

The New York Times

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 1982

Why Peace Sites?

By LOUIS KOUSIN

IN THE winter of my life, my main concern has been how to keep my feet warm. But shortly after retiring in mid-1980, I realized that there were larger issues than my feet.

This was made apparent by an increasing dread of a nuclear war. The awareness was sharpened by the birth of my first grandchild, a little bundle of joy named Leah (for my mother).

What assurance did Leah, along with millions of other children, have about growing up in a threatening world?

Sometimes, the mix of concern and anxiety can trigger a corrective response. The problem was: How can one deal with such an awesome problem in a creative, positive way?

It occurred to me that military sites dot the landscape, not only in our own country, but also in a considerable part of the world. It then occurred to me that a natural antonym for military sites could be peace sites.

Where and how could such sites be established?

The most obvious places are, of course, in existing institutions in every town, city and part of our country. In brief, where you pray, where you play, where you study, where you work and where you live.

These institutions are places where people gather in peaceful pursuits. So why not try to dedicate them as permanent peace sites, places where

education for peace, programs and plans for peace, such as the nuclear-freeze campaigns, can be initiated, reinforced and expanded?

The kernel of the idea led me to the state headquarters of New Jersey SANE in Montclair for a conference with Dorothy Eldridge, the director of SANE here for more than 30 years. Her reaction led to a meeting with the organization's state committee and its unanimous approval in mid-1981.

Using New Jersey as a pilot test project, we undertook to seek a goal of 20 peace sites. These would be followed, if successful, by a plan for similar goals of 20 such sites in other states. In all, a national goal of 1,000 peace sites.

With the aid and cooperation of a very small staff, the process and then a philosophy of the peace-site conception began to emerge.

The original proposal and descriptive material were sent to prospective community institutions in New Jersey, and dedication of the first peace site took place with a brief ceremony in October 1981. By the end of the year, there will be at least 12 such sites in the state.

The process involved personal meetings with key leaders and social-action committees, board meetings and final approval by administrative bodies, a deliberate but productive procedure.

As of now, there are eight specific peace sites, including Ethical Culture Societies in Maplewood-South Orange and Teaneck, the Roman Catholic Church of Our Lady of Sorrows in Jersey City, a professional building in Livingston, a Unitarian Church in Wayne, a storefront peace center in

Highland Park, a synagogue in Union County and a Y.W.C.A. in Montclair.

At least four more sites, including a university and another Unitarian Church, are positive prospects by the end of the year.

An encouraging portion of this project has been the enlistment of support from national religious and community-center agencies. (These include the Y.W.C.A., the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the World Federalists.)

Other groups cooperating include the Peace Office of the American Friends Service Committee, the Unitarian Universalists, the United Presbyterian Church, the United Church of Christ, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Newark, Archbishop Thomas Gumbleton of the Detroit Diocese and president of Pax-Christi U.S.A., the American Ethical Union and National SANE.

A national campaign will require the enlistment of peace emissaries in each state. To date, we have enlisted them in California, Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

To balance our efforts here, preliminary inquiries are being made in England, West and East Germany and the Netherlands. Proposals to be addressed to foundations for the support of a national peace-site staff are under way.

In essence, we are trying to apply in principle what the late Gen. Omar N. Bradley declared on his retirement:

"The central problem of our time is how to employ human intelligence for the salvation of mankind."

It begins to look like the peace-site idea is one whose time has come. And my feet are much warmer from marching. ■

Louis Kousin, peace-site coordinator for New Jersey SANE, lives in Cranford.