

HISTORY OF THE BRIDGEWATER CELEBRATION FOR PEACE

The International Day of Peace was established in 1981 by the United Nations. It is held every year on or near September 21. As a way of observing this Day, many peace based Non-Governmental Organizations and individuals representing a wide variety of religious and spiritual traditions encourage worldwide 24 hour spiritual observations, nonviolence and global ceasefire on this date.

The Bridgewater Celebration for Peace began in Sept. 2005 as a 24 hour Peace Vigil. It was organized by members of First Parish Church of Bridgewater and Citizens for an Informed Community, a local peace advocacy organization. Other churches in Bridgewater and the area were invited to participate. These early vigils included spiritual practices from Buddhist, Hindu and Native American traditions as well as those of participating churches. A Peace Pole with plaques proclaiming "Let Peace Prevail on Earth" in several languages was placed on the front lawn of the church. Opening and Closing ceremonies were held there.

After the first few vigils, the group decided to expand to more of a Celebration for Peace as a way to engage broader participation. Over the years several traditions have arisen. Children and adults have gathered to create crafts and art work promoting peace - pinwheels, pennants and banners. These were then carried in a Peace Procession around the center of Bridgewater led by a large Peace Dove carried by four bearers. Several stops were made along the way for readings about peace from many traditions. This was often followed by the children playing Cooperative Games. At various times there have been plays such as "Sadako and the Thousand Cranes", Dances for Peace at the Bridgewater United Methodist Church in Bridgewater, and a Fire of Forgiveness ceremony. In the past few years activities also included a musical program "Playing for Peace".

Since the Sixth Annual Celebration we have worked in conjunction with Bridgewater State University (BSU) Department of Community and University Development. One year they held a Round Table Discussion on "World Peace in Thirty Years - How Do We Get There from Here?" International students participated in the Peace Pole Ceremonies, the BSU Diversity Department led a program on "Peace through Diversity" and a Communications Department profession produced a video on the "Right to Peace".

Through all this evolution, we have kept a commitment to seeking for peace in the heart, the home and the world.