

Karl Grahek, who recently passed away, was a peace advocate who seemed to embody Pope Francis' spirit of peace by living this daily commitment.

He was born in Ely, Minnesota; was an educator in St. Paul and a member of the Twin Cities Slovenians.

Karl participated in his Social Justice committee at church and attended numerous meetings of the ECAPC (Every Church a Peace Church). Karl wrote numerous letters to our senators and representatives and supported those running for public office that had a peace agenda. His "peace agenda" was highlighted by his withholding of the federal "war" tax on his telephone bill. In addition he flew to Georgia and participated with 22,000 like minded peace activists in an effort to close the SOA (School of Americas) which trained many of the death squads active in Central and South America.

Karl along with the Twin Cities Slovenians have given financial support to the International Trust Fund (ITF) for the de-mining and victims assistance in Bosnia and Herzegovina with a view to assist that country in dealing with consequences of armed conflict, notably clearing of mine fields and rehabilitation of children and adults who have lost limbs as a result of these land mines. The ITF has recently expanded its activities so as to include areas of Croatia and Kosovo.

Slovenia is strongly involved in activities of the international community especially south-eastern Europe. It has taken an active part in a number of recent initiatives: Conclusion of the Convention on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty and Convention on the Prohibition of Anti Personnel Mines.



In conclusion Slovenia is well aware of the importance and the need to fight against poverty and of efforts to reduce differences in a world that faces the challenge of globalization. It hopes to allocate more resources for educational development and to raise public awareness that peace and security cannot be seen as separate national issues.

PEACE POLE: 19 community and service groups came together to build the Peace Pole in Ely; it is one of over 200,000 poles worldwide. The peace pole pictured on the front page has an inset photo of a peace pole located on the front lawn of Karl Grahek's home. It is partially covered with garland but the peace message is in Slovenian.

Footnotes

¹ Danilo Turk: *Slovenian officials Welcome EU's Nobel peace prize, October 13, 2012.*

² *Initiative for Peacebuilding: Slovenia and Peacebuilding, University of Ljubljana, September 2008, Vladimir Prebilic, PhD, Uros Svetec, PhD, Janja Vuga, BA.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *J. M. Silveyra, Padre Pedro, Apostle of Hope, A Hero for Our Times, 2013.*

⁵ *Excerpt from Paris MATCH magazine, June, 2005.*

⁶ *Madagascar America Foundation, 2013.*



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SLOVENIA

PEACE AMONG THE PEOPLE



Peace Pole, Whiteside Park, Ely, MN

"Naj Mir Zavlada Svetu"
May Peace Prevail on Earth

Throughout its history armed conflict has left an indelible mark on the Slovenian landscape. Slovenia declared its independence in 1991 from what was formerly called the country of Yugoslavia following a ten day war of secession. Since that time Slovenia joined the EU (European Union) and NATO and thus shared the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012 with the EU as recipient. Danilo Turk, the Slovenian President at the time stated, "the prize came to the right hands as the EU was the most successful peace project in the history of mankind."¹ Because of the current peaceful status of Slovenia, it can concentrate its efforts on "peace building" rather than "peacekeeping."

Peacekeeping implies military action; peace building takes a broader look at helping developing countries achieve economic and social progress. During its period of independence, Slovenia has transformed from a beneficiary of democracy-building assistance to a donor country. It has addressed the different forms of “frictions” within developing countries-unequal access to important resources, ethnic strife, unequal position of minorities and suppression of democracy. ²

Today, Slovenes freely remember the life and contributions of France Prešeren. Prešeren’s poem, “The Toast” written in the 1840’s has become Slovenia’s national anthem. The seventh stanza:



*God’s blessing on all nations,
Who long and work
for that bright day,
When o’er earth’s
habitations
No war, no strife
shall hold its sway;
Who long to see
That all men free
No more shall foes,
but neighbours be.*

Within the spirit of Prešeren’s poem, Slovenians have shown an appreciation for the diverse cultures in the world and a desire for world peace. One study estimated that some 900,000 Slovenian citizens representing half of the Slovenian population participate in nongovernmental organizations devoted to peace building such as humanitarian and development assistance as part of post conflict reconstruction or assistance in the event of natural and other disasters. ³

A symbol to the world who had devoted his

life to helping the poor, neglected and abused people with no rights and human dignity is PEDRO (PETER) OPEKA.

Father Opeka was born in Argentina of Slovenian refugee parents. He and his humanitarian association (AKAMASOA) has helped over 300,000 of the poorest of the poor in the African island country of Madagascar. ⁴

In 2013 he was nominated for the NOBEL PEACE PRIZE and has been compared to Mother Teresa. He has received numerous awards from churches, governments and service Organizations including the Kiwanis World Service Medal.

While in Madagascar he saw the extreme poverty in the slums of the city and discovered the degradation of the “garbage people” scavenging the garbage disposal hills to find something to eat or to sell. He was able to obtain some land and persuaded the group of the most destitute to leave the slums and trash hills and improve their lot by becoming farmers. Moreover, he taught men the skill of brick making and bricklaying which was used to build homes and buildings for villages in Akamasoa. The garbage people have achieved human dignity by means of hard work, developing self esteem and a sense of responsibility for themselves and for the entire community. In 2005 a visiting journalist from a French magazine described how 17,000 of Pedro’s people had been rescued from “slow death on the trash hills of Antananarive, Madagascar. Eight thousand were educated in the schools established by Pedro; 200,000 transients were helped with food, clothing and medical care at Akamasoa Welcome Center and another 23,000 villagers received help with their education. ⁵



In addition, the Akamasoa’s Welcome Center, which he founded - four maternity wards as well as four general hospitals



for the poor whom no one would treat were established and built in areas of the greatest need, from the capital city of Antannarivo, to remote isolated rural areas over 560 miles away where properly trained native staff, physicians, dentists, midwives and nurses would care for the Indigent patients. In 2012 at least 35,890 patients were treated. ⁶

Dr. Anton Strest, Archbishop of Ljubljana, Slovenia said, “ Peter Opeka is accomplishing for Madagascar what Mother Teresa accomplished for India.”

Dr. Jerry M. Linenger, MD, PhD, astronaut and author of the best selling memoir, “Of the Planet: Five Perilous Months Aboard Space Station Mir” stated, “ Padre Pedro’s life, his sacrifices on behalf of the poor... His determination that no child should ever be hungry and without education, and his leadership in the struggle for human brotherhood and peace are a wonderful source of inspiration.”

Twin Cities Slovenians: Peace Advocate Karl J. Grahek

In Pope Francis’ 2014, Christmas address he called for global peace and the end of violence in Syria and parts of Africa and urged atheists and followers of other religions to join together in this common cause. He said” True peace is not a balance of opposing forces; it is not a lovely facade which conceals conflicts and divisions, peace calls for DAILY COMMITMENT.”