

Dear Reverend, Dhamananda, Governor Whitmer, Senator Peters, and honored guests,

It is a great honor to receive the Global Peace Award from the Buddhist Council of America here in Detroit, Michigan. I was born and raised here in Detroit. I received my undergraduate degree at Sacred Heart Seminary in Detroit. My father, Joseph Grudzen, worked at Chrysler Corporation for over 30 years. My great uncle, Floyd Grudzen, was President of the largest UAW local union with over 29000 members at Dodge Main. My sister, Susan Slack, brother James Grudzen, our daughter, Simone Grudzen, my wife, Marita Grudzen, and my classmate from Sacred Heart Seminary, Father Victor Clore, are with us today. Father Clore worked closely with Bishop Thomas Gumbleton, founder of the Catholic peace organization, Pax Christi International.

Our global interfaith education conference in 2023 collaborated with the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week and featured the new President of Pax Christi International—Bishop John Stowe of Lexington, Kentucky. Here is Bishop Stowe's comment about the present Gaza Crisis which GMU supports:

“When food cannot get in, when medical help is limited or inaccessible to the people in Gaza when innocents are being killed day in and day out, when people are trapped and being forced into even smaller confinement — we have to raise the voice, a voice that is not supportive of Hamas or terrorism, but a voice that calls for peace,” Stowe said.

I am grateful that a member of Bishop Stowe's mission team, Father Robert Deweke, is with us here today representing Bishop Stowe.

My spiritual journey led me to further graduate studies in Theology and History at Maryknoll Seminary and Columbia University in New York. These graduate studies in Christianity, Islam, and other world religions prepared me for later peace education and community development projects in Bangladesh, India, the Middle East, and Kenya.

Global Ministries University, the organization I cofounded in 2001 immediately after the tragedy of 9/11, has become a leader in interfaith education in Africa, India, and the US. My wife, Marita Grudzen, has worked ceaselessly with me over the past two decades to expand the peace and interfaith education mission of Global Ministries University. We are now affiliated with Tangaza University in Nairobi and the Institute for Religion and Science in Cochin, India. We now train interfaith leaders in Africa, India, and the US who are pursuing graduate degrees

with Global Ministries University. The recent visit of President William Ruto of Kenya to the US indicates the growing interdependence of the US with Africa. The Government of Kenya has recognized Global Ministries University as a peace education leader in Kenya's coastal region over the past decade. Global Ministries University has provided peace and interfaith education training for community and religious leaders in collaboration with Harmony Institute in Nairobi and Kenya's Maryknoll Affiliates religious community. We have promoted the development of Peace Clubs in Kenya's coastal region where interfaith conflict has often occurred.

We are preparing for our third global interfaith conference in collaboration with the UN—World Interfaith Harmony Week in February 2025. Our global interreligious conference's theme is “Belonging Together: Migrants, Refugees, and Displaced People and Global Solidarity.” Michigan is home to many immigrant families from diverse regions of the world including a large number from the Middle East.

We are dedicated to creating a culture of peace through education, non-violent interfaith values, compassion, and community service. Thank you for this opportunity to share with you today.

Gerald Grudzen, Pd.D.
President
Global Ministries University