



Deliberative Dialogue
What does it take to build peace in the community?
A Woman's Perspective
July 9, 2009

Panelists: Shirley Spencer; Jari B. Faulkner; Dr. Gerda Govine; Stella Murga; Tami Devine; Ashley Phillips; Miriam Mendez; and Yvette McDowell.

The July Deliberate Dialogue held at the Western Justice Center asked community members "As a woman, what does it take to build peace in the community?" Eight women panelists were taken through a fact pattern that led to discussion concerning the role gender played when a woman was in a leadership position trying to build peace in her community. Among the women panelists, the consensus proved to be that women have different tools they can use to build peace but that they are only half of the solution. While different, the role that men and women play in building peace is necessary and vital to the process.

In this particular fact pattern, a city's first ever woman mayor has just been elected. There was a consensus that fear and expectation would be a part of the woman's experience if things were not going well for the city while she was in power. The fear would be brought from people afraid of the "new", and who would not like seeing things done in a different way, while the expectation would come from people wanting the first woman mayor to be a role-model and to "not mess it up for the rest of us".

As the first woman mayor, many agreed that this fact alone spoke to the community's demand for change and a willingness to try something new. With the community support she would be able to use her skills as a woman to build bridges in the community and collaborate to make needed changes. Most thought that as a woman, a particular skill set she might possess would be the ability to bring all voices to the table in trying to solve city problems. As a woman, the ability to care about all sectors of the community would be taken into consideration instead of following a particular path taken by the men before her which might have relied more on a force dominated solution. However, her strength would lay in the fact that as the first woman elected to being mayor people were craving a change and would be willing to stand behind that change. This had less to do with her being a woman, but more as an agent of change that needed to be helped to succeed.

In the end, it seemed not to matter so much what a woman could do to build peace *differently* from a male, but what could be done together as people dedicated to building peace. It was acknowledged that there is no "best" way to build peace from a gender standpoint, as many men share the "feminine" traits of compassion, sensitivity and collaboration so often attributed to female peacemakers. Building peace, as a woman, means taking the lessons learned from life, looking through her particular life lens and taking the different experiences to bring her own unique skills to the table. Being a woman does not necessarily make her a peacemaker or give her added worth to the peacemaking process, but the life experiences she has gained by being a woman and a human being involved in building peace is what can make her skills invaluable to the process. Gender matters when the process is acknowledged.