

Shawn Gauthier - Nov 2023 Let Peace be Their Memorial Ceremony

Opening Remarks:

Good afternoon, and welcome.

Welcome to this eighth annual Let Peace Be Their Memorial wreath-laying ceremony. We warmly welcome you all into this house of peace.

As we speak this day of peace, let us recognize the peoples who lived on these lands for thousands of years, before being displaced and harmed across generations through myriad forms of violence. As we speak this day of peace, let us acknowledge that if we long for the peace of the world, we must also seek to live in peace with the Indigenous peoples of this place, today, through the hard and ongoing work of reconciliation.

So, as we speak today of peace, let us acknowledge—with gratitude, humility, and commitment—that we gather on the unceded ancestral lands of the Coast Salish Peoples: the Musqueam, the Squamish, and the Tsleil-Waututh.

We gather this Remembrance Day, with the horrors of war and its terrible costs laid out before us yet again. We gather with people across the country and around the world who come together this day to remember, to weigh war's terrible toll, to honour the lives of those lost to war—including civilians—and to resolve to labour on in the cause of peace.

This work of peace-making endures, because the human family is so prone to forget. To forget, again and again, the price we always pay for violence. Du Fu, the Chinese poet of the 8th century said in his poem, **“Moonlit Night, thinking of my brothers”**:

Warning Drums have ended all travel.
A lone goose cries across autumn borderlands.
White Dew begins tonight,
This bright moon, bright there, over my old village.
My scattered brothers —
And no home to ask: *Are they alive or dead?*
Letters never arrive.
War comes, and goes—then comes like this again.

Because war come and goes and returns again, we gather this day to dare to tell a different story. We gather to strengthen our resolve to take the path of peace, remembering civilians the world over who have been killed in war and other conflicts, and lamenting the moral injuries of war, which sound their insidious echo down the ages.

May we, through the living of our lives, labour to make peace their memorial.

Thanks & Closing Remarks:

Thank you for being with us today. As you might imagine, a great deal of work goes into putting on an event like this. Vancouver Peace Poppies founders Denis Laplante & Teresa Gagné have asked me to express their gratitude to:

The Vancouver Unitarians for the use of our facility, for all the volunteers who helped create these special handmade wreaths, and for the support of our staff with the set-up, sound, and recording of the ceremony.

A special thanks goes to our emcee and volunteer coordinator Nan Gregory and her partner Don Griffiths whose ongoing support and encouragement have been essential.

As well, thanks to our many volunteer wreath-layers who are a vital part of the ceremony and who we thank for their time and commitment to building a better world.

And we are grateful for all of the songs and poetry that have always been an important part of social justice work, and so we thank our wonderful musicians: Jim Edmondson, Earle Peach, Fraser Union, the Re:Sisters, and poet Christopher Levenson for sharing their music and words with us again this year.

And, finally, speaking for us all, I want to express our deep gratitude to Denis Laplante & Teresa Gagné, for their tremendous efforts to create this event that calls us to live into the best of our humanity.

If this ceremony has moved you, we hope you will support next year's ceremony, with your time and energy, that this tradition may carry on and on, until there is an enduring peace in the world. Our organizers desperately need more help, particularly with the advance work of finding suitable wreath-layers and a keynote speaker. They also need help with volunteer coordination and publicity. If you are able to help in one of these areas please email info@peacepoppies.ca, or add your name and contact information to the Volunteer Help book out in the lobby.

Thank you, again, for being with us today. As we close, I leave you with words from Barbara Pescan:

Oh, Life,...

[Comfort] the poets and those who mourn.

Send peace for the soldiers who did not make the wars
but whose lives were consumed by them....

For the wounded ones, and those who received them back,
let there be someone ready when the memories come,
when the scars pull and the buried metal moves,
and forgiveness for those of us who were not there
for our ignorance.

And in us, veterans in a forest of a thousand fallen promises,
let new leaves of protest grow on our stumps.

Give us courage to answer the cry of humanity's pain
And with our bare hands, out of full hearts, with all our intelligence
let us create the peace [for which our hearts long.]