day of Peace in Billings

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"A day to commit to peace above all differences and to contribute to building a Culture of Peace" describes the United Nations [International Day of Peace](#), first observed in 1981. The theme for this year's Peace Day was "Climate Action for Peace", focusing on goal #13 of the sustainable development goals (click [here](#) to read more about the SDGs). Here in Billings, Montana, men and women gathered at an event hosted by the local chapter of the Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP) to celebrate the UN International Day of Peace on Saturday, September 21, 2019.

Although it was rainy and chilly outside, people were greeted with enthusiasm and warmth as soon as they walked into the meeting room. Peace-loving participants of all ages gathered together to observe this important day, which brought in our neighbors from the south side of Billings. It was an opportunity to invest in our local community and encourage a spirit of service and caring for others.



The entire world wants to live in peace, but when people are starved of spiritual and physical nourishment, in poor health, unable to afford necessities and struggle to find meaningful employment, they can become discouraged and depressed. Along with faith and education, investment and service in my community is essential. It makes the place I live in happier, safer and better. We all care about our families, our neighbors, safety in our community and our homes. In some ways this resembles water, a theme and metaphor for this peace meeting. Clean, pure water sustains life, but

muddy and impure water can threaten and harm those who use and drink it.

Bonnie Perkins donated her kidney because she believes in the Golden Rule!

Our guest speaker, Bonnie Perkins, inspired us with her story of selfless giving. Although she is mostly recognized in Billings as the "Sourdough Bagel" lady and gets up at 2 am to make traditional bagels, Bonnie has another passion: a philanthropic and courageous vision. She once read about someone who needed a kidney to live, and though she wasn't able to donate to that person, she decided to register as a kidney donor. Bonnie spoke to an attentive and highly engaged audience about what she gained because she donated her kidney to a stranger in California earlier this year.

In her talk, Bonnie encouraged people to find ways and means to respond to needs and give hope to others. To Bonnie, the Golden Rule means giving something of extreme importance that may inspire another person to give, and so the chain of giving continues. There were people among our guests that day who had lost family members due to kidney failure, and Bonnie's generosity, outgoing nature, courage

and enthusiasm were truly uplifting!

After this truly heart-warming message, it was time to spring into action and give participants the opportunity to serve. As representative of WFWP Montana, I introduced the idea of creating peace rocks by sharing a simple story. Mid-summer in 2018, I found some beautifully hand-painted stones in my garden. The caring of a stranger touched my heart. At the end of the summer they were gone. As I shared this story, one of our guests exclaimed, "Oh I know who did that. There were some put into my garden also." She loved it too!



Remembering how grateful and cared for I felt when I received this unexpected gift, I proposed that all the participants make their own hand-painted stones. For the next hour or so, everyone chose a theme to paint, picked out rocks, colors and brushes and painted "peace rocks." Alternating between buzzing conversations and the pin-drop silence of total focus, guests painted beautiful rocks. There were rocks with ladybugs, one with a stunning dragonfly and some with mountain scenes in the background and the words "Peace" in English and Japanese.

I suggested that we could put our "Peace Rocks" into service in one of the following ways:

- 1- Keep them so we always remember that "Peace Starts With Me,"
- 2- Give them away to someone to heal their heart and bring peace or
- 3- Secretly place one in a garden for a stranger, neighbor or friend to find and marvel at.

Even the youngest peace-makers enjoyed painting. Why not try it out yourself? All you need are brushes, paints, and some rocks.

After we shook the tension out of our hands and had admired everyone's rocks, we turned to the last activity: "Rivers to the Sea." As the topic was related to water, I first led an impromptu oral quiz. A classroom atmosphere took hold as chuckling, eager guests answered questions about why water is essential to life. Most people didn't know how much of the Earth's surface is covered with water (71%) or how long people can live without water (3-4 days). There was a lot of laughter and good-natured teasing and bonding. Someone had brought giveaway gifts, and right answers were rewarded with hand lotion!

After this, it was time for the water ceremony representing our unity. I read a dedication to invoke the Spirit of Peace before our "Sea" was joined to all the "Rivers" in the meeting. Some attributes of water are its ability to unify and flow freely from one place to another, take any form and clean whatever is put into it. To symbolically unite as individuals into a harmonious, common body, we each took half a cup of water, symbolizing a "River" and one by one poured it into our "Sea," a crystal bowl. Each person spoke about their intention to bring peace while they poured water into the bowl.

I had a remarkable time, and our guests did too! Perhaps you can join us next year, or you may want to observe UN Peace Day in your own community.