

Gandhi's grandson visits Auburn

By Lee Strong
Senior staff writer

In 1991, Arun Gandhi, the grandson of Mohandas K. (Mahatma) Gandhi, was asked to be the keynote speaker at a Seattle, Wash., gathering of the National Coalition Against Malicious Harassment.

The coalition of minority groups had formed to present a united front against neo-Nazis and racist groups.

But as the gathering began, Gandhi found the organizers huddled together, discussing ways of ejecting from the conference several well-known Ku Klux Klan members were seated in the front row.

"I said, 'No, don't do that, you will make them martyrs,'" Gandhi recalled in a March 2 telephone interview with the *Catholic Courier*. "You should invite them to participate. Welcome them to the podium to participate in the discussion. Tell them, 'You are a minority, too.'"

The organizers followed his advice, Gandhi reported. "The Klans people were so terribly embarrassed they slunk out of the auditorium," he added.

The incident was a small one, but it illustrates Gandhi's contention that the only way to deal effectively with prejudice, hate and violence is through love and nonviolence.

"One of the things we must remember is we can't cure hate with hate, we can't put an end to violence with violence," Gandhi said in the telephone interview. "We can only respond to hate with love, to violence with nonviolence. That is the only effective way to respond."

On March 6, Gandhi visited Cayuga Community College in Auburn to share these and similar insights in an address and a workshop on ways of dealing with anger. The theme of his talk was, "Why the King and Gandhi dreams remain unfulfilled."

The visit was sponsored by a number of groups, including Finger Lakes Social Ministry, the Finger Lakes Cluster, and Sacred Heart, St. Alphonsus, St. Francis of Assisi and St. Mary's parishes.

Gandhi's education in dealing with violence and prejudice came as a child growing up in South Africa in the early 1940s. There, he was a target of prejudice at the hands of both whites and blacks — and he wanted to respond.

"I wanted to do what you are normally taught to do — an eye for an eye justice," Gandhi recalled during his *Courier* interview.

Instead, Arun's parents sent him to his grandfather in India to learn how to deal with anger from a man whose name has become synonymous with nonviolent action.

"We think anger is a very bad thing,



Submitted photo

Arun Gandhi

we should suppress it," Gandhi said. "He told me that anger is very good — it is fuel that can motivate things."

But in order for anger to be a fuel rather than a source of destruction, Gandhi continued, "You must train your mind, train your body."

As a result of his time with his grandfather, Gandhi learned ways to channel his anger. He became a journalist, but by the 1960s found himself working on behalf of the "untouchables," members of the lowest Indian caste and the objects of prejudice.

In 1987, after successful efforts in India and South Africa to deal with prejudice and hate, Gandhi came to the United States to study racism here.

"One of the things that came out of our studies is that we should try to help people here understand what we did in South Africa and India," Gandhi said.

So in 1991, he founded the M.K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence in Memphis, Tenn. Through the institute, he conducts workshops in schools, government agencies and businesses on

dealing with violence and anger.

Gandhi was familiar with some of the racial incidents in Auburn in recent years, including an attempted neo-Nazi rally on Sept. 25, 1993, that ended up with counter protesters attacking the neo-Nazis.

Such a violent response to violence "just exacerbates the problem," Gandhi said. "You only make matters worse — you don't cure the problem or resolve the problem."

In the face of the rally, he suggested, a better response might have been to pray silently along the march route.

He also cited the response of people in Billings, Mont., a few years ago when neo-Nazis began harassing Jews who put up menorahs in their windows for Hanukkah.

The people of Billings could have confronted the neo-Nazis. Instead, Gandhi reported, they "decided everybody was going to put menorahs on their windows. Eventually, the neo-Nazis gave up."

Just as violence does not work to counter hate, Gandhi also asserts that legislation is not sufficient.

"The law can take you only half the way," Gandhi said. "The other half, the people themselves have to reach out."

Indeed, Gandhi said, one of the failures of the Indian nonviolence movement in the 1940s and the U.S. civil-rights movement in the 1960s was that once laws were passed to promote and protect rights, people stopped their efforts — resulting in the increased racial tensions today.

"You have to continue the work, continue the revolution at a different level," Gandhi said. "After you get the laws, you have to move off and work with the people."

To succeed against violence, prejudice and hate in society, Gandhi concluded, "we have to begin to change our own attitudes and anger. We have to find intelligent ways to deal with these things."

Guitarist's performance to assist Catholic school

AVON

Ralph Louis, a noted area guitarist and music instructor, will perform "A History of the Guitar" Through Performance on Thursday, March 16, at 7 p.m., in St. Agnes School, 60 Park Place.

Louis will present solo versions of guitar pieces taken from classical, original, ragtime, blues and jazz music.

Admission is \$5 for adults, and free for children. Proceeds will benefit St. Agnes School.

For information, call Louis at 716/243-4055, or the school at 226-8500.

Discussions scheduled for Christians and Jews

Four Sunday-afternoon discussion sessions on Christians and Jews have been scheduled for 4 p.m. March 12, 19 and 26 and April 2 at the Jewish Federation Building, 441 East Ave.

Topics to be covered are: "What does it mean to be (what I am)," March 12; "Marriage and intermarriage," March 19; "Death rituals and etiquette," March 26; and, "Liberation, resurrection and human destiny," April 2.

The Catholic discussion leaders will be Father Joseph Brennan, Deacon Brian McNulty, Joan Workmaster, director of liturgy for the Diocese of Rochester, and Father Joseph Hart.

The sessions are free and open to the public.

Central America is topic of March 9 Elmira forum

ELMIRA — Social justice in Central America will be the topic of a Downtown Public Forum on Tuesday, March 14. The gathering is slated for noon to 1 p.m. at the First Baptist Church Activity Center, corner of Church and Main streets.

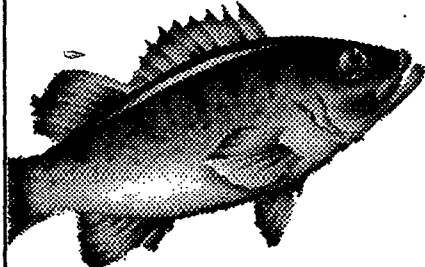
The guest speaker will be Peter Ladley, a member of the Chemung County-based Peaceworks group. He will give a presentation entitled, "Land and Hunger: Our Link with Central America." The meeting will also include a video, "The Roots of Rebellion," which addresses the impact of inequitable land distribution in Central America.

March 2nd ASH WEDNESDAY BEGINS THE LENTEN SEASON!

In conjunction with this special time of year, The Catholic Courier will feature weekly a section devoted to Lenten Dining.

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