



Seek & Pursue Peace

Spring 2011

Inside

page two...

- ♦ International Day of Prayer for Peace

page three...

- ♦ Peace Retreats

page four...

- ♦ Faithfulness with Compassion

page six...

- ♦ Peacemaker Profile



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

Rockford a Year Later

“Rockford” has become a part of the vocabulary of the On Earth Peace movement since mid-2009, when a police shooting in there led to a crisis moment for the community of Rockford, Illinois. The poverty and racism that normally slide under the surface of the nightly news — not just in Rockford, but across the country — were revealed and lifted up into the light, and a kairos moment emerged.

Longtime leaders and new faces in Rockford started seeking ways to inspire and catalyze the community toward healing and stability. Samuel Sarpiya, who was planting a church in Rockford, and is now on the On Earth Peace staff, began working with a newly emerging group of leaders, who came to be known as the Rockford Partners for Excellence (RP4E).

Early on, RP4E chose to focus on the impact of poverty and racism in Rockford, and they recognized the need to slice these problems down to an approachable scale for an initiative. RP4E saw how persistent and systemic injustice played a role in the conditions at West Middle School, the hardest-hit and lowest-performing school in town.

Since 2009, through one-on-one organizing, weekly meetings, and hundreds of hours of volunteering, the members of RP4E have been hard at work bringing a vision and developing evidence of what Rockford can be beyond poverty and racism. The following is drawn from a longer interview between Matt Guynn and Samuel Sarpiya that can be found on the On Earth Peace website.

continued on page 2



Samuel Sarpiya and Matt Guynn

continued from page 1

Matt Guynn: You've done so much to provide basic volunteer and mentor services at West — cooking classes, mentoring, even arranging to have the school painted. What makes RP4E different from any other community improvement or service effort?

Samuel Sarpiya: For RP4E, our efforts are about creating social change at the systemic level. While we are meeting immediate needs, we are not just interested in band- aid solutions. This is shown by our work to change the school district's bussing policy. Half the kids at West Middle School who live in the nearby housing projects were being bussed, and half weren't. This led to ongoing conflict, and even the existence of gangs of kids divided between those who got bussed and those who didn't. We researched the situation, and then advocated for the school district's bus policy to change, so that everyone

would be bussed. They have now agreed to bus all kids from the projects!

MG: What advice would you give other communities interested in generating this kind of effort?

SS: Look at your own community and understand the historical context of what you are trying to deal with (for example with a listening initiative). This research helps develop a real analysis of what you are facing. You may start with service or social work to meet a momentary need, but the real goal is to generate change in the system.

MG: What has contributed to RP4E's success thus far?

SS: Keeping our eyes on the prize: Rockford beyond racism and poverty. As we kept focused on the prize, more and more people have come to have a sense of ownership in the community and have wanted to be a part of the

change. The community owns the vision and doesn't say that the problems are someone else's to solve.

MG: What comes after West?

SS: We are refusing to jump to the next situation without seeing consistency at West Middle School. We want to know that things at West are really changed for good, so we have not moved an inch. There are calls from some other schools, asking us to come to other parts of town. RP4E would like to explore another issue, maintaining our broader role as an agent of community transformation, and not only to be known as a school improvement group. This might lead us to get involved in the housing projects on the west side of town — since 80% of the kids at West Middle School come from those projects.

Ripples Within Ripples: International Day of Prayer for Peace and Beyond

On Earth Peace hopes to see hundreds of public prayer events the week of September 21, the International Day of Prayer for Peace, in which people of faith and good will gather in their streets to say together, "We seek the peace of the city! We have chosen to eliminate violence."

Our intention for each local IDPP vigil is that it opens a doorway to ongoing efforts to eliminate violence locally and globally. Every year, through IDPP organizing, local leaders around the world are building new and deeper relationships with others around mutual concerns about violence.

In some communities, a critical mass comes together. In some places, IDPP initiatives bear fruit as partners join together across

faith lines, across lines of political belief, across class and cultural lines, in order to catalyze a new thing in their communities.

It is a mysterious thing, and it happens in God's time, but in some places, conditions ripen for a new-or renewed-ongoing venture to advance justice, build peace, and eliminate violence.

Rockford Partners for Excellence (cover) is one example of a community initiative that was born out of an IDPP organizing effort (2009). Here are two more examples (more details about each are on our website).

In the Philadelphia/South Jersey region, Circle of Hope (a Brethren in Christ congregation with 600 members) is building on previous years' IDPP involvement as they carry out a six-month listening initiative, seeking to understand the impact of militarism in the Philadelphia region and to explore how their congregation can best act to reduce the hold militarism has on the area.

In Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, Breakthrough Community Action (BCA) and the Anabaptist Network in South Africa (ANISA) are supporting a new community initiative to address community issues including transience, xenophobia, alcohol abuse, and corruption. BCA and ANISA laid the groundwork for this when carrying out their 2010 IDPP organizing.

Who will be listed in this report next year? Will it be your community? Join the International Day of Prayer for Peace campaign in 2011, and come through a doorway into long-term efforts to eliminate violence and build peace.



The Anabaptist Network in South Africa (ANISA)

Peace Retreat Invitation

From its beginning, On Earth Peace has made peace education for youth a priority through multi-day learning events. These Peace Retreats (previously Peace Academies) provide skills for youth as they seek to eliminate violence and act as peacebuilders in their communities. In the last year and a half, On Earth Peace has led nine youth Peace Retreats in partnership with Church of the Brethren, United Church of Christ, and United Methodist congregations, and districts of the Church of the Brethren.

On Earth Peace is offering four new peace retreats for local youth programming!

Agape Community Peace Retreat

This retreat invites youth to consider Jesus' call to agape love of enemy and neighbor alike. Youth will engage in activities that deepen their understanding of Christian peacemaking by critically looking at the patterns of Biblical and contemporary society.

Meeting Place Peace Retreat

This retreat introduces youth to strategies for healthy communication and alternatives to violence. Youth will explore meeting in a place of shalom through Biblical exploration and Christian community life.



Prince of Peace and Beavercreek Churches of the Brethren (Ohio) gather for a youth Peace Retreat. Working with youth leaders from these congregations, the retreat was designed to focus on communication skill-building and conflict resolution.

Enemy Love Peace Retreat

This retreat encourages youth to choose to follow Jesus' call to "love our enemies." Through Bible study and reflection, youth will consider what scripture and tradition have to say about violence and war, love and peace. Alternatives to military service through conscientious objection will be introduced as part of this retreat.

Who is My Neighbor Peace Retreat (For Middle School Youth)

Middle school youth will explore the command to "love your neighbor" by asking, like the teacher of the Law, "Who is my neighbor?" Engaging the parable of the Good Samaritan as Jesus' prescription for peace, youth will identify approaches to peacemaking for interactions with peers and with their communities.

"I learned I can solve conflicts... that my voice matters."

Quote from Youth Participant

To learn more about any of these retreats or to design your own, contact Chelsea Goss, Peace Retreat Coordinator, at peaceretreats@onearthpeace.org.

Faithfulness with Compassion: An Elusive Goal?



Ever since Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, humanity has struggled with what it means to be faithful. Ever since Cain killed Abel, humanity has struggled with what it means to treat our brothers and sisters with compassion. These tensions persist through the entire Hebrew narrative, spill over into the New Testament and overflow into all of church history up to and including today.

In Jesus' time, the Pharisees strove earnestly to maintain a clear identity for the people of God in the face of sometimes overwhelming challenges from the Roman authorities. For them, circumcision, Sabbath-keeping, and strict adherence to the law were the clearest signs of who was willing to put faithfulness to the God of Jacob above conformity to the world: who was "in" and who was "out" of the family of faith. From their perspective, when Jesus ate with Gentiles and healed on the Sabbath, he came dangerously close (too close) to undermining the very foundation on which stood all that it meant to be righteous. Certainly the Son of God would never associate with tax collectors and prostitutes! Or commend a Gentile Roman centurion for his faith. Or heal the daughter of a heathen Syrophoenician, much less

speak with a Samaritan woman. No wonder Paul initially persecuted the early Christians.

And yet this same Jesus said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until it is accomplished" (Matt 5:17-18, NRSV). No wonder Peter was bewildered when the voice from heaven said, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane" (Acts 9:15).

The challenge for people of faith remains: how do we know what God finds acceptable and unacceptable, so that we can know how we can be acceptable to God? The answer would seem to be that we need to be guided by what is clearly stated in scripture. And yet scripture is not always clear. What seems to be stated plainly in one passage is just as plainly contradicted in another. And, of course, even people of faith disagree when it comes to interpreting texts that have been confounding the people of God for millennia! So, does that mean it is an illusion to suppose we can ever discern the mind of Christ together? Or can it be that clarity regarding the will of God is merely

elusive: always just beyond reach, and yet always worth striving for?

Or is there a question yet beyond these: how do we model Christ's compassion, despite our deep differences? Again and again, Christ's actions modeled a third way — a way between hard-heartedness and permissiveness, and a path between divisive conflict and conflict avoidance. Walking Jesus' third way is a challenge for any who attempt to follow him.

On Earth Peace knows that conflicts centered in our faith identities are among the most painful and intense. That's why we offer workshops like Matthew 18, where congregations learn biblical principles and practices for handling conflict. And that's why we walk with congregations who are experiencing challenging conflict, in order to help them seek God's face, learn together, and grow stronger. We also live in hope and faith that when two or three are gathered in Jesus' name, Jesus is there with them — granting wisdom, strength, and healing even in times of inevitable tension and pain.

*... may we be
witnesses to the
ministry of
reconciliation in
our covenant with
one another to heal
and care for this
body. Amen.*

from "A Structural Framework for
Dealing with Strongly Controversial
Issues: Framework for Conversations"

A Timeline of Human Sexuality in the Church of the Brethren and On Earth Peace's Involvement

1983 Pre-conference mediation workshop sponsored by General Board Peace Consultant, Chuck Boyer, attracts 150 participants who will eventually make up the nucleus of what (in 1987) becomes the Ministry of Reconciliation.

When the delegate body adopts the paper on Human Sexuality from a Biblical Perspective, participants from the mediation workshop help those who feel hurt by the decision to strategize about ways they can be heard.

1990 The Ministry of Reconciliation (MoR) becomes a program of On Earth Peace.

1990s MoR is asked by the Program & Arrangements Committee to staff Dialogue Rooms and by the Parish Ministries Commission to facilitate insight session discussions focused on issues of sexual orientation and inclusion.

1995-today MoR Observers are

available during business sessions and by appointment to listen, to help make sense of the proceedings, and to mediate conflicts & misunderstandings.

2010 MoR provides training to Standing Committee members related to the coordination of district hearings called for in the Structural Framework for Dealing with Strongly Controversial Issues that will address two items of business at the 2011 Annual Conference: A Statement of Confession and Commitment and Query: Language on Same Sex Covenantal Relationships.

2011 Knowing that this conference will be a difficult time for many, MoR is working with Congregational Life Ministries and Voices for an Open Spirit to provide resource persons and safe spaces for support, prayer and dialogue.

For more information about the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference, go to <http://www.cobannualconference.org/>.

Deepen the Spirit

God, speak to us...

Speak to us of faithfulness

Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples.

(Exodus 19:5a)

Speak to us of compassion

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:34-35)

Speak to us of judgment

Do not speak evil against one another, brothers and sisters. Whoever speaks evil against another or judges another, speaks evil against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and to destroy. So who, then, are you to judge your neighbor?

(James 4:11-12)

Speak to us of grace

For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. (Romans 3:22b-24)

*...and give us ears to hear.
Amen.*

On Earth Peace Connection

For over thirty years the epicenter of tension between faithfulness and compassion within nearly every faith tradition has been around questions of sexual orientation and inclusion, and in the midst of it all On Earth Peace has been there:



- ♦ Helping people learn how to communicate positively in times of disagreement.
- ♦ Producing resources for engaging in difficult discussions.
- ♦ Advising those dealing with conflict.
- ♦ Facilitating conversations.
- ♦ Standing with those who face any issue of injustice.

As an agency of the Church of the Brethren, On Earth Peace has provided hundreds of hours of pro bono work in this area through the Ministry of Reconciliation, at a value of tens of thousands of dollars.



Fletcher Farrar is the kind of person who makes the world a better place. Walk with him to the formerly vacant lot behind his house in Springfield, Illinois, and you will find his garden plots filled with vegetables, flowers, prairie plants, and ground covers. Walk with him around the economically depressed neighborhood where he and his wife, Mary Jessup, live, and you will find dozens of houses which he and the nonprofit organization he founded

Peacemaker Profile Fletcher Farrar

have renovated for low-cost, high-quality housing for those who otherwise could not afford it. And walk (figuratively) with him through the print or online pages of *Illinois Times*, the weekly newspaper he owns and edits, and you will find a paper that does its part to enhance the quality of life in Springfield, Illinois' capital city.

Fletcher is a member of the Springfield Church of the Brethren. He is a strong supporter of the peace-building work of On Earth Peace, and is helping to undergird the work of Samuel Sarpiya, On Earth Peace nonviolence organizer in Rockford, Illinois. He says, "When it comes to peacemaking, On Earth Peace doesn't just sit around. Theirs is a particularly active approach to nonviolence. New programs, new people and new ideas are being brought to the table all the time, as though the need were urgent. It is."

On Earth Peace at Annual Conference

When the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference convenes July 2 in Grand Rapids, Michigan, the ministries of On Earth Peace will be in evidence everywhere conference-goers look.

Most prominent will be nonviolence organizer Samuel Sarpiya, who leads the violence reduction work in Rockford, Illinois, and is coordinating the 2011 International Day of Prayer for



Photo by Keith Hollenberg

Peace. Samuel is preaching in the Monday evening worship service. He will also speak Tuesday morning at the On Earth Peace breakfast, on "Seeking the Peace of the City."

Ten Insight Sessions are planned, with topics ranging from "Faith, Family, and Finances" to "A Relevant Peace Tradition Has Some Teeth." A large, open-space exhibit booth will welcome friends, volunteers, and supporters to gather, visit, plan, and learn how On Earth Peace is actively stopping violence and building peace.

The Ministry of Reconciliation, a service of On Earth Peace, will again support the work and life of the conference with observers/reconcilers in the business sessions and also available at other times and places.

Board of Directors

October 1, 2010, through September 30, 2011

Doris Abdullah
(Treasurer)

Joel Gibbel

Louise Knight

Ben Leiter
(Secretary)

Carol Mason

Madalyne Metzger
(Chair)

David Miller

Phil Miller

Robert Miller
(Vice-Chair)

Don Mitchell

Donna Shumate

Susan Starkey

Gail Erisman Valeta

**On Earth Peace Breakfast
featuring Samuel Sarpiya
Tuesday, July 5, 7:00 a.m.**

Staff

Michael Colvin
peace witness associate
503-775-1636
mcolvin@onearthpeace.org

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

Chelsea Goss
coordinator of peace retreats
peace-ed@onearthpeace.org

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

Kay Guyer
intern
kguyer.oep@gmail.com

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 Sarpia
nonviolence coordinator
samuel@rockfordcommunitychurch.org

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



Youth Peace Travel Team Announced

This year marks the 20th year of the Youth Peace Travel Team! Each summer, the team teaches has taught junior and senior high youth about peace, justice, and reconciliation as they visit camps and conferences across the

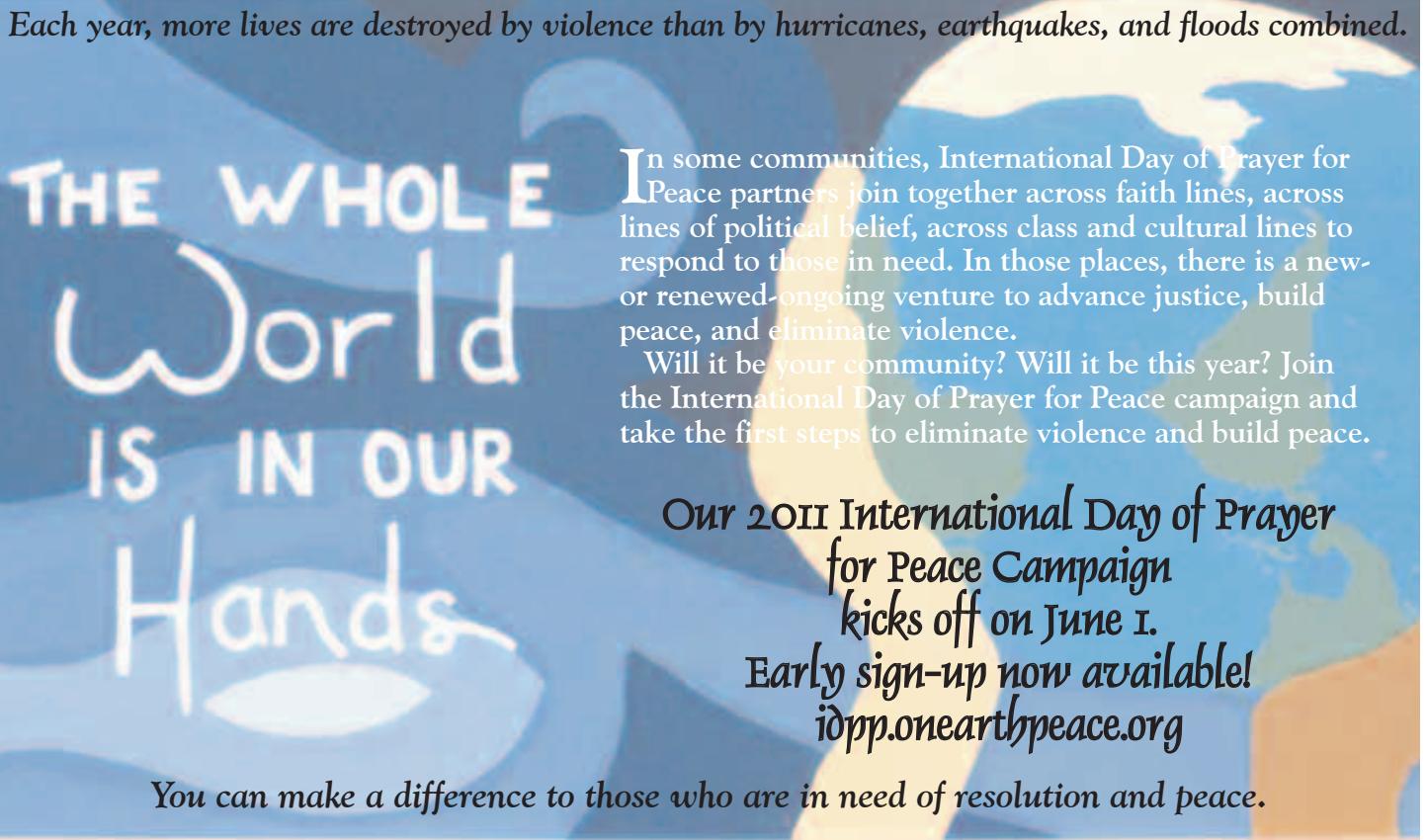
Church of the Brethren denomination. At Annual Conference in Grand Rapids, Michigan, we will celebrate this ministry on Saturday, July 2, at 9:00pm at Ah Nab Awen Park-. All are welcome!

Continuing with this program, the 2011 Youth Peace Travel Team has been announced:

Mark Dowdy of Huntingdon, PA (McPherson College); Tyler Goss of Mechanicsville, VA (Bridgewater College); Kay Guyer of Woodbury, PA (Manchester College); and Sarah Neher of Rochester, MN (McPherson College).

The Youth Peace Travel Team is sponsored by the Church of the Brethren's Outdoor Ministries Association, Youth and Young Adult Ministry office, Brethren Volunteer Service, and On Earth Peace.

Each year, more lives are destroyed by violence than by hurricanes, earthquakes, and floods combined.



THE WHOLE
World
IS IN OUR
Hands

In some communities, International Day of Prayer for Peace partners join together across faith lines, across lines of political belief, across class and cultural lines to respond to those in need. In those places, there is a new-or renewed-ongoing venture to advance justice, build peace, and eliminate violence.

Will it be your community? Will it be this year? Join the International Day of Prayer for Peace campaign and take the first steps to eliminate violence and build peace.

*Our 2011 International Day of Prayer
for Peace Campaign
kicks off on June 1.
Early sign-up now available!
idpp.onearthpeace.org*

You can make a difference to those who are in need of resolution and peace.



On Earth Peace Assembly, Inc.
P.O. Box 188
New Windsor, MD 21776-0188
410-635-8704

Return Service Requested

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Westminster, MD
Permit No. 40