

people/places/things

She has walked 25,000 miles for peace

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Special to

The Christian Science Monitor

Boston

"A pilgrim's job is to rouse people from their apathy and make them think," she declares.

She's been in the business for 25 years — ever since she retired. By 1964 she had trekked 25,000 miles in her personal pilgrimage for peace.

She calls herself Peace Pilgrim. Those around her seem to address her by the name "Peace" as though it were simply a name instead of the first word of a job description.

Peace says she averages 25 miles a day, or a bit less if she has speaking engagements. She moves with the seasons, she says, because people will only stop and talk if the weather is nice. Recently she walked through Boston.

In order to arouse curiosity and engage people in conversation she wears a navy-blue smock with "Peace Pilgrim" emblazoned on the front and "25,000 miles on foot for peace" on the back. When she began her journey she expected to spend most of her time just talking with people she met and urging them to work and pray for peace. But as her renown spread, she found herself plied with invitations to speak at high school classes, college seminars, and adult Sunday school classes.

Peace Pilgrim belongs to no specific church, nor does she adhere to any specific religion. She decided to read the Bible for the first time early in her pilgrimage because it looked like she would be asked to give sermons at churches as she traveled along. And in Jesus' teachings about love, she says, she recognized the ethic that she was trying to live.

One of her stops in Massachusetts was at the Boston Christian Community on Com-

monwealth Avenue. The small chapel was packed. She spoke to her audience with her back to the door, welcoming newcomers as they entered and interrupted her talk.

"Hello, I'm Peace Pilgrim," she would say, and shake their hands. Then she would stretch up on her tiptoes to look for empty chairs. "Let's see. I think there is a chair or two over here . . . or are there any more in the back? Good."

And her quiet delight enchanted the small crowd.

"Everyone needs a path of service," she declared. "If you don't have one, go out and get one."

Peace says that her hair had "already turned to silver" when she began her pilgrimage, but that she has not had an ache or a pain or a cold in forty years. "My good health began when I learned to live to give instead of to get," she said.

But, her audience wanted to know, wasn't she ever frightened? What about when she was walking alone in the dark? Or when she was hungry and cold?

"Well," she said, "I have no fear. You see, you are in great danger if you have fear. Because you attract to you the very things that you fear. I fear nothing and expect only good. And so to me, only good comes.

"And darkness is beautiful," she added. "God is in the night the same as in the day."

In the 25 years of her pilgrimage, only one person has ever struck her with the intent to hurt her. He was a disturbed teen-ager who had violently beaten his mother. While Peace was visiting the neighborhood, the boy said he wanted to go for a walk in some rugged hills nearby. Since no one else would accompany him, and he was afraid he would break a leg if he walked alone, Peace volunteered.

She says she knew that the quiet walk would do him good. But when a sudden thunderstorm descended upon them, the terrified young man came at Peace Pilgrim with fists flying.

She recalled: "This was my test, as to whether when confronted with an actual situation, I would be able to face hatred with love."

Rather than running, she says, she regarded the boy with compassion. He was stricken with remorse, and was never violent again.

"What are a few bruises on my body in comparison with the transformation of a human life?" she asks. And as though she had said it many times before: "Never underestimate the power of the way of love. It reaches the spark of good in the other fellow and disarms him."

Peace Pilgrim has walked through all of the 50 states, the 10 provinces of Canada, and through parts of Mexico. But she concentrates most of her efforts in the United States.

"I'm not nationalistic," she says. "I'm a citizen of the world, a member of the human family. But you see, we are such an influential nation in the world today, that insofar as we would turn in the direction of peace I honestly believe the world is likely to follow."



Peace Pilgrim: path of service