

Peace Witness in the Next Century



A few years ago, On Earth Peace was thirty years old. This year the Church of the Brethren turns 300.

Jesus' life and ministry took place about 2000 years ago.

Our individual lives move within these larger faith stories. In this newsletter we bring you the stories and messages of a number of strong peacemakers in the Brethren tradition. Of course there are so many more persons whose lives and thoughts are inspiring.

As I look over the items in this issue, I see people who have been mentors and role models for me, as well as people who are dear friends and co-workers — and family members. I am thankful for their place in my life. I'm pleased that you will be able to hear from them in these pages.

There is a question going around these days; I'm sure you have probably heard it: "Are we still a peace church?" The recent sociological survey of members of the church indicates that many in our denomination are not committed to peacemaking or to nonresistance, and this is a deep concern. I'd like to share four quick reflections on this question.

First — this is not a new problem. In World War II, only 20% of Brethren young men who were drafted declared themselves as conscientious objectors to war, and over half of those 20% served in the military in noncombatant roles.

Second — however mixed we may be in terms of our own personal beliefs and commitments, we are more unified when it comes to our understanding of our call to peacemaking as a

church. Whenever questions come to Annual Conference regarding our peace witness — from the position paper,

"Peacemaking: The Calling of God's People in History," to the resolution on the war in Iraq — they

are adopted by the delegates, and generally with widespread support.

Third — peacemaking takes many forms. From the Imperial Heights church in Los Angeles, who reach out to youth at risk of gang violence in their

community, to the Manassas church in northern Virginia, who speak out on behalf of the immigrant and the outcast, we Brethren are about peacemaking. Conscientious objection to military service is only one of many ways God calls us to minister and witness for peace.

Fourth — perhaps we are asking the wrong question. I don't think we are in

doubt about whether Jesus calls us to live our lives without violence. We all pretty much agree that Jesus was a peacemaker. So the question is not, "Are we a peace church?" but rather, "Are we a church that follows Jesus?"

Of course, we all fall short of that ideal, and God is gracious

in our shortcoming. But let's focus our questioning and self-reflection at the deeper level of our commitment to Christ. If we do that, our being a peace church will not be in question.

Bob Gross, director

... the question is not, "Are we a peace church?" but rather, "Are we a church that follows Jesus?"

As we stand on the doorstep of the church's fourth century, this is a year of deep reflection, planning, and prioritizing for On Earth Peace. We're not just going through the strategic planning motions — this is a roll-up-your-sleeves, question-the-assumptions, listen-to-the-Spirit kind of planning. We're finding new energy in continuing and emerging directions alike, all based on our central mission of equipping and leading faithful peacemakers. Watch for new things as we finish our planning and step out in new ways in the coming year.

What Should the Church's Peace Witness Be in the Next Century?

Annual Conference Breakfast Panelists Start the Conversation

The future of the Church of the Brethren as a peace church is now being passed to young adults who are passionate about our denominational heritage, aware of contemporary attitudes, and seeking ways to make a difference in the world. On Earth Peace has invited some of them to speak at the On Earth Peace Breakfast at Annual Conference this year to answer the question:



Elizabeth Keller: With the “war on terror,” our world in the U.S. has absolutely responded in fear — not in peace. Building walls, destroying forests, carrying guns, we insist that peace cannot be attained, so we respond with force, wealth, and denial. In part, the world is right, for the world does not give as Jesus gives — this is precisely why the church’s peace witness must prevail

in this next century. As Christians, we believe in the power and presence of God, who grants us the gift of peace, through the transforming Christ and the empowering Spirit.

Yet, I beg to ask, do we “Christians” really *believe*? The North American church and culture are hungry for a spiritual awakening. People want to participate in a church that places the expectancy of a transforming God at the center. Both the church and unchurched are overwhelmed by the pursuit of success, burdened by the want of consumerism, deadened by the distancing isolation — all these things that distract us from looking upward and outward with awareness and conscience, that hinder us from loving and serving an aching, violent, fearful, hungry world. We are longing for a communion with the Holy . . . longing for Jesus’ gift of peace.



Jordan Blevins: Today the Church of the Brethren is fully engrained in the society around it. We are political figures, school board members, fully participating members of the community. As such, we must consider the question: *If not a violent reaction, what can the Brethren do?*

In this day and age, it is no longer good enough for the Brethren to simply say we are not going to participate in war because we believe it is wrong and against Jesus’ teachings. While all of this is true, we need to go above and beyond it, and say, if not war, then what? We need to come up with aggressive ideas which can further the peace process, not just stand by the sidelines and argue that what is being done is wrong.

Living out the Kingdom of God means reflecting the relationships of the triune God through the power of the Holy Spirit. We must be ready to dedicate ourselves and our resources to the way of nonviolence — the same way the rest of this world is willing to dedicate itself to violence. We need to be a beacon that declares there is another way to live, and another possibility for reclaiming life from the jaws of death.



Gimbiya Kettering: There are always people asking about my identity: where I am from, who my people are. For years, my answer included a standard line: *My father is Church of the Brethren* — which only led to more questions about who are the Church of the Brethren.

And my answer was, *They are a historically pacifist church.*

It is an answer that no longer satisfies me. It scares me to imagine that our pacifist heritage has become only a relic of the past. Something we once were and once believed in, but by implication no longer are. I, too, have been overwhelmed by the pressures of the world, which leave little room and less reward for spiritual peace. But, I am not willing to lose this conviction for peace.

From my Jamaican heritage, I grew up listening to the Peter Tosh song “Equal Rights” that says, “Everyone is crying out for peace, yes/none is crying out for justice.” The song reminds me that without equal rights there will be no peace, a message that reminds how much violence is related to systemic oppression.

I feel blessed that I come from cultures that believe the world can be changed by God’s love and peace. As I unite these two parts of my heritage, I retrain my tongue to say, *We are a Living Peace Church.*



Anna Lisa Gross: Jesus’ message, and a theme throughout the First Testament, was not one of equality, but of reversal. The first shall be last, and the last shall be first. Are you the first or the last? Does this message excite or frighten you? Where will you be in the Kingdom?

Particularly as the Church of the Brethren has assimilated into mainstream U.S. culture, many in the church are privileged, by race and ethnicity, economic and educational status, and much more. How do we honor the diversity within us, as we do not all share these privileges? How do we answer Jesus’ call to care for those on the margins? Do we lend a hand? Work side-by-side? Give? Listen? Share? Take?

Eggs, Sugar, and Peace

A WWII Perspective on Peace

I grew up in Germany in the 1940s, as it was being torn by World War II. Air raids had driven my family from our home in Berlin, to the Baltic Sea, and finally we settled in the small town of Bad Harzburg, in the lower Harz Mountains. It was a difficult time for my family and we did not have a faith to rely on. My mother believed in the teachings, though not the divinity, of Jesus of Nazareth, and we only attended church for Christmas. Still it was those years, the conflict I witnessed, and the kindness of strangers that formed my faith and pacifist beliefs.

We were living with distant relatives and three other displaced families, sharing a basement kitchen — not that there was much to cook. Food was extremely scarce and we children learned to gather from the woods mushrooms, nuts, edible green plants, and firewood. Since the house where we ate our meals was built on a hillside, the kitchen had a ground level entrance that bordered with a chicken coop. The chickens belonged to the relative who sheltered us, but he never shared any of the eggs with our family.

Soon, an egg or two was disappearing every night. The owner was furious and offered an award — one egg — to the finder of the thief. Despite the reward, no one was blamed. Much later I learned it was a Russian Orthodox preacher who was one of the refugees we lived with. Every night he gave the eggs he took to

my mother, saying “Put this into the children’s porridge. They won’t know it’s there but their bodies will.” He knew this could be seen as a sin, but explained his actions thus, “I know we have a commandment: Thou shalt not steal. But in my religion, we have a higher commandment: You must save life.”

As I pondered the will of God, American army tanks rumbled into our town. Finally, the war was over. Of course, Germany would never be the country we once knew; it was an occupied nation. The Military Police (MP) were a powerful presence that claimed to be keeping order. Houses were requisitioned on short notice for officer quarters. Whatever perishables were left by the evicted German families were thrown into a sidewalk bonfire stoked by a wary MP.

Still living in lean times, I was constantly searching for food. Seeing a bag of sugar at the edge of the flames, I reached for it. The MP pushed me away with the butt of his rifle, probably just following orders. At that moment, it dawned on me: there is something wrong with war. It was not, as I had learned, that some country wanted something another country had. This MP did not want the sugar, yet I could not have the treasure. War was not like children fighting over toys; it was destructive to others for its own sake.



At 21, Karen Carter met a BVS volunteer at the American Community Church she attended in Berlin. He showed her his work, explained how he had been sent by his church—a pacifist church. Karen and Clyde have now been married for almost fifty years, marched with Martin Luther King, against the Vietnam War, and against the CIA in Latin America. They continue to work for peace; in January she accompanied Bob Gross on the On Earth Peace/Christian Peacemaking Teams delegation to the Middle East.

Annual Conference Activities

See the insert in the center of this newsletter for more information about the On Earth Peace Annual Conference breakfast, insight sessions, and other On Earth Peace events at this year’s Church of the Brethren Annual Conference.

Chuck Boyer, Pastor and Prophet

Chuck Boyer has the gracious, gentle spirit of a pastor, and the courageous heart and voice of a prophet. For more than forty years he has blessed the Church of the Brethren with these gifts, as pastor, denominational staff leader, and Annual Conference moderator.

Growing up in the West Manchester Church of the Brethren, near North Manchester, Indiana, Chuck learned about the peace testimony of the church at Camp Mack, and at district and denominational events.

At age eighteen, he knew he was a conscientious objector (CO), but faced a difficult choice. If he accepted the I-A classification that the draft board had given him, he would likely be able to continue with his plans for his life, because there was no active draft at the time. However, if he filed for CO classification, he would probably be called for service immediately.

As a senior in college, Chuck had a powerful experience of God's presence one day. He heard a voice saying, "Why do you keep resisting my call to you to be a peacemaker?" Convinced, Chuck

called the draft board and told them that he wanted CO classification, and entered Brethren Volunteer Service immediately after graduation.

Chuck's experience in BVS in Germany was life-changing. He was inspired by the people with whom he worked in post-war reconstruction in Cassel, and moved by the suffering and destruction he saw there. He decided to enter the ministry, and enrolled at Bethany Seminary upon returning from BVS. From seminary, he became campus pastor at Purdue University during the height of the war in Viet Nam, and was deeply involved with draft counseling.

In 1969, he was called to be the director of BVS, a role that called upon both his prophetic and pastoral gifts as he supported and challenged youth in their service to the world in the name of Christ.

Chuck's next role was as Peace Consultant for the General Board, where he led and encouraged many

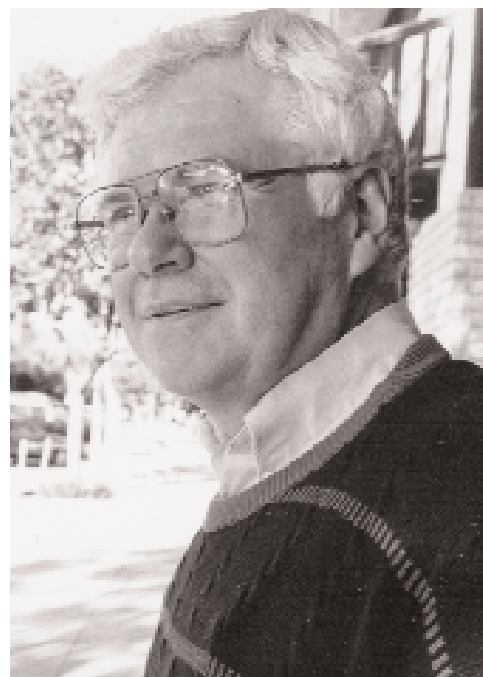


Photo by George Keener, courtesy of the General Board

Chuck Boyer, Annual Conference Moderator, 1992

peacemaking efforts (including the Ministry of Reconciliation, which later was transferred to On Earth Peace), and made his own strong witness as he and his wife Shirley chose not to pay the military portion of their federal income tax.

In 1988, Chuck was called to be pastor of the LaVerne (CA) Church of the Brethren, where he served until his retirement in 2002. Chuck was moderator of Annual Conference in 1992, and was noted for his warm, inviting manner and his strong advocacy for the inclusion of all persons in the life of the church. Again, he was the prophet and the pastor.

What is Chuck Boyer's prophetic call for the church now? "I believe the Church of the Brethren should take the lead in creating a way for people in this country to meet and get to know the people of Iraq as neighbors. We did that with the German student exchange programs after World War II, and we can do it again now.

Debbie Roberts and Bob Gross



Christmas 2007

Keeping the Church of the Brethren Pacifist Tradition Alive

Excerpted from “Some Reflections of a Would-Be Peacemaker”

After a lifetime of working as a peacemaker in the Church of the Brethren, Fran Clemens Nyce shares her reflections about the future of our pacifist heritage.

It seems obvious that the local congregation needs to be the primary place for peace education and witness to be happening. I do not know how typical our Westminster (MD) Church of the Brethren congregation is, but our Peace Education Committee has found it be a big challenge to work with that agenda. Some good things are happening, including the funding of a peace education scholarship. Currently we are dialoguing on the question of the validity of the official Brethren position that “all war is sin,” and how to maintain respectful relationships among members who have differing views on that position. Sometimes, it seems easier to stand on the street corner with a peace poster! I hope it will be possible for the Church of the Brethren to maintain our historically strong witness for peace in

How can we find a way to continue to welcome diversity while remaining faithful to our distinctive calling as a “living peace church”?

spite of the discrepancy between our official peace position and the actual position of a large percentage of our membership. Maybe some of our Westminster members are right in feeling that it is some dishonesty in that reality.

Regardless of differing interpretations of pacifism, we can all accept the challenge of living a life of love and compassion with our neighbors across the street as well as in the global community. But it is still true that we are to be “in the world, but not of the world,” clearly rejecting the culture of violence that glorifies

military power, in spite of the subtle pressures to water down our peace message in order to be more socially acceptable. The question for us is this: How can we find a way to continue to welcome diversity while remaining faithful to our distinctive calling as a “living peace church”?

I am happy to actively support On Earth Peace with its single-minded focus on helping the Brethren to continue to live out our calling as a peace church, by training youth and adults in the ways of peace, providing Ministry of Reconciliation, and encouraging resistance to war and nonviolent action for peace. It is my hope that through the ministries of On Earth Peace and all other peace education efforts of the church, including the Brethren Witness/Washington Office, the Christian Citizenship Seminars, the National Youth Conferences, and Brethren Volunteer Service, the Church of the Brethren can continue to provide leadership and resources to help us live up to our calling.



Though Fran Clemens Nyce calls herself a would-be peacemaker, we believe she has been a successful peacemaker for several decades. Fran is from a long line of Brethren and embraced pacifism from her youth. She was a BVSer in post-WWII Europe, continued in resistance to the Contras, and continues into the present, both on an international scale and in her home congregation. This article is an excerpt from a long testimony of a life lived for peace that she wrote for *On Earth Peace*.



Sign up for our E-Newsletters

- ◆ **the Peacebuilder** — a brief email newsletter with stories, ideas and news of the On Earth Peace community
- ◆ **Peace Witness Action List** — examples of creative and empowered nonviolent action around the world
- ◆ **Living Peace Church News & Notes** — a monthly column for church newsletters about peace and reconciliation
- ◆ **Reconciliation News** — news and resources of interest to practitioners and friends of the Ministry of Reconciliation and On Earth Peace.

For more information, visit www.onearthpeace.org.

Pacifists in Gangland

The churches in the Mid-Atlantic district rarely consider themselves to live in neighborhoods plagued by gang violence. They used to think those were issues for congregations in poor and urban places — faraway places like Los Angeles. However, Bruce Butler discovered differently as he volunteered with youth in Talbot County, Maryland, schools. Gangs have a foothold in his community, and Bruce wants to change that.

In April 2007, Butler attended a workshop that acknowledged increased gang activity in Maryland and his community, presented by local and state law enforcement. Wondering what to do next, Butler met Pastor Gilbert Romero of Bella Vista (CA) Church of the Brethren at a Bittersweet Gospel Band concert and shared his concern. Pastor Romero indicated that he could arrange for gang prevention training in L.A., where there have been long-term initiatives.

After receiving support from local law enforcement, Butler approached others to generate interest in spending a week in Los Angeles to receive training. He

was joined by Pastor Thomas Richard and Nicole Swann of Fairview Church of the Brethren (Cordova, MD), and two other citizens of Talbot County. On Earth Peace, local churches, agencies, and individuals subsidized the group's trip to L.A., where they met with groups who work to provide peaceful alternatives and conflict resolution in communities stricken by gangs: the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, Imperial Heights Church of the Brethren, Home Boy Industries, Dorothy Kirby Detention Center, Central Juvenile Hall, and Frontier High School.

Together they formed the "Talbot County Safe Neighborhoods" Initiative to share the skills and strategies learned to effectively work in cooperation with local law enforcement to engage Talbot and neighboring Maryland counties. They have identified ten goals to increase community awareness of gang activity, reach out to youth being recruited by gangs, and share strategies that will make neighborhoods more peaceful.

*Co-written with Bruce Butler,
Easton (MD) Church of the Brethren*

Meet Marie Rhoades Peace Education Coordinator

Marie might not look much older than the youth she is leading, but she has the spirit of a mature peacemaker and disciple. Deeply



rooted in the Church of the Brethren and growing up as a pastor's kid, Marie has been attending peace rallies and witnessing since she was a child. This led her to study religion and philosophy at McPherson College and go on to get a Masters of Divinity from Lancaster Theological Seminary. A calling to work with youth led to the role of Youth Pastor at Lancaster (PA) Church of the Brethren, as well as coordinating youth at a community and district level. She is a peacemaker and future leader within our denomination.

At On Earth Peace, she continues reaching out to youth and young adults by providing educational materials, interactive workshops, and peace retreats. She is currently leading a discussion on how to use new modes of communication and technology to spread the news of peace. Congregations seeking new ways to teach peace are encouraged to contact Marie in the upcoming months. She can be reached by email at marie.oepa@gmail.com or by phone at 802-387-5079.

Marie joins our staff from her home at A Place Apart, an intentional community in Vermont that seeks to live in peace. For more about Marie, in her own words, please read her article on page 10.

Are you or your congregation being led towards a ministry with gangs?

On Earth Peace wants to network with anyone responding to gangs in their communities.

Bruce, Tom, and Nicole are available to share info and perspectives they gained in the February 2008 training (see article above).

Please contact Matt Guynn at 503-775-1636,
mattguynn@earthlink.net;
or Bruce Butler at 410 820-5692 or e-mail
orkingforpeace@peoplepc.com.

More Than Just Observing MoR Presence at Annual Conference

Each year at Annual Conference, delegates take their seats and listen to the business at hand. Some decisions are made quickly. Some require questions, comments, and thoughtful deliberation. Some result in lively exchanges. Through it all, the Ministry of Reconciliation (MoR) Observers quietly wait for the opportunity to be helpful to anyone in need of a listening ear.

Up to a dozen volunteers take turns each year wearing the yellow MoR Observer badges and seating themselves in a designated area in the main hall. The tradition of seating Observers in the hall began in 1994, when MoR Committee member, Enten Eller, realized that some members were having difficulty with other members in the course of the business sessions. Following careful consideration, the idea of offering listening services at

conference was brought to the Annual Conference Officers. They welcomed the concept, and have invited the presence of MoR Observers every year since.

The goal of the Observers is to be helpful in situations where people are visibly frustrated or in conflict. They offer assistance in situations where there are observable conflict behaviors, such as angry words or nonverbals at the microphone. Alternatively, they might approach someone who clearly has feelings of frustration or hurt as they leave the microphone, or who may appear to “shut down” if their comments were ruled out of order or cut off in some way. The Observers gently offer assistance, and only proceed if their offer is accepted.

MoR Observers’ services are utilized in less visible ways, as well. At times, they have been called upon to offer

confidential mediation services between individuals, a service which can be requested by anyone at conference. Observers have also assisted with various witnesses that have taken place over the years, as a calming, neutral presence.

The work of MoR Observers continues to be appreciated by many at Conference, but perhaps most emphatically by those who are bystanders. Many delegates have related that their anxiety levels were lower when potentially divisive topics were on the agenda because skilled volunteers were available to assist if conflict should erupt. This summer, MoR Observers will take their seats on the conference floor in Richmond, Virginia. On Earth Peace is grateful for their expertise and their commitment.

*Annie Clark, program coordinator
of Ministry of Reconciliation*

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Mission Statement

On Earth Peace Assembly is a movement grounded in the Church of the Brethren dedicated to following the teachings of Jesus Christ in renewing and living out our biblical and denominational heritage of peace. Our purpose, through religious and educational activities, is to empower people to discern the things that make for peace – in ourselves, within families, in our global environment, among nations – and to advocate peace and justice, seeking the realization of God’s will on earth as it is in heaven.

Peace Vigil, A Way of Life

Every Monday for the past 25 years, from 11:30 to 12:30, we have been standing in a peace vigil in front of the Athens County (OH) Courthouse. Every Monday, that is, when we are not in Iraq or Palestine working with Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT), living as witnesses for peace. Some might see our whole lives as a vigil. We see it as living and working with brothers and sisters in the church to more authentically live out and be a witness to the radical message of nonviolent suffering love that Jesus demonstrated.

Our peace work in the Middle East traces back to a CPT delegation to the West Bank that Peggy made in 1995, which inspired Art to go with CPT to Hebron later that year. However, our peacemaking dates back to the Civil Rights Movement and anti-Vietnam War activities in the 1960's. It has become a part of our daily life, in the communal and simple way we choose to live, not taking part in the structures that promote oppression and violence.

When the war in Iraq loomed before us, Peggy felt a clear call and in October 2002, she went to Baghdad, staying through the shock and awe bombing. In the past 5½ years she has made ten trips to Iraq and spends more than half the year there. Art balances a life between the U.S., Hebron, and Iraq. Yes, the

separation we experience, the long excruciating plane trips to the Middle East, directly facing the principalities and powers, have been difficult. Sometimes we think it would be nice to sit back and do nothing, but we quickly realize what an incredible privilege we would lose.

We have had the gift of sharing hopes and dreams with our Iraqi neighbors, as well as their fear and despair. After experiencing the horror and futility of war, we feel more urgency to tell the truth: that war is never a solution to seemingly impossible dilemmas. Answers come from the courageous peacemakers we work alongside, whose faith guides them as they rebuild their lives and work for justice. They inspire and humble us. The love we have experienced with the Iraqi people has been a precious gift, a pearl of great price — and has helped shape our understanding of what it means to follow Jesus.

This work has given us opportunities to go deeper in our trust that God is there with us when we go into uncertain situations to witness to the gospel of reconciliation and peace. We went to



places like Abu Hishma and Fallujah, where U.S. soldiers told us, “Don’t go there. They are terrorists. They will kill you.” When we allowed ourselves to be open and vulnerable to those who were called our enemies, God was there breaking down the walls of hate and fear that divided us, and giving us healing. When we faced and asked for release of our own anger toward those who were instrumental in the invasion and occupation, God gave us the ability to listen caringly to their fear and pain. We discovered that love really does help us move beyond our fears and propels us forward in this work.

Art and Peggy Gish are organic farmers and Christian peacemakers from Athens, Ohio.

International Day of Prayer for Peace

Sunday, September 21, 2008

Is your congregation ready to share a vision of peace with its community?

Does your community need a word of healing, or challenge, or both?

Churches worldwide are invited to pray for peace on September 21, 2008.

The International Day of Prayer for Peace offers an opportunity for church communities in all places to pray and act together to nurture lasting peace in the hearts of people, their families, communities, and societies.

In 2007, over 100 congregations, colleges, and communities associated with the Church of the Brethren planned vigils and other events as part of the International Day of Prayer for Peace.

What about 300 congregations in 2008?

For more information, call 503-775-1636 or visit our website, www.onearthpeace.org.

A Peacemaker in Every Community

Peace Partners: On Earth Peace's New Volunteer Program

In 2007, On Earth Peace worked in all 23 districts. Ministry of Reconciliation alone had more than 800 participants. Peace Education workshops impacted over 2,000 youth. Peace Witness expanded its mission to include helping returning veterans reintegrate into civilian life. With a staff of seven, this scale of work is only possible through the tireless efforts of our volunteers, who commit themselves to peace and to their

communities. It is this way that the message of peace ripples from our communities through the world.

If you have been inspired and challenged by the lives of the peacemakers who have shared their stories and experiences in this newsletter, we encourage you to get in touch with On Earth Peace about our Peace Partners program. We welcome volunteers from around the world, of all

ages and cultural backgrounds. As a Peace Partner, you will not be working alone. You will be supported by On Earth Peace and other peacemakers in your community.

To sign up for more information, contact Peace Partner coordinator, Lauree Hersch Meyer, by email at laureehm@hotmail.com or by mail at 2303 Alabama Avenue, Durham, NC 27705.

For more information about Peace Partners and other needed volunteers, please visit the new page at our website:
<http://brethren.org/oepe/support/PeacePartners.html>

Calendar

June 2-6

*Ministry Summer Service/Youth
Peace Travel Team Orientation
Elgin, Illinois*

June 22-28

*Junior High Workcamp
New Windsor, Maryland*

July 6-12

*Song and Story Fest
Camp Brethren Woods, Virginia*

July 12-16

*Church of the Brethren
Annual Conference
Richmond, Virginia*

August 8-10

*Western Plains Youth Weekend
Camp Mt. Hermon, Kansas*

August 11-15

*National Young Adult Conference
Estes Park, Colorado*

August 22-26

*Young Adult Peace Camp
Brethren Heights, Michigan*

August 30-September 1

*Peace Retreat Leadership
Team Training
Chicago, Illinois*

October 4

*Exploring Consensus
Decision-Making
Richmond, Indiana*

October 25-26

*Keeping a Cool Head
in a Hot Meeting
Western Plains District Gathering IV
Salina, Kansas*

November 7-9

*Illinois/Wisconsin Youth
Peace Retreat*

November 13-14

*Keeping a Cool Head
in a Hot Meeting
Camp Mack, Indiana*

November 15

*Difficult Conversations Workshop
New Windsor, Maryland*

*Information available on these programs
and much more at www.onearthpeace.org*

Peace Action Organizer

As more and more congregations get active with On Earth Peace nonviolence ministries, we need your help!

We are looking for volunteers who have 2-4 hours a week available to assist with congregational peace and justice organizing.

Potential tasks

- * Outreach/follow-up with congregations about their peace and justice leadership
- * Tracking congregational contacts and identifying next steps
- * Developing and distributing resource packets
- * Organizing or facilitating networking conference calls

The general goal for all volunteers is to support congregations' ability to provide bold nonviolent leadership in their communities and the world.

Specific areas of activity include the International Day of Prayer for Peace, resisting military recruitment / positive alternatives to military service, and ministries to welcome soldiers home from active duty.

For more information, contact Matt Guynn at mattguynn@earthlink.net or 503-775-1636.

Teaching a Peaceful Life

We commit ourselves to participation in lifestyles of peace and justice for the sake of the world and for the healing and health of our souls. We understand that to some extent none of us can be free to be fully alive until all are free to be so.

~A Place Apart, Core Value

This statement drew me to A Place Apart, knowing that there I could explore active peacemaking as call. In Putney, Vermont, I live with others who seek to balance daily activities and work with discipleship and spiritual growth. I intentionally make room for prayer and attentiveness to God's presence and call in my life. I have been led to this place by my Church of the Brethren heritage, my family's values, and my experiences.

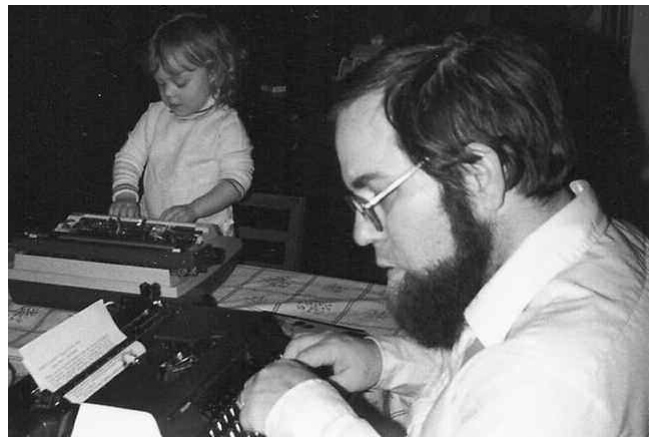
Some of my first memories are from rallies for peace that my parents attended, with me in tow carrying the handcrafted signs that only a child can produce. As a junior high student, I began to recognize the unique interpretation that my Church of the Brethren upbringing brought to issues of injustice and violence. To explore these traditions, I attended a peace academy in New Windsor. Inspired by what I learned, I shared the message by hosting a peace retreat at my home church (Harrisburg First (PA) Church of the Brethren).

In college, I focused on the study of religions with a hope that nonviolence inspired by love for neighbor and God would be found as a thread that united the faithful of the world. In the Middle East, I studied the biblical traditions, and in India the Eastern — thus meeting Gandhi as a leader who too sought to recognize the power of satyagraha, as Jesus did agape love. These experiences shaped my thoughts, beliefs, and work. During my service at Lancaster (PA) Church of the Brethren as pastor of youth, I shared the importance of the peace tradition of the Church of the Brethren as a way of discipleship.

I sit down to write this article coming from a presentation of Ishmael Beah whose bestselling memoir, [A Long Way](#)

[Gone](#), tells of his experiences in Sierr Leone during the civil war as a victim and as a child soldier. While reflecting on the things that make for war and for peace, he mentioned the same thing that many have acknowledged — that education is the key to peace. M. R. Zigler, the founder of On Earth Peace, also understood that educating youth was essential to peacemaking. He focused on youth from the Church of the Brethren whose tradition called them to active peacemaking.

I am convicted that peace education is essential in the church and excited that it will be my focus as Peace Education Coordinator for On Earth Peace. All too often as Americans and as Christians, we are eager to place responsibility of war and peace on those who are in the midst of violence — pointing out the splinter in their eyes while ignoring the log in our own. With access to education and to the teachings of Jesus,



Marie learned the the values of peacemaking and writing at an early age from family members like her father, Gerald Rhoades.

we have great responsibility. I enter peace education with Jesus, who was a teacher, rabbi, and student, also an activist, non-resister, and healer. My hope is that through continued education, focused on peace as exemplified by Jesus, we will become a church filled with active disciples and agents for change eager to do the things that make for peace.

Marie Rhoades, Program Coordinator of Peace Education

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But This War is Different A Peace Meditation



*Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;
righteousness and peace will kiss each other.*

~Psalm 85:10, 2008-2009 On Earth Peace Theme

When the Brethren minister P.R. Wrightsman of Tennessee was confronted by a clergyman of

another faith while the two rode a train through the Confederate south, his adversary delivered a line we hear at the start of many conflicts — “But this war is different.”

Wrightsmen had just explained that the Brethren stood against war, but this rattling railway car, filled with lowering Confederate soldiers and others in love with the so-called “glorious cause” couldn’t imagine anything but that God was on their side. Other wars might have been sin, but not this one!

Wrightsmen stood his ground and said later he felt protected by God though surrounded by unsympathetic passengers, including a good number of Confederate soldiers. But the attitude that “this war is different” is part of what makes the peace witness so unpopular. After the fact most (but not all!) Americans would agree that the defense of slavery was not a glorious cause.

In the early stages of a war there have not been enough casualties to cause the general populace to count the cost. The passions are too fierce. The present war is always different. Whether it was the War of the Revolution, the Civil War, the World Wars, Korea, Vietnam, or the Gulf Wars, it is only in retrospect that citizens can look back dispassionately and evaluate whether a war was just, necessary, or just plain stupid.

In an era when most of our Brethren, much less most Christians, express doubts about a position on peace, I would like to suggest that we cultivate a sense of history, peace games, if you will,

patterned after war games.

Sunday School classes might be encouraged to consider which wars in the past were more justified than others. This is where the study of history comes into play. The passions that fueled the first World War were every bit as fierce as those which accompanied the second. Japan and Germany represented true evil, while the European nations stupidly fell into World War I without any just cause. Europe lost a whole generation of young men for nothing — and sowed the seeds that made the second war possible.

It also helps if peacemakers have a heart for all people rather than the disdain that some display. Jesus lamented over Jerusalem’s folly, and said elsewhere it is not God’s will that even one should perish. When P.R. Wrightsmen and his Brethren arrived for

their Love Feast they found their meetinghouse surrounded by hostile Confederate soldiers. Though the other Brethren wanted to walk away from the service, Wrightsmen incorporated the soldiers into the Love Feast, and lamented privately that so many would not survive the war.

None of this means we should stop working for peace in the present, but it does suggest that part of our task as peacemakers is to function as historians, interpreters, who make the cast that, once the passions of war fade, the reasons for that war seem more suspect. Do that often enough, and perhaps people will begin to connect the dots, all the way from the past to the present and perhaps even the future.

Frank Ramirez is pastor of Everett (PA) Church of the Brethren.

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*~Lauree Hersch Meyer, former On Earth Peace board member,
Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina*

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