

News release

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(Photo attached, credit to Cathy Bolkcom)

Pacem in Terris Peace and Freedom Award recipient announced



Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, renowned for bridging Eastern and Western spirituality, is the 2015 Pacem in Terris Peace and Freedom Award recipient.

Traditionally, the honoree of this peace prize — based on the 1963 Pacem in Terris encyclical of Pope John XXIII -- journeys to Davenport to receive the award. However, because the 89-year old “Thay” (or Teacher) is recovering from a severe stroke, Bishop Martin Amos will travel to Deer Park Buddhist Monastery in southern California to present the award. A designee of Thay (pronounced “tie”) and his

visiting community of 120 Vietnamese monastics will accept the award on their leader’s behalf.

He is receiving the Pacem in Terris award Oct. 31, on the 50th anniversary year of Martin Luther King Jr.’s selection for the same award. The two religious leaders shared a peace and nonviolence bond that influenced the political climate in the late 1960s.

Thay wrote to King in 1965 asking him to publicly denounce the Vietnam War, which the American Civil Rights leader did in his famous 1967 speech at the Riverside Church in New York City. Earlier that year, King nominated Thay for the Nobel Peace Prize, referring to him as “an apostle of peace and non-violence.”

As Thay’s peace efforts escalated, so did the risks, and he was forced to flee Vietnam in 1966 after an assassination attempt. Thay harnessed his exiled status to reconcile Eastern and Western political and spiritual challenges in an effort to realize his lifelong commitment to universal peace and justice.

He was chosen to represent the Buddhist Peace Delegation for the Paris Peace talks in 1969, which resulted in the signing of the 1973 Paris Peace Accords but also cemented his exile from Vietnam.

In 1976 Thay attended the World Conference on Religion and Peace in Singapore where he witnessed the plight of the Vietnamese refugees (Boat People), and organized efforts to rescue them.

In 1982, Thay founded Plum Village near Bordeaux, France, which has grown to four interconnected monasteries. He also founded three monasteries in the United States, and two in Vietnam (which have been suppressed by the Vietnamese government). At the monasteries, deep listening makes the teachings on compassionate action accessible and alive.

Back in the U.S., Thay led peace walks in 2005 and 2007 to address racial tension in Los Angeles. Also in 2007, he organized and conducted “Great Chanting Ceremonies” intended to mindfully bind the remaining wounds from the Vietnam War. More recently, he sent delegates to the 2014 Conference on Slavery and Human Trafficking.

Until his illness, Thay continued to travel the world, conferring with political and religious leaders, enlisting their support in pursuit of lasting world peace. In a 2013 news release from the Plum Village Monastics, Thay reflected: “On the altar in my hermitage in France are images of Buddha and Jesus, and every time I light incense, I touch both of them as my spiritual ancestors.”