



## Our Distinguished Board of Directors

In each of our *Peacebuilder* issues we will feature one of our extraordinary and illustrious members of our [Board of Directors](#). For the first issue, we feature the Chair of our Board, the Hon. Dorothy W. Nelson.



**Judge Nelson** always wanted to be in a profession that serves other people and decided that as a lawyer, she would have the training and skills to bring about real change in society and assist others.

Judge Nelson received her bachelor's degree in political science from the University of California at Los Angeles in 1950, and in 1953, she earned her law degree from UCLA School of Law. For her first job out of law school, she worked as a research associate at the University of Southern California Law School. Judge Nelson went on to receive her Master of Law degree from the USC Law School. *The following year she joined the school's faculty to become USC's first woman law professor.* Judge Nelson was named USC Law School's interim Dean in 1967 and Dean in 1969, becoming the first woman Dean of a major American law school. After Judge Nelson served ten years as Dean, President Jimmy Carter appointed her to the United States Court of Appeals for the 9th Judicial Circuit in 1979. She assumed senior status on the court in 1995.

Judge Nelson was one of the early proponents of alternative dispute resolution and believed that mediation was a viable alternative to litigation. As a member of the Baha'i Faith, she believes that one of the best ways to resolve conflict is through consultation or mediation rather than the adversary system, and began teaching about mediation, arbitration and other forms of appropriate dispute resolution in the early 1960's.

As interim Dean, Judge Nelson helped establish the dispute resolution center at USC Law School, and while Dean, helped to establish the Western Center on Law and Poverty (in conjunction with UCLA and Loyola Law Schools); the Chicano Law Center; the Center on Law and Aging (with the UCLA School of Gerontology); and the Center for Preventive Law, among others.

In 1985, Judge Nelson and a group of prominent judges and lawyers from the 9th Circuit established the [Western Justice Center Foundation](#). This group of visionaries, including, Chief Judge (James R.) Browning and Judge (Anthony M.) Kennedy (now a U.S. Supreme Court Justice) did not focus only on the court system. They sought also to examine the needs of people in communities, organizations and businesses who find themselves in conflict and they conceived of a center to bring together organizations that are widely dispersed, promote collaborative work and research.

Judge Nelson's enthusiasm for the work continues, "It is wonderful to be associated with an organization that is dedicated to the peaceful resolution of conflict in schools, communities and the courts. The Western Justice Center Foundation welcomes collaborations that will help us to create more opportunities for unity and dignity in society."

Judge Nelson is married to the Hon. James Nelson who retired after serving on the Los Angeles County Court bench for over twenty years. The Nelson's are long-time residents of Pasadena who are well known for their contributions in the community.