

**The Rev. Dr. Robert Cotton Fite
Receives
The Rev. Michael Yasutake Peace and Justice award for 2017**

My name is Joy, and it is my privilege to present the Yasutake award on behalf of the Peace and Justice Committee of the Episcopal Diocese of Chicago. The award recognizes individuals whose lives and witness manifest the values of the prophet priest The Rev. Michael Yasutake --

- A commitment to the gospel message of justice, nonviolence, and peacemaking;
- A willingness to engage the 'other' and embrace the cause of the oppressed.
- An ability to take risks to witness to the Gospel.

Loss and grief touch this moment since we present this award posthumously. **The Rev. Dr. Robert Cotton Fite** died on August 15, of this year. Those who knew him best would attest to the truth that the only thing harder than living in a world without Cotton Fite, would be living in a world that had never known Cotton.

Priest Associate at St. Luke's, Evanston for nearly 40 years, his primary vocation was pastoral therapist, and Director of the Pastoral Counseling Center at Lutheran General Hospital in Park Ridge, IL. Cotton was always a ready resource for parish clergy trying to understand how to be appropriate mental health professionals within our own vocations. A healing, charming presence, a kind soul, a quick wit, an astute preacher, and a great friend; a commitment to holding people and causes in prayerful contemplation each day marked his witness in our midst.

Then Cotton retired -- and his vocation was transformed: from the work of healing persons, to the work of healing the world.

With his friend, and ours, Newland Smith, he established the Palestine Israel Network, as an action group of the Episcopal Peace Fellowship. PIN was born out of the baptismal promise to "strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being" and the 2005 call of Palestinian civil society for the nonviolent boycott, divestment, and sanctions campaign.

Cotton became an unwavering spokesperson for a peaceful and just resolution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Since 2003 when he made his first trip to Israel-Palestine, he devoted himself with much passion and intense persistence to active engagement in the Palestinian struggle for justice -- educating, leading workshops, and speaking to congregations and groups both locally and nationally on this issue.

He was among the founding members of Kairos USA and a staunch supporter of the educational resource *Steadfast Hope: The Palestinian Quest for Just Peace* -- a group study offered by EPF to provide basic understanding of Israeli and Palestinian narratives, a history of the conflict and an awareness of factors being played out in the current situation. It helped change minds and hearts, and raised awareness in our churchy circles. I saw that first hand when we offered the study at the Cathedral.

Cotton's prophetic witness was grounded in relationships, with all who partnered in the work of peace and justice in Palestine and Israel, with any who would venture into new understandings in the company of others, with new friends in an ancient place and old friends here at home.

He embraced this complex and provocative issue with conviction, always asserted with a capacity to hear another's point of view. He spoke out at General Convention and at our own Diocesan Convention, and argued the case of justice to prelates, priests, and all the baptized, always gracious even as he made many uncomfortable. He sold us Palestinian olive oil, and led study groups. He marched and protested, wrote letters and made calls, organized dinners and events.

He graced the pulpit at St. James Cathedral, and through his relationships brought us Naim Ateek, Palestinian Anglican priest, and liberation theologian, and Brant Rosen, reformed Rabbi, here in Chicago, to preach us to new possibilities and bolder hopes for our beautiful and broken world.

Again, Cotton lived his conviction that relationships are at the heart of a healed world. He was in his eighth year as chair of Seraj Library Project, which partners with rural Palestinian villages to create accessible, quality libraries for villagers of all faiths. Seraj's mission is: [1] educate the American public about the Occupation, [2] provide tangible resources for the Palestinian people, [3] support those who, despite repeated failures to create a just peace, live and act in hope.

News of Cotton's death brought heartbroken messages from around the Diocese, around the country, around the globe. This award and testimony asserts that the good news of Cotton's life and witness invites you and me to continue his work of healing the world.

Presented by: The Very Rev. Joy E. Rogers, Retired Dean, St. James Cathedral, Diocese of Chicago. Joy is a member of the Peace and Justice Committee of the Diocese. "Cotton has been my friend for over 30 years. While I was Dean at St. James, Cotton's efforts forged connections between my congregation and folk who were at the forefront in the justice quest for Israel/Palestine."