VIEWPOINT

Working Together For Peace

by the Rev. H. Paul Santmire
Chaplain, Wellesley College

To say that this is a time of uncertainty is to say something true. We all feel this deeply. Where do we go from here? Especially the hundreds and thousands of us, in this area and across the country, who want to work actively for peace in the world. What do we do now? What can we do?

But there's a prior question, I think. Will we work for peace together? This is a decisive question, since the drift of our world is not automatically toward peace. On the contrary, anyone who knows anything about history knows that the drift has always been toward conflict and war -- unfortunately, but true. So the forces for peace have to work together. If everybody goes off in his corner and plays his own music, not wanting to be associated with the other guy, the result will be just a lot of noise.

Now not everyone will choose to work actively for peace in the same way. Indeed there are a variety of tasks open to all of us. So, although we must have unity, we will also want to recognize, and I would say, welcome the reality of diversity. But accepting that diversity, and not being discouraged by it or not being led to squabbling by it, isn't always easy to do. We sometimes can't see, right off, how different instruments can play different notes and all end up playing harmoniously.

Perhaps a familiar story will help to clarify matters. In the early part of this century a ship of astounding proportions was constructed. It was the largest and the most luxurious and the most powerful passenger liner ever built. All the resources of the technology of its time were employed to make it the safest ship afloat. Or so people said. It was constructed with a double bottomed steel hull. And this was divided into 16 watertight compartments. The liner weighed 46,000 tons. It was unsinkable. It was called, as we all know, the Titanic.

On the night of April 14, 1912 the liner was steaming along at the speed of 22 knots, very fast for existing conditions. It was following a northern route across the Atlantic. At about midnight it crashed into an iceberg, which ripped a 300 foot gash in its side. The Titanic began to sink, while the more than 2000 persons aboard began to seek out the 1000 or so lifeboat spaces. There had been no

people who starved to death today in Biafra. Population explosion. Revolution of rising expectations. Brutal warfare, throughout the world. The suppression of freedom in Czechoslovakia; the thoroughgoing destruction of the country and the people of Vietnam, with countless American lives as well. This continues, notwithstanding the peace talks. I could mention more. The suffering and turmoil in our inner cities. The pollution of our environment. And most threatening of all, the arms race; continued nuclear proliferation, and the possibility that the whole world is now sailing squarely into thermo-nuclear disaster.

With so many icebergs, and with the speed so dangerous, the time to work in concert for peace is now, before it's too late. But notice: not everyone will choose to play the same part. Most will work in established ways, I would imagine. And they should. We can work to get the captain to change the course, for example: to chart a more southerly course, where there aren't so many icebergs. Or we can work to have an oceanic service force developed and supported -- call this maybe a United Nations peace force -- to chart the icebergs and to inform the various ships where the icebergs are. Or we can work to get a law passed that a ship must always have an alert radio operator on duty, so that if an accident should happen we won't be caught sleeping. And so on.

But I think there's a place for a few men of conscience, to play what at first seems to sound like a sour part, should circumstances call them forth. Let's imagine, for example, what might have happened if a group of people had picketed the ship Titanic before it left port, perhaps with signs saying, "This Ship Will Follow a Disastrous Route," perhaps singing and shouting, "Unsafe, unsafe, unsafe." Maybe enough people would have been roused, to prevent the disaster.

Or let's even imagine a few people on board suddenly realizing that the ship was going much too fast through dangerous waters. What if they had decided to obstruct the progress of the ship in some non-violent way? What if they had gathered at a certain point and suddenly yelled, "Man overboard. Man overboard." Then the ship would have slowed down. Then

Nine," a group composed mainly of priests and Roman Catholic laymen and laywomen. Last May these reputable citizens of Church and State burned some Federal Draft Records with homemade napalm. They have now been sentenced to jail, a fate they anticipated and did not seek to escape. They burned those draft records with a deep love for the people of the world. I think it would be a tragic misunderstanding if we would write them off as so many law-breakers.

Listen to what one of them had to say, the priest Daniel Berrigan: "Our apologies, good friends, for the fracture of good order, the burning of paper instead of children. . . We could not, so help us God, do otherwise. For we are sick at heart, our hearts give us no rest for thinking of the Land of Burning Children." These noble men, and others like them, are saying to our Titanic society and to our Titanic world, with profound urgency: "Slow down. Change your course. Disaster is almost upon us."

It seems to me, then, that now as never before, all of us who feel deeply the need for peace in the world, must work actively together. But let's not squabble among ourselves, especially about the few who have chosen the arduous way of civil disobedience. Discordant as they may sound at first, they have a part to play too.

Maybe, then, one day we will finally hear strains of the joyous, harmonious music of peace from all over the world. Maybe we will be spared the horrible music of the band playing while the Titanic sinks. It could be. If each one of us has the will to make it so.