



Herndon Friends Meeting

660 Spring Street
Herndon, Virginia 20170

March 9, 2009

Eight Fairfax County High School Students Earn 2009 Peace Awards

Fairfax, VA – If you ask any of the eight high school students who are this year’s recipients of a local annual Peace Award how each of us can make a difference in the world, they will tell you the key is to listen, make an effort to understand, and get involved. They would know. Living in Fairfax County, these young adults are steeped in diversity daily, where the melting pot of cultures at their schools can sometimes result in clashes. But through their commitment and compassion, each of these students has, in some way, made strides toward becoming an ambassador of peace. They volunteer in their communities, take workshops in peace-making, or serve as official student mediators to help resolve conflicts among their peers. Some raise money for local families in need and some write letters to their congressional representatives in support of human rights.

The students were honored at a reception on Sunday, March 8, at the Northern Virginia Mennonite Church in Fairfax. They include **Emily Neal** of Fairfax High School, **Natalie Lubsen** of Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology, **Madison Singer-Riske** of Lake Braddock Secondary School, **Ji Young Choi** of Woodson High School, **Binti Pathak** of Robinson Secondary School, **Sarah Zaazhoa** of West Springfield High School, **Freddy Parada** of Herndon High School, and **Lauren Martin** of South County Secondary School.

“Pursuers of peace come from many backgrounds,” Margaret Rogers said, one of the organizers from Herndon Quaker Meeting. “We invite other groups, both secular and non-secular, to join us in awarding this important honor each year to local students. The more who support this effort, the more deserving peacemakers we can recognize.”

Students were chosen based on four factors: demonstrated commitment to peace by engaging in activities that strive to end conflict either locally or globally; demonstrated efforts to discuss or otherwise resolve potentially controversial issues within the school or community in order to bring about positive resolutions to those issues; demonstrated efforts to promote the understanding of divisive issues and situations in order to bridge language, ethnic, racial, religious, or class differences; and demonstrated efforts to resolve conflicts among students or members of the community who feel isolated or alienated.

Chris Gilson, manager of the U.S. Peace Corps’ Mid-Atlantic Regional Office, addressed the group, encouraging the students to continue looking to each other for inspiration when it comes

to peace-making. “Inspiration is everywhere,” Gilson said, “But sometimes we get busy, and involved in other things, and inspiration can be easy to miss.” Gilson also suggested adding travel and learning languages to their peacemaking “tool kits.”

For the past four years, several area religious groups have pooled their resources to fund the Peace Award, the amount of which varies each year. This year’s participating groups included three Quaker Meetings (Langley Hill, Alexandria, and Herndon), as well as the Northern Virginia Mennonite Church, the United Christian Parish of Reston, and Accotink Unitarian-Universalist Church. Any civic or religiously affiliated group is invited to join in supporting the annual Peace Award. If interested, please contact Herndon Friends Meeting at 703-736-0592.