

Soulforce™ History, Purpose and Goals

SoulFORCEä , Inc.

An interfaith movement working to stop spiritual violence perpetuated by religious teachings and policies against gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons. We teach and apply the nonviolent principles of M.K. Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr.

Soulforce™ Inc., Our History

In 1994, with the publication of his autobiography, *Stranger at the Gate: To Be Gay And Christian In America*, Dr. Mel White became an activist almost accidentally. The sudden, unexpected interest in his story by *60 Minutes*, *Larry King Live*, the *Washington Post* (and an avalanche of media across the nation) catapulted Mel into the front lines of a war being waged against gay and lesbian Americans by powerful religious and political forces. He had no training or experience in activism. He didn't know there were rules for doing justice nonviolently, rules established in the heat of battle by leaders of the great nonviolent justice movements.

That same year, Dr. White was installed as dean of the Cathedral of Hope Metropolitan Community Church in Dallas, Texas. As the number of gay men murdered in Texas increased, so did his anger and frustration. He struggled with an unsettling reality that the primary sources fueling the violence and hatred of these children of God were Christian brothers and sisters he had known and loved.

For two years, Mel tried to dialogue with Christians whose anti-gay rhetoric sanctioned and led (directly and indirectly) to the suffering and death of God's lesbian and gay children. Among them were people he knew well, many of them his old ghostwriting clients--Billy Graham, Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, D. James Kennedy. He wanted these media preachers to understand the terrible human consequences of their anti-gay message. They refused to see him. Finally, in 1994, Dr. White wrote to his new friends, "It's hopeless. I'm not even going to try to contact them anymore."

One week later, Lynn Cothren, Coretta Scott King's personal assistant, warned Mel in a letter from the King Center that he had broken a primary rule for doing justice non-violently. Giving up on his adversary was "an act of violence." When he admitted that he didn't know there were such "rules," Lynn pointed him gently to the teachings of Martin Luther King, Jr. King pointed him to Gandhi, and Gandhi and King both pointed him back to the life and teachings of Jesus and the Jewish prophets.

During his early years as an attorney in South Africa, M.K. Gandhi, a Hindu, was deeply moved by the teachings of Jesus, Thoreau, Tolstoy, and Ruskin. "The Sermon on the Mount," says Gandhi, "went straight to my heart." Determined to reduce 'principles into practice,' Gandhi created Satyagraha: a plan of action (a) for the development of our inner lives and (b) for the transformation of society. Gandhi developed and refined his 'truth force' or 'soul force' principles while leading justice movements in South Africa (1893-1915) and India (1915-1948).

While a student at Crozer Theological Seminary, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. discovered Gandhi's 'soul force' rules and used them to shape his own nonviolent civil rights movement in America (1955-1968). "While the Montgomery boycott was going on," King writes, "India's Gandhi was the guiding light of our technique of nonviolent social change...Nonviolent resistance had emerged as the technique of the movement, while love stood as the regulating ideal. In other words, Christ furnished the spirit and motivation, while Gandhi furnished the method."

In 1998, after spending four years researching the lives and teachings of Gandhi and King, Dr. Mel White and his partner, Gary Nixon, launched Soulforce™ Inc. to study, teach, and apply the "soul force" principles of relentless nonviolent resistance in the struggle for justice by sexual and gender minorities. "We are people of faith from every possible faith tradition," White explains. "And we are determined to help end this unholy war being waged by religious leaders against God's gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender children."

SOULFORCE™, Inc. Our Purpose

1. To research, systematize, and apply the "soul force" principles of Gandhi and King to the current struggle for justice for God's lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender children.

For the past two years, Soulforce™ volunteers have worked to systematize the "soul force" principles of Gandhi and King and to apply them specifically to the struggle for justice for sexual and gender minorities. Gandhi alone left 127 volumes of collected writings to be analyzed and applied. The writings of King, Dorothy Day and other nonviolent justice activists in the U.S. offer invaluable assistance in understanding and applying Gandhi's ideas in this new century.

2. To assemble an archive of "soul force" resources including books, articles, video and audiotapes, pamphlets and letters related to Gandhi, King, and other theorists and practitioners of "soul force";

The Soulforce™ team has already assembled a major Gandhi/King/"soul force" collection with hundreds of books, articles, audio and videotapes. Another primary goal for this new non-profit corporation is to acquire and assemble one of the world's great collections on nonviolence and to see that the collection is widely and effectively used.

3. To introduce the "soul force" principles to people of faith, university students, and justice activists through lectures, workshops, and seminars;

In the past three years Soulforce™ volunteers have presented the principles of relentless nonviolent resistance to gatherings of people of faith, university students, professors, and justice activists in 35 states and more than 100 cities. Our current budget helps underwrite these presentations in schools, churches, synagogues, and community centers with inadequate financial resources to fund these visits by our Soulforce™ team.

4. To organize and train volunteer Soulforce™ teams across the country that will apply the "soul force" principles to their local, regional, and national struggles for justice and against injustice;

Across the U.S., there are primary centers or sources of misinformation about gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender Americans. Under the auspices of Soulforce, volunteers recruit and train "truth and reconciliation teams" in each of these areas to make friendly contact with these religious leaders and work to negotiate understanding and eventual reconciliation.

5. To produce print and media (audio and video) materials useful in presenting the Soul Force principles;

The "soul force" principles of Gandhi and King are unexplored territory for most Americans. Soulforce™, Inc. underwrites the production and distribution of free and low-cost materials to help present and apply Soul Force to the nation's current struggle for justice, not just for lesbians and gays, but for all who suffer injustice. In just two years, we have produced and distributed over 50,000 copies of our five primary videos.

SOULFORCE, Inc., Our Goals

- I. Help stop spiritual violence* by religious organizations against the GLBT community.
- II. Help replace that attitude of judgment and exclusion with full and unqualified acceptance of sexual and gender minorities.
- III. Help those who suffer from that spiritual violence to see themselves as children of God fully accepted as they are by their loving Creator.
- IV. Help recruit, train, and mobilize our GLBT sisters and brothers to help stop spiritual violence guided by the principles of relentless nonviolent resistance.

*Examples of spiritual violence include:

- a. Claiming that our lives are "sick and sinful" (Baptist and other fundamentalist Christian churches), "incompatible with Christian teaching" (United Methodist and other more liberal Christian churches), "objectively disordered" and "intrinsically evil" (Roman Catholic teaching)
- b. Refusing to ordain us and thus finding us unworthy of Christian service.
- c. Refusing to bless our relationships.
- d. Recommending that we not be trusted to adopt, co-parent, teach, coach, or serve in the military.