On Earth Peace

Seek & Pursue Peace

Fall 2011

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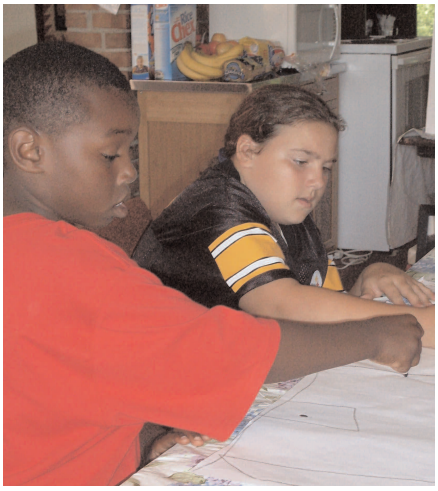

On Earth Peace answers Jesus Christ's call for peace and justice through its ministries; builds thriving families, organizations, and communities; and provides the skills, support, and spiritual foundation to face violence with active nonviolence.

www.onearthpeace.org

Agape-Satyagraha Graduates Serve as Peer Mentors

Partnering with local community organizations, Agape-Satyagraha Training mentors youth, many of whom are "at-risk" for bullying and systemic violence, in skills to eliminate violence in interpersonal and community situations. Agape-Satyagraha: Leadership Training for Youth in Conflict Resolution and Social Change is a core education program of On Earth Peace. Marie Benner-Rhoades, Peace Education Coordinator, sat down with graduates of Agape-Satyagraha Training who continue to be involved with the program as peer mentors: Shinel R., 12th grade; Jonathan K., 10th grade; and Alyeshya W., 9th grade.

Question: What kept you motivated to complete Agape-Satyagraha Training?

Alyeshya : Before I started the program, I was always getting into fights and getting bad grades in school. As I went through the program, I found that I was not getting into fights and my grades were good enough for honor roll. My attitude changed — from anger to slowing reactions down — and my teachers noticed that.

Question: What are one or two things that you learned through Agape-Satyagraha Training that you continue to use?

Jonathan: I use the conflict escalator, always working to bring things down. With my dad, I take deep breaths and just let things slow down rather than ride up.

Question: Why are you peer-mentoring?

Shinel: I want other kids to realize that what they do on the streets isn't necessary. I want them to know that they can build themselves to be somebody positive. They can be an alternative to what's out there.

Question: What did you learn from mentors that helps you as a mentor?

Alyeshya: [The mentors] never let you give up. You're encouraged to keep trying…over and over... I really appreciated that. I would have given up on my own.

Question: What advice do you have for youth starting the program?

Shinel: Keep pushing yourself. Even if you want to give up, don't stop. [The things you learn] help you be better to others and better to yourself.

Question: Are there ways beyond mentoring that you want to use your Agape-Satyagraha skills?

Jonathan: To help friends calm down. To live lives with peace and not war. Soothe the soul.

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On Earth Peace Coordinates Ministers of Reconciliation at Contentious Conference

In anticipation of increased anxiety related to business items addressing human sexuality and inclusion in the church, On Earth Peace planned for particularly strong involvement at the 2011 Church of the Brethren Annual Conference. And when a man nominated from the floor was elected to be the 2013 Annual Conference Moderator over the two women candidates brought forward by Standing Committee, On Earth Peace strove to help those who felt hurt by the process.

Preparation for conference included working closely with staff of Church of the Brethren, Inc., to coordinate a ministry of presence to supplement our traditional Ministry of Reconciliation (MoR) offerings. Insight sessions included a Bible Study on Forbearance; "Doing Conflict Well" with Janet Mitchell and Barbara Daté; and an opportunity to provide feedback regarding the Special Response Process the denomination had been using for the past two years in preparation for the business coming in 2011. The latter led to a request from Annual Conference Officers to share our findings.

During the conference itself, fifteen On Earth Peace "Ministers of Reconciliation" provided a variety of services:

- Several took turns being available at the On Earth Peace booth, where a table and chairs had been set aside for conversation. We also arranged with Annual Conference leadership to make a more private space available, if needed.
- By request of the Annual Conference Officers, MoR Observers were available in designated areas at every business session and by request to listen; to mediate conflict, facilitate communication, navigate misunderstandings; and to help make sense of the proceedings.
- By request of Voices for an Open Spirit and coordinated by Marty Farahat, a team of MoR facilitators was available after every business session to help debrief.
- By request of the coordinator for Young Adult Activities and coordinated by intern Audrey Hollenberg-Duffey, young-adult Ministers of Reconciliation were identified and available each night during the Young Adult activities. This work inspired the creation of a StepUp Action Team of young adults to encourage and support Youth and Young Adult participation in future Annual Conferences.

For more information, contact On Earth Peace Ministry of Reconciliation program coordinator Leslie Frye at lfrye@onearthpeace.org or 620-755-3940.

Can a Flash Mob Be a Ministry?

An outbreak of joyful singing was what was heard precisely fifteen minutes after the Monday afternoon business session at Annual Conference, as young adults gathered and filled the Exhibit Hall with the harmonies of Hymn 118 "Praise God from Whom" — inviting all those surrounding to join in.

This Brethren Flash Mob was not without purpose, for inside the business meeting there had been much heated debate and controversy as the Special Response Hearing took place. How are we as young adults going to get our voices heard, if not through outburst of song? How can we come together and invite to the table all who seek it? Let us remember we are all the body of Christ, we all have our own songs to be brought to the table, and when this happens each individual's song will join others, singing beautifully in harmony.

Chelsea Goss, a BVS volunteer, has worked this year with On Earth Peace as Peace Retreat Coordinator. She graduated from Bridgewater College in 2010 with a degree in Elementary Education and was a member of the 2009 YPTT. During the last year, Chelsea conducted five peace retreats in four states and reached out to over 118 youth and young adults. Additionally, she was involved with various aspects of our work, including leading sessions at Annual Conference, attending staff meetings, and collaborating with the IDPP team. We have been blessed by the talents and energy Chelsea has brought and want to extend a special thanks to her for this year of service.

On Earth Peace is currently recruiting a BVS volunteer for 2012. If you are interested in more information about the Peace Retreat Coordinator, contact Marie Benner-Rhoades at mrhoades@onearthpeace.org.

The Youth Peace Travel Team Response to Annual Conference

This statement was created by the 2011 Youth Peace Travel Team (YPTT) (pictured left to right): Tyler Goss, Kay Guyer, Sarah Neher, and Mark Dowdy. The YPTT is a ministry of On Earth Peace, Outdoor Ministries, Brethren Volunteer Service, and the Mission and Ministry Board's Global Mission Partnerships and Youth and Young Adult Office. Applications for the 2012 Youth Peace Travel Team are now available — contact Marie Benner-Rhoades at peace-ed@onearthpeace.org.

When we claim to be both a historic and living peace church, yet we do not lament our brokenness, where do we go from here?

When progressive and BRF young adults spend an evening together playing games and building friendships, why don't we go from here?

When women were ordained in the Church of the Brethren in 1958, yet we undermine the vote for a woman in 2011, where do we go from here?

When Bethany Theological Seminary lifts up all women's voices, why don't we go from here?

When our global neighbors are suffering from the impacts of climate change, yet we are slow to take responsibility and action, where do we go from here?

When those in the Church of the Brethren transform their churches and homes to be energy efficient with the help of the New Community Project, why don't we go from here?

When youth and young adults on the Annual Conference floor push to be heard even more, where do we go from here?

When Moderator Tim Harvey holds a meeting to hear youth and young adult concerns, and challenges them to take it upon themselves to invest in the church, why don't we go from here?

When youth and young adults are in love with a Church of the Brethren which lives a just love and peace, yet this church has seemed to disappear before them, where do we go from here?

When youth and young adults are inspired by Brethren who literally put their lives on the line for peace, why don't we go from here?

When the theme of Annual Conference is "Gifted with Promise: Extending Jesus' Table," yet the church does not extend this table to our LGBTQ brothers and sisters, where do we go to here?

When a spontaneous footwashing is held to support all walks of life in the church, why don't we go from here?

Do you love camp?
Are you ready to be a mentor to other youth?
Do you want to spend a summer teaching others how to be peacemakers?

Applications for the 2012 Youth Peace Travel Team are now available; contact Marie Benner-Rhoades at peace-ed@onearthpeace.org.

Organizers Registered for 2011 IDPP Campaign

Religious affiliations: Church of the Brethren, United Church of Christ, United Methodist, Presbyterian, Mennonite, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), Pax Christi, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark, Brethren in Christ, Dominican Sisters of Peace, General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches UK, Church of the Brethren-DR Congo.

Religious organizations and missions groups: National Council of Churches (USA), Breakthru Community Action (South Africa), 1-800-JESUSCHRIST (USA), Youth With a Mission (YWAM), Rebuilding the Broken Walls Center (Nigeria), Shalom Ministry for Reconciliation and Development (DR Congo), missions workers in Southeast Asia (kept anonymous for safety reasons).

College/campus/seminary groups: Stony Brook University — Protestant Campus Ministry (NY), Manchester College (IN), Hastings College Chapel (NE), Andover Newton Theological School (MA), Bethany Theological Seminary (IN), Bridgewater College (VA).

Countries: United States, South Africa, Mexico, Democratic Republic of Congo, Denmark, United Kingdom, India, Nigeria.

This list was compiled on September 15, 2011; for the final list, see www.onearthpeace.org/building-communities/international-day-prayer-peace/2011-idpp-registrants.

International Day of Prayer for Peace is Stopping Violence

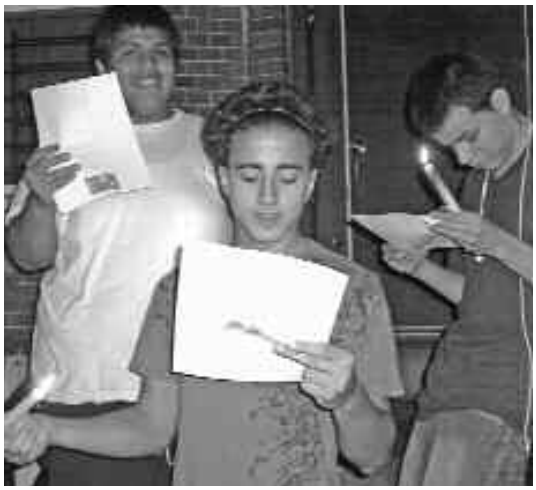
The theme of On Earth Peace's fifth International Day of Prayer for Peace (IDPP) campaign was drawn from our annual scripture focus, Seek the Peace of the City, from Jeremiah 29, where the verse continues, "... and pray to the Lord for it, for in its peace, you will find peace." On Earth Peace believes that God calls us to fervently pray for healing, wholeness, justice, and peace, and to be involved in shaping the destiny of our communities. IDPP is a day when thousands of people of faith around the world join with the World Council of Churches and the United Nations in calling for nonviolence and peace in the face of pervasive violence.

IDPP Observance at Colegio Bautista Emmanuel, San Salvador, El Savador. Photo Credit: Sarah Hall.

In the last five years, On Earth Peace has seen how local IDPP events can generate new energy and opportunities to address the real problems people face. Martin Luther King, Jr., talked about the triple evils of poverty, racism, and militarism — and the faces of violence in today's world continue to multiply.

On Earth Peace's annual campaign to organize communities around IDPP seeks to create space for ongoing leadership initiatives to stop violence and build reconciliation. Each IDPP effort is an opportunity to take a further step forward. But what comes next?

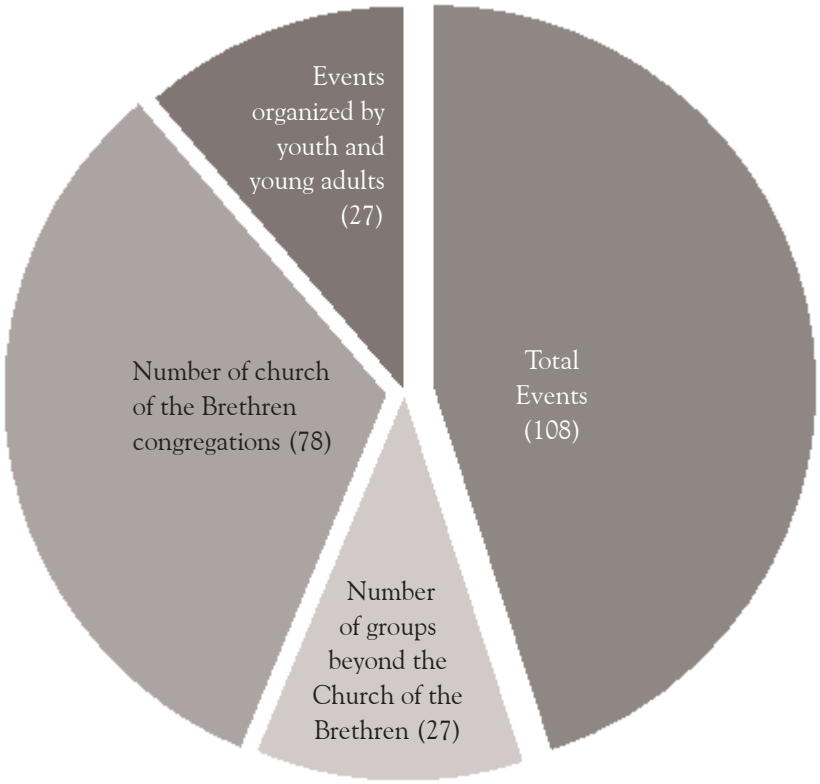
If you are part of a group that wants to challenge violence in your community or beyond, please contact On Earth Peace staff to schedule a conversation. We would like to dream with you about what's possible, and share about how On Earth Peace's tools and approach might support your efforts to stop violence and build reconciliation.



Brooklyn (New York) First Church of the Brethren's Young Adults and youth team were the leaders for a Vigil held September 21. Here, high school student José Hernandez reads the peace scriptures taken from Galatians 1:3-5 & 5:22-23 , Mark 4:35-30, Matthew 5:9, and Psalm 34:14-16. Photo Credit: Doris Abdullah.

Each year more lives are destroyed by violence than by hurricanes, earthquakes and floods. Combined.
We are responding!

2011 IDPP Stats



DEEPEN THE SPIRIT

It is my experience that it is in prayer that our hearts are safe to break over the violent brokenness of our world. Paradoxically, it is only a broken heart that is open to be filled with the nonviolent power of the Holy Spirit.

It is in prayer that we see our tears and the world's pain, transfigured into fierce compassion. It is here we find grace as both pardon and empowerment to answer Christ's call, to lay down our weapons of war and take up his cross in nonviolent service of the least of these.

With this in mind, I couldn't be more excited about a new generation getting behind the International Day of Prayer for Peace.

~Jarrod McKenna,
Christian Activist and Australian Peace Award Recipient

Jarrod and "Empowering Peacemakers in Your Community" (EPYC), a youth nonviolence empowerment initiative he founded in 2004, endorsed On Earth Peace's 2011 International Day of Prayer for Peace effort.

Youth and Young Adults Take Action!

Youth and young adults are stepping up more than ever to plan and lead events in their communities for the International Day of Prayer for Peace happening September 21st.

"I was looking for a song to sing, searched for a leader, but the leader was me." These lyrics from Jon Legend were some of the inspiring words that made Shelley West, a high schooler from Union, Ohio, realize that action needed to be taken. Shelley stated, "I realized that God is calling me to step up to be a leader in my school and community, because I can't just sit back and watch violence and injustice happen." After hearing about IDPP from the Youth Peace Travel Team this past summer, Shelley knew that she wanted to take action by planning an IDPP event in her local community with the pastor and youth pastor from her church. Along with inviting many of her peers to speak on their passions of peace, the service was planned to include a candlelight vigil, paper cranes for peace, prayer, and a variety of music.

In our busy lives we often look to others to take the first step — but sometimes we are the ones who need to take the lead. To find out more information about the International Day of Prayer for Peace go to onearthpeace.org/idpp.

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Agape-Satyagraha Graduates

Question: Why are we violent but not illiterate?

On Earth Peace: Because we are taught to read.

On Earth Peace is committed to providing youth with opportunities to learn the things that make for peace — one way we do this is through the Agape-Satyagraha Program.

Graduates, like Jonathan, Alyeshya, and Shinel, committed to study and active participation in Agape-Satyagraha Training for over a year before completing the program. In addition to their investment, adult mentors and site coordinators work with youth each week to teach skills, interpret experiences, and identify ways that Agape-Satyagraha Training can be used in transforming conflicts and society. This year, in On Earth Peace's seven Agape-Satyagraha Training sites, 62 youth and 42 adults participated in the program for some time. Each year, approximately 2200 volunteer hours have been given to this program.

Alyeshya

Peacemaker Profile: Grace Lefever

At age 89, Grace Lefever embraces life with youthful exuberance, and radiates a joyful energy to everyone around her. She has been an art teacher, a director of orientation for Brethren Volunteer Service, an organic farmer, and has raised five children. Most of all, she has been a leader, teacher, mentor and inspiring example — for three generations — to those who seek to live healthy lives on a healthy planet.

Grace has also been an actively committed peacemaker, including her involvements with the Brethren Peace Fellowship and with On Earth Peace. For more than 25 years, she and her husband Tim and their children walked the annual Christmas peace pilgrimage from Nazareth to Bethlehem in southeastern Pennsylvania. She continues to be passionate about reducing violence and building peace, and communicates those concerns effectively to friends, neighbors, and policy-makers.

Each summer, Grace joins us as a regular partici-pant and leader at Song and Story Fest, the intergenerational music and story-telling camp sponsored by On Earth Peace. As a contributor, she has chosen to set up an automatic monthly donation to On Earth Peace to support, in her words, "the wonderful work that is being accomplished in many areas."

On Earth Peace Issues a Statement of Inclusion

On Earth Peace Board of Directors

Dear Friends,

At On Earth Peace, we work to eliminate violence — in all forms.

It's easy to think of violence as a physical act, such as assault or warfare. But violence goes beyond that. Our words — our rhetoric and the way we choose to voice our opinions — can also harm and hurt.

That's why we are so troubled by recent events at the 2011 Church of the Brethren Annual Conference. And that's why, after our board of directors meeting last month, we issued the following statement of inclusion:

"We are troubled by attitudes and actions in the church which exclude persons on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or any other aspect of human identity. We believe God calls the church to welcome all persons into full participation in the life of the faith community."

Thank you for helping to create a world free from violence. Together, we are building a world of dignity, respect, and love for all of our brothers and sisters.

In peace,

Madalyn Metzger
Chair, On Earth Peace Board of Directors

From the Executive Director

If you have not yet made a contribution to the ministries of On Earth Peace, I have good news. You have a wonderful opportunity right now. This is the perfect time to make your first donation, for two reasons.

First reason: Your contribution will make a difference in the lives of those who are working hard to overcome violence — in their lives, in their communities, and in the world. In this newsletter you are seeing that the ministries of On Earth Peace make a difference in the lives of inner-city youth, in communities where violence is prevalent, and wherever our violence-elimination work is established.

Second reason: Your gift will help to leverage over $20,000 which has been pledged by other donors. In order to expand our capacity to serve more youth and children, congregations and communities, we have set a goal of reaching 200 new or renewing contributors this year. For added motivation, some of our long-time supporters have collectively pledged more than $20,000 in extra gifts — over and above their regular giving — but only if we reach the goal of 200 new contributors.

Your gift, of any amount, will help us reach our goal and receive the additional $20,000 pledged.

Rooted in Christian faith, we are building new partnerships with congregations and local community leaders, and we are reaching young people in exciting new ways with Jesus' message of nonviolent living. Please join us in this holy adventure — there has never been a better time.

Bob Gross

Bob Gross
Executive Director

Apology to those who received the wrong letter.

In a recent mailing from On Earth Peace, some of you who are current contributors may have received the wrong letter — one which stated that we have not been receiving donations from you. We apologize for this error, and we assure you that we do have a record of all contributions, and we truly value each gift and each giver.

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October 1, 2011, through September 30, 2012

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Staff

Leslie Frye
program coordinator – Ministry of Reconciliation
620-755-3940
lfrye@onearthpeace.org

Bob Gross
executive director
260-982-7751
bgross@onearthpeace.org

Matt Guynn
program director & coordinator of Peace Witness
503-775-1636
mguynn@onearthpeace.org

Darlene Johnson
office manager
410-635-8704
djohnson@onearthpeace.org

Gimbiya Kettering
communications coordinator
202-289-6341
gkettering@onearthpeace.org

Jim Replogle
operations director
jreplogle@onearthpeace.org

Marie Benner-Rhoades
program coordinator – Peace Education
717-917-9392
mrhoades@onearthpeace.org

Samuel Sarpiya
nonviolence coordinator
samuel@rockfordcommunity church.org

www.onearthpeace.org
email: oep@onearthpeace.org

Shinel: Agape-Satyagraha Graduate Profile

Shinel R. is a senior at John Harris High School in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. In October 2008, she began attending Agape-Satyagraha Training and graduated in December 2009, with nearly perfect attendance. Shinel has continued as a peer mentor for the past two years. When asked, "Why?," Shinel says, "We need to address issues of crime and violence, especially youth-on-youth crime. Youth are being killed by youth." The skills taught in Agape-Satyagraha Training help do just that.

To graduate Shinel, and others like her, On Earth Peace and its partners invest:

- 50 plus weeks of Agape-Satyagraha Training
- 5 levels of learning
- 200 plus hours per graduate of consistent adult mentors volunteering
- $150 weekly program costs of each local site
- $1,000 On Earth Peace administration and support

"Shinel has become a really good mentor for other youth and has become interested in making a difference in her community. She has stepped up to resolve issues in her own life rather than avoid them. And that's worth the investment."

~Gerald Rhoades, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, Agape-Satyagraha Training founder and site coordinator

To read Shinel's own words in an interview with her and other recent Agape-Satyagraha graduates, turn to page one.

On Earth Peace

On Earth Peace Assembly, Inc.
P.O. Box 188
New Windsor, MD 21776-0188
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