News > New Haven

IWagePeace walk in New Haven aims to stress peace and unity

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NEW HAVEN — It's not often hundreds of people stop off at a church, Islamic Center and Jewish spiritual center on the same stroll, but that's what will happen Monday after the 3rd annual IWagePeace walk leaves the Green at 6:30 p.m.

Those stops couldn't be more fitting for the occasion, a walk in which IWagePeace founder and President Bruce Barrett strives to bring Christians, Muslims, Jews and all faiths together to see the beauty in each other's humanity.

The walk also features former armed combatants from Combatants for Peace and peacemaking youth from Israel and Palestine to join hundreds in the walk from more than 35 faith-based communities and cultural groups.

The first two years, the event was held along the boardwalk in West Haven, drawing hundreds. This year, the event has expanded and will include New Haven Mayor John DeStefano Jr. and community groups such as Guns Down Books Up.

Rabbi Dana Bogatz of Congregation Sinai in Milford said moving out of West Haven onto New Haven's Green and the inclusion of other groups is a sign Barrett's movement is "gaining momentum."

"I think we always have to be exploring the possibility of peace," she said, adding that doesn't mean the "beleaguered" shouldn't have the right to fight.

Barrett said the hope is that such a get-together will celebrate and encourage active peacemaking between Israel and Palestine and here at home. He said peacemakers acknowledge the suffering and humanity of all sides, and pledge to work toward a just and peaceful solution to the conflicts.

"We do not see ourselves as enemies, but as friends with a common problem demanding our attention," Barrett said, adding the goal is for people to not "succumb to fear, hatred, and

harm," but rather be "drawn to goodness through our very public and common action together."

All who want to take part in the walk – everyone's invited – will meet on the New Haven Green beginning at 6 p.m., stop for a brief ceremony at the United Church on the Green, walk up Temple to Wall Street, stop at the Joseph Slifka Center for Jewish Life at Yale, then proceed down York and across Broad Street to Park, to Chapel, to Orchard streets and end at Masjid al Islam on George Street.

New Haven is closing the streets, providing a rolling blockade as the walk proceeds.

Aziz Amezzane, a member of New Haven Islamic Center in West Haven, who will serve as an interpreter for one of the Combatants for Peace from Palestine, said the evening is a great chance to walk next to people from different faiths and backgrounds.

"…To show people we're all the same. We have the same aspirations for our children. We want our children to live in peace," he said.

The Rev. Scott Morrow of North Haven Congregational Church said the people of his congregation really "value and appreciate," the opportunity to "come together around an issue in the world," such as peace that's complicated and filled with anguish.

And it's especially nice, he said, to do it with "people who are hopeful."

He said the same values are cherished by Christians, Jews and Muslims.

Morrow said they are particularly excited this year to have Kids for Peace join the walk. Members of the kids' group as well as Combatants for Peace, will address the crowd.

"I think all of us are naturally concerned for the welfare of children; we have a sense we want to watch out for them," Morrow said.

He said the kids who have suffered from war are a powerful reminder because when people see images of war, strife and conflict, they are usually of soldiers or leaders rather than kids and so there is a tendency to forget about the youngest victims.

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