

Nonprofit founder pursues peace after seeing war's destructiveness

By Crystal O'Gorman



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Chris Saade has experienced the destructive nature of war and dedicated his life to peace.

Saade, a psychological coach and spiritual teacher who lives in south Charlotte, was raised in a Christian family in Lebanon and volunteered with a peace group from the age of 13. He endured the Lebanese Civil War and continued to work for peace until moving out of the country when he was 20.

Saade said this experience made him realize the importance of seeing every person as an equal and the significance of being engaged in peace-building.

"That (knowledge) stayed with me," he said. "I felt it was important to build training institutes that focus on creating more peace."

In 1998, Saade founded the Institute for Life-Leadership and Coaching, a nonprofit organization. The institute combines psychological and universal spiritual principles to teach leadership skills guided by unconditional love; inclusiveness for all races, genders and religions; and the role of community responsibility. Most of his students are medical professionals, counselors or nonprofit leaders, but the programs are open to the public, and all costs are income-based.

Saade's focus is furthering his message of peace through the Olive Branch Center, a nonprofit community organization founded by him and his wife, Jessie Thompson. Olive Branch promotes religious and spiritual inclusion and global solidarity through publication and the International Academy of Sacred Leadership training.

Saade has published his first book this month, "Second Wave Spirituality: Passion for Peace, Passion for Justice," through North Atlantic Books.

He said he's spent the last 20 years studying social activists and spiritual leaders, such as Mother Theresa, Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. He calls them the pioneers of this new wave of spirituality.

His book explains how these leaders have transformed the way we act on our faith.

"It's no longer an internal faith, but love-in-action ... using unconditional love and peace as the premise to go out into the world and help those less fortunate, advocate for social justice and protect the environment," he said.

Most recently, Saâde has been involved in the Olive Branch's sponsorship of RESULTS, a national nonprofit group; the local chapter of RESULTS was started by his wife in January 2013. The organization's focus is getting bills passed that end poverty.

The 10-member group has lobbied for political support of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria; Global Partnership for Education; and the Education for All Act.

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