

**The North Shore Choral Society
November 22, 2015**

Music of Peace

**Pre-concert talk by
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**Glenview Community Church
Glenview, Illinois**

Our theme today on the 80th anniversary celebration of the North Shore Choral Society is “Peace.” Peace is an abiding aspiration of all people, yet it is often difficult to achieve. From the violent conflicts among sectarian groups in the Middle East, to extremist acts of terror in Europe, to the conflicts in our own cities in the United States, it is difficult sometimes to see how to bring about the peace for which we all yearn.

My talk today will draw from the words and actions of peacemakers to focus on the role that Chicago has played over the past 80 years in efforts to bring about peace. To talk of peace, however, we necessarily focus on war, and I’ll be touching on how civic leaders and citizens have worked for peace during times of war. From World War II to the Cold War to the Vietnam War and the Iraq War, Chicago has been a crucible for peace. It has been a community for dialogue, for resistance to war, and for nurturing leaders for peace. From Jane Addams to the atomic scientists who created the first nuclear bomb to Martin Luther King and Vietnam War protestors in 1968 to Barack Obama and his opposition to the

Iraq War, these leaders have worked to bring peace both here and abroad.

In 1931, just four years before the founding of the North Shore Choral Society, Chicago community leader and director of Hull House, Jane Addams received the Nobel Peace Prize. As a social worker she understood how fragile are the bonds of community, and from her experiences in World War I saw how war destroyed the nurturing social fabric that children and the disadvantaged require to flourish. As President of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom from 1917-1929, she sought to revive the ideal of peace and fraternity among nations, after the terrible destruction of World War I, and called for general disarmament in 1931. It was Addams who first said, "True peace is not just the absence of war, it is the presence of justice." And she continued,

"Only in time of fear is government thrown back to its primitive and sole function of self-defense and the many interests of which it is the guardian become subordinate to that."

She went on,

"I believe that peace is not merely an absence of war but the nurture of human life, and that in time this nurture would do away with war as a natural process."

She died in 1935 -- the same year that the North Shore Choral Society was established.

In 1942 as war was raging in Europe, physicist Enrico Fermi and his team of scientists at the University of Chicago, produced the first self-sustaining atomic chain reaction. This demonstration, at the beginning of the Manhattan project, convinced the United States government that the explosive power of the atom could be harnessed to create an atomic bomb before the Nazis could accomplish that feat.

Even before the bomb was tested at Trinity, New Mexico, in 1945, however, those same Manhattan Project scientists at the University issued a memo to the Secretary of War, protesting the bombing of civilians in Japan and calling for the international control of atomic energy. They warned of a future nuclear arms race and foresaw the devastating effects that this altogether new technology would have. Immediately after the war, scientists at Chicago established the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* to warn the public about the catastrophic effects of nuclear weapons and to protest secrecy about the Bomb that would exclude the public from discussion about its uses. This was the beginning of the scientists' movement for nuclear disarmament.

During the Cold War, from the 1950s to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, many calls for peace were marginalized; the greater threat was the Soviet Union. Those who sought negotiations were thought to be communist sympathizers. But those in the scientists' movement continued to talk to Soviet counterparts through the

pages of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* and at international meetings called the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs. In fact, their work behind the scenes and in consultation with political leaders in the United States and the Soviet Union shaped arms control agreements in the 1960s and 70s and served to reduce the threats.

The scientists' influence was not enough, however. The protests of citizens, who learned about the presence of radioactive isotopes in baby's teeth and mother's breast milk, called for the end of nuclear weapons testing to protect their own communities in the United States. Among these groups was the Women Strike for Peace with an active Chicago chapter. Their protest in 1961 of some 50,000 across the country, helped bring about the Limited Test Ban Treaty of 1964.

During the Cold War, the United States was involved in a "hot" war in Vietnam that lasted a decade and caused major rifts in American society. It also produced the most successful peace movement in US history. Chicago again was at the center of the action. On March 25, 1967, Nobel Peace Laureate Martin Luther King, Junior, led 5,000 people down State Street to protest the war. King and his colleagues in the Southern Christian Leadership Council and the Congress of Racial Equality were working to end racial oppression—a silent war against black people. As did Jane Addams, they understood that true peace for African Americans could only be brought about with the presence of justice.

Dr. King also understood the connections between war overseas and problems at home. As he said at the March 25 rally, “Poverty, urban problems, and social progress generally are ignored when the guns of war become a national obsession.”

Just a little more than a year later, at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, protests against the Vietnam War were the center of attention at the convention and of protests in Grant Park. The pro-war candidate and then Vice President Hubert Humphrey, lost the presidential election, and the war began to wind down under the newly-elected Republican administration. The American public, led by the peace movement, had brought an end to the war in South East Asia.

As the Cold War waxed and waned over the 70s and 80s, Chicago was again in the headlines when in 1986, by a unanimous City Council vote (unprecedented at the time), Chicago became a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone. Chicago joined about 130 American communities in the United States and others in Europe working against the nuclear weapons build-up in the 1980s. With consistent pressure from citizen protests, leaders in the Soviet Union and the United States brought an end to the Cold War as the Berlin Wall fell in 1989.

But the work of peace was not complete. New conflicts erupted in the aftermath of the Cold War with violence and war, in

Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Kosovo, in central Africa, in Sri Lanka, Timor and elsewhere. To address these intrastate conflicts, the Parliament of World's Religions met in Chicago in 1993, on the centenary of the first such parliament, also in Chicago, in 1893. In the face of growing ethnic and religious strife in the world, that 1993 interfaith parliament emphasized the moral values that religions share at its conference entitled "Toward a Global Ethic: non-violence, just economic order, tolerance and truthfulness, and gender equality."

These 21st century conflicts among sectarian and religious groups were brought home to us in the September 11, 2001, attacks on American soil. And our government sought to deal with an emerging international radical group by invading Afghanistan to root out violent groups using terror to fight for their cause. The United States also invaded Iraq, an action that brought worldwide protests. And again, it was in Chicago at a 2003 rally to oppose the invasion of Iraq that a new voice was heard. A junior Illinois state senator, now President, Barack Obama, raised his voice with others to protest that war—that "dumb war" as he called it.

Today, in the aftermath of Ferguson, Missouri, Charleston, South Carolina and other sites of deadly attacks on black people, and in the spiral of violence in Syria and other parts of the Middle East, and in Paris, France, and Bamako, Mali, in recent days, we are

brought back to those words of Jane Addams: “True peace is not just the absence of war, it is the presence of justice.”

Chicago citizens and leaders have worked for peace for over 80 years. Whenever violent conflict has broken out, whether here or abroad, we have stood for negotiated resolution and justice. For as Martin Luther King said in his Nobel Peace Prize address,

“Violence is impractical because it is a descending spiral ending in destruction for all. It is immoral because it seeks to humiliate the opponent rather than win his understanding; it seeks to annihilate rather than convert. Violence is immoral because it thrives on hatred rather than love. It destroys community and makes brotherhood impossible. It leaves society in monologue rather than dialogue. Violence ends up defeating itself. It creates bitterness in the survivors and brutality in the destroyers.”

What is so remarkable about Chicago, its history and its people is that it has served as a crucible for war and peace. At one and the same time, it is the most racially segregated city in the country, and yet it is from our communities that the first black President in America emerged. Its scientists made possible the first atomic bomb—the most destructive technology on Earth—and yet it is the home of the scientists’ movement that works for

nuclear disarmament. From the very experiences of injustice and war, come practical visions of justice and peace.

Perhaps it is the very differences among us that somehow bring out the best in us. As Martin Luther King observed, "We have inherited a big house, a great "world house" in which we have to live together - black and white, Easterners and Westerners, Gentiles and Jews, Catholics and Protestants, Moslem and Hindu, a family unduly separated in ideas, culture, and interests who, because we can never again live without each other, must learn, somehow, in this one big world, to live with each other."

Peace is a process—not an end state.
As Jane Addams put it,
"We must also remember that peace has come to mean a larger thing. It is no longer merely absence of war, but the unfolding of life processes, which are making for a common development. Peace is not merely something to hold congresses about and to discuss as an abstract dogma. It has come to be a rising tide of moral feeling, which is slowly engulfing all pride of conquest and making war impossible."

It was on a day in March 1967, in Chicago, that Martin Luther King said,

“We must combine the fervor of the civil rights movement with the peace movement. ...We must organize for peace. We must speak out in a multitude of voices against cruel and senseless war.”

It is with a multitude of voices that the North Shore Choral Society sings out for peace today. By raising voices in harmony over these past 80 years, it has helped build a community to support peace.