

On Earth Peace: Report to 2022 Church of the Brethren Annual Conference

Introduction

On Earth Peace is an agency of the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference. The present agency relationship dates from 1998. If you are part of this denomination, OEP is your peace agency.

On Earth Peace's work as a ministry within the Church of the Brethren dates to 1974, when the organization was founded by 20th century Church of the Brethren peace leader M.R. Zigler. Since 1974, OEP has developed programs serving youth and young adults, congregations, and community groups, as we walk in partnership with Church of the Brethren congregations, camps, districts, and Annual Conference.

Our purpose as an agency of the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference is to help the Church of the Brethren become a relevant, vital, "living" peace and justice church equipped to create vital relationships and initiatives on contemporary issues of violence and injustice. We believe it's possible for this Historic Peace Church to develop new skills and spiritual power, to become capable of meeting, finding, and proclaiming Jesus in the neighborhood.

OEP exists as an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit. While it is an agency of the denomination, there is no guaranteed central denominational funding source. All resources for our ministry come from donations of individuals and congregations.

Basic Information About OEP

On Earth Peace Values

Our shared values are what bring us together as the On Earth Peace community. These values guide our work and direct our decision-making.

- Jesus-Centered Spirituality -

We follow Jesus into the work of justice and peace. We share in spiritual practices and develop faith resources to help undergird our programs.

- Positive Peace -

We learn, teach, and practice dynamic forms of peacemaking which see conflict as an important tool to meet needs, address injustice, correct imbalances of power, and seek healing and reconciliation.

- Anti-Racism/Anti-Oppression -

We commit to name and undo barriers to participation in our programs based on identity, and to work for full inclusion and equity for all who wish to join in our work. We commit to the long-term transformation of On Earth Peace, the church, and society.

- Intergenerational Leadership -

We nurture peacemakers and leaders, and honor the wisdom, skill, and experience of all generations.

- Beloved Community -

We commit to raising the levels of relationships until justice and peace prevail, and all people attain their full human potential.

On Earth Peace Vision

We see a world in Beloved Community, free from oppression, violence, and war.

A present and future “kin-dom of heaven” -- with on earth peace, and goodwill to all. Our name and our vision come from the angels’ song at Jesus’ birth in Luke 2.

On Earth Peace Mission

We develop and walk with leaders and communities who work for justice and peace.

Since our formation in 1974, when we equipped Brethren youth as conscientious objectors and adults as peace promoters, OEP has supported leadership for peace in each generation. Our work today centers in developing both leaders and their communities for more effective work for justice and peace.

OEP Strategic Priorities

Our program work for the years 2020-2022 focuses on helping leaders and communities apply the spiritual and practical discipline of Kingian Nonviolence Conflict Reconciliation. We also have special priorities for our work within the Church of the Brethren, and our continued long-term journey toward becoming an organization and community that dismantles systemic barriers to participation by different demographic or identity groups.

1. *Develop individuals as leaders with spirituality and skills in Kingian Nonviolence, using groups such as cohorts and communities of learning and action.*
2. *Walk with leaders and their communities as they take action for justice and peace using the Kingian Nonviolence approach, including accountability, consultation, and organizing in solidarity with current movements.*

3. *Through our agency responsibilities and opportunities, embolden the Church of the Brethren to become a living peace and justice denomination.*
4. *Institutionalize Anti-Racism/Anti-Oppression in On Earth Peace practices and structures, including staff and board composition, programs, budgets, policies, and accountability to AR/AO partners including Crossroads and the Supportive Communities Network.*

2022 Theme: Attack Forces of Evil Not Persons Doing Evil

In 2022, OEP is lifting up the third principle of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s nonviolence approach, "Attack Forces of Evil, Not Persons Doing Evil." This can also be phrased as "nonviolence seeks to defeat injustice, not people." In our denomination, and in the society around us, personal attacks and divisive rhetoric are destroying relationships and breaking down communities, often without addressing the real relational or systemic problems underneath. It's time to learn to attack problems instead of attacking people, to hold out hope for restored relationships, and to speak a positive vision of the future.

This principle, grounded in the teachings of Jesus, is important for all members of the church. This teaching can help church members transform conflict within our congregations. Dr. King's principle can create a faithful and constructive place to stand and act on community issues that matter to us. Many of us see and some of us withstand violence, war, poverty, racism, hunger, and environmental destruction. We have powerful Annual Conference statements on these topics and more. But at a fundamental level, how equipped are we to speak, act, and lead on these issues? We believe that the Church of the Brethren can be strengthened by developing a common language for how we step in and step up.

We see that common language in an approach called Kingian Nonviolence Conflict Reconciliation. Kingian Nonviolence is based on the theology, philosophy, and methodology of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the leadership of the Civil Rights movement.

Former OEP board member David Jehnsen (Living Peace Church of the Brethren, Columbus, OH) connected OEP with Kingian Nonviolence Conflict Reconciliation in about 2007. Jehnsen, who was raised in the Michigan district of the Church of the Brethren, joined Brethren Volunteer Service in 1962 and became part of the Chicago Freedom Movement, serving on Dr. King's Chicago staff. After Dr. King's assassination, Jehnsen worked with Rev. Dr. Bernard LaFayette, Jr., a close lieutenant of Dr. King, to codify what they learned into an approach and curriculum. Seeing this as a path to

implement the values and teachings of Jesus, OEP has moved to institutionalize this approach in our work and ministry. Kingian Nonviolence shares the “will” and the “skill” of nonviolence - values and practices we can use for interpersonal conflict and community leadership.

Dr. King’s third principle, “Attack Forces of Evil, Not Persons Doing Evil,” invites us to channel both righteous indignation and agape love into our work for wholeness, justice, and freedom. Dr. King shows us the possibility of using nonviolent conflict in pursuit of reconciliation, dignity, and peace. We learn that the work of justice means strategically challenging policies and practices of dehumanization and injustice, the so-called forces of evil. This isn’t just “getting angry.” It’s channeling the energy within anger toward underlying problems and restoring relationships. We learn that those who practice evil are also victims of larger forces, and still children of God capable of some measure of transformation themselves. Towards these apparent opponents, we extend the possibility of agape love. This isn’t just nostalgic “love.” This is love that resists wrong and seeks transformation by developing initiatives for change. This is the love that Jesus lived and taught.

Principle Three, our 2022 theme, says that we are to learn to attack the forces of evil. We hear here the echo of Paul’s words: *“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” - Ephesians 6:12 (KJV)* In today’s world, spiritual wickedness takes institutional form in brutal police “use of force” guidelines, in military adventurism and drone warfare, in energy company strategies that destroy communities and wilderness to extract the last fossil fuel available, in gentrification that destroys historic communities of color, in corporate efforts to split worker power, and in church policies and practices that marginalize and exclude LGBTQ+ people, women, and people of color.

The faithful and relevant peace-loving Christian disciple today needs to become a practitioner of nonviolence, skilled and spiritually formed to vigorously engage these kinds of policies and practices while also expressing agape love toward those who design and implement them. We wrestle “not against flesh and blood”--against humans. (Humans, we try to love.) We wrestle with systems, policies, practices, and cultural patterns.

Taking up this theme for 2022 means that we, as your peace agency, seek to practice these skills ourselves while bringing these disciplines to life in our Brethren community. With Principle Three as a backdrop and our young adult interns as our principal organizers, in 2022 On Earth Peace will significantly revamp our social change organizing work. We will raise our capacity for applying the discipline of Kingian Nonviolence with our constituency and partners as we focus on specific campaigns and movements for change.

We hope to help the church grow in its ability to speak with power to the needs of our time. We have set a long-term goal of training 1000 Brethren in Kingian Nonviolence Conflict Reconciliation. At our current level of resourcing, this intensive process may take ten years, and would transform the denomination's approach to questions of justice and peace. But that is the look ahead. Here is a look back at 2021.

2021 Program & Ministry Updates

Internship Program

On Earth Peace connects with 18-24 year olds, college and graduate students of any age, and recent graduates through our paid internship program. Our interns and fellows, who are second year interns, lead much of our organizing, communication, and development work. In 2021, 36 interns and fellows worked in various capacities: leading events, donor outreach, and communications on behalf of the organization.

Interns and fellows led nearly 40 webinar and meetup opportunities building capacity, commitment, and community in justice and peace efforts. These webinars were a key element of our Learning Action Communities, which connected constituents with current concerns including Racial Justice, Environmental Justice, Palestine Justice, Prison Justice, Women's/Gender Justice, LGBTQ+ Justice, and Migrant Justice. Our Children's Formation Organizer continued the Read Aloud program started as the pandemic closed schools in 2020 and launched a monthly webinar, "Children As Peacemakers: Equipping Resilient Leaders." Other intern-led initiatives include Community Engagement Grants for Youth Groups, the bi-weekly Peacebuilder e-newsletter, the Just Peace Leaders campaign, our Just Peace Outfitters online store, monthly two-hour Introduction to Kingian Nonviolence webinars, and many more.

Community Engagement Mini-Grants for Youth Groups

OEP is supporting youth groups and their efforts by offering up to \$500 in grant funding to support a youth-initiated project for peace and justice in their community. We accompany youth through webinars and consultation as they connect with their neighborhoods. In 2021, OEP offered grants to youth at First Church of the Brethren (Harrisburg, PA), Westminster (MD) Church of the Brethren, and Glade Valley (MD) Church of the Brethren.

Individual, Congregational, and District Connections

More than fifty one-on-one conversations conducted by staff and interns supported individuals in their work and ministry. In three districts, staff and interns provided leadership and consultation for congregations or teams working on racial justice analysis and organizing. Staff provided a Congregational Peace Health Checkup for one congregation. This intensive process of consultation and facilitation helps the congregation assess their own strengths, growth areas, and calling, with twelve potential focus areas of Christian discipleship and congregational life.

Kingian Nonviolence Leadership Development

In 2021, On Earth Peace provided five 16-hour core trainings in Kingian Nonviolence Conflict Reconciliation. This includes open enrollment workshops, requests from groups in Baltimore and Bolivia, and internal training for interns. Twenty new Kingian Nonviolence trainers completed Level 1 certification through On Earth Peace, including five Church of the Brethren pastors or leaders who now lead Kingian trainings in their own contexts. On Earth Peace played a key role in convening the broader Kingian Nonviolence network through the Kingian Nonviolence Coordinating Committee. OEP staff served on the board of the Institute for Human Rights and Responsibilities, which holds publishing rights for the Kingian Nonviolence curriculum.

Partnerships

We deepened connections with partners in mutual support of our work including with Supportive Communities Network, the Church of the Brethren Standing Committee and Agencies, Dunker Punks Podcast, Church of the Brethren Women's Caucus, Kingian Nonviolence Coordinating Committee (convened by OEP staff), Community Peacemaker Teams (where OEP staff served as board chair in 2021; formerly known as Christian Peacemaker Teams), Oregon Poor People's Campaign (where OEP staff served on the Coordinating Committee), Military Families Speak Out, and the National Network Opposing the Militarization of Youth.

Conversations with Church of the Brethren Leadership

Since at least 2011, On Earth Peace has expressed public concern about the violence that is expressed in our denominational conflict over the 1983 Annual Conference paper on human sexuality. That year, in response to a credible death threat against a minority church leader, OEP shared a statement of inclusion challenging the church to become a safe and welcoming community for all oppressed minorities in the church. Since then OEP has continued to work toward a vision of church where people will not be harmed because of their identity but rather affirmed as God's beloved children. Over the past ten years, OEP has invested considerable time and resources to participate in important denominational conversations in hope of building understanding and relationship.

We continue to believe and practice that all God's children have a rightful place in the church universal, in the Church of the Brethren specifically, and within the ministries of On Earth Peace. We believe that patterns and practices in the denomination which prevent the full participation of racial and cultural minorities, women, or queer people must be examined and shifted, within On Earth Peace itself and in wider church structures.

Some challenge OEP for perceived violation of the 1983 Annual Conference Statement on Human Sexuality. Our view is that the denomination needs to take a closer look at its failure to implement the seven key directives in that paper. OEP has been attempting to carry out the specifics and the positive intent of the paper. At the same time, OEP is concerned that the nearly 40-year-old paper claims a consensus that never existed and contains implicit support for practices such as conversion therapy which have been widely condemned as harmful.

In 2021, On Earth Peace actively participated in dialogue processes with the Church of the Brethren Standing Committee and with representatives of the Council of District Executives. Our staff and board members spent hundreds of hours utilizing Kingian Nonviolence principles in important conversations with denominational leaders toward the goal of a more inclusive and welcoming church. At the end of this decade of conflict, we continue to participate in these processes in good faith and in hopes of both justice and reconciliation across the church.

OEP Staff

In 2021, the board of On Earth Peace discontinued the position of executive director as part of an effort to address a long-standing structural deficit. We bid farewell to Bill Scheurer, who had served in the executive role for nine and a half years, in early 2022. The staff is functioning in an interim capacity to share executive roles, with plans to restructure staffing in 2023.

Co-Interim Executives: Marie Benner-Rhoades, Matt Guynn, Darlene Johnson

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In addition to our full-time staff, On Earth Peace has an average of 20 paid interns working as part-time contract staff on a wide range of programs and projects, and relies on a leadership network of volunteers and contractors.

OEP Finances

Financial Report for January 1, 2021, through December 31, 2021 (*unaudited*)

Our audited financial report is available on request.

Income:

Individuals	\$ 124,986
Churches	69,483
Foundation Grants	3,000
Govt Grants	70,740
Programs	15,385
Endowments	13,342
Other	6,338

Total \$ 303,274

Expenses: \$ 509,150

Net Operating Loss: (\$205,876)

Unrealized Gains: \$ 97,016

Net Loss: (\$108,863)

Many individuals and churches continue to faithfully give and even increase their donations to OEP. On Earth Peace gives thanks for your support and abundant generosity. Where we need your help now is to find more people and churches like you, and to invite them into the work of OEP. Support this ministry by becoming an individual donor, by asking your congregation to support On Earth Peace, or by asking how you can help us raise funds.

To learn more about our Dove Club monthly donors program, the RoundUp app for donating your spare change in credit/debit card purchases, and our Legacy Society program for planned giving to help secure our work for the next generations, please contact us at OEP@OnEarthPeace.org or (410) 635-8704.