PEACE Through NONVIOLENCE

Promoting alternatives to violence in ourselves, our families, our communities, and our world.

Ashland Center for Nonviolence

2015 Annual Report
WORKING FOR PEACE TOGETHER OVER THE PAST YEAR

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

MESSAGE FROM JOHN STRATTON

MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY

SEEKING PEACE WITH JUSTICE

RESOLVING CONFLICT

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The cover image is an art contest submission by C. Klein of Mapleton Elementary School.
There is more to peace than opposing violence. This is the reason why ten years ago, Arun Gandhi, ACN’s first speaker, challenged us to spell nonviolence as one word, without a hyphen. It is a small point, but not a trivial one. Most people define nonviolence negatively – as simply avoiding violence. They assume it is passive, that it perhaps involves making moral speeches about being nice, and that it requires people to take whatever is dished out by the violent people around them.

But nonviolence involves more than avoiding violence. It means loving not only one’s neighbor, but also one’s enemy and “seeking the peace of the city” in which one resides. Mahatma Gandhi called nonviolence satyagraha, usually translated as truthforce or soulforce. He had in mind the active – and yet nonviolent – resistance to wrong, fueled by love rather than anger. Its goal is the transformation of one’s relationship with the enemy rather than destroying him. In many ways, Arun Gandhi’s presentation ten years ago set the stage for the Center.

Nonviolence can be difficult to learn, to embody, and to teach. This is because it is a spirit, a way of being. Martin Luther King said that nonviolence doesn’t just mean avoiding physical violence, but also cultivating a nonviolent spirit. “You not only refuse to shoot a man, but you refuse to hate him.” Gandhi too spoke about the “religion of nonviolence” as rooted in the realization that human dignity requires a spirit whose strength derives from obedience to a higher law: holding fast to what is true, especially the superiority of compassion. When we put things this way, we get a sense of why peace is so hard. Doing something is easy; being something is hard.

To pragmatic people like ourselves who put a premium on immediate results, these ideas can sound noble but naive. We want to solve our problems once and for all. We want the enemy destroyed. But violence does not create peace, and we know that, when we let ourselves think about it. We can see this in international conflicts: seemingly elusive peace doesn’t come about by destroying the enemy, but through justice, reconciliation, and—in the most dramatic instances like South Africa after Apartheid—forgiveness. Violence tears down; peace builds up.

Over the past year, our world has witnessed a lot of events that put nonviolence to the test. The mission of the Ashland Center for Nonviolence compels us always to look for positive alternatives and to find ways to cultivate the spirit of nonviolence and to work together for peace. Thank you for being part of this important work!
As I conclude my first year as executive director of the Ashland Center for Nonviolence, it’s terrific to look back over all that we’ve done together. It was certainly a busy year for me between transitioning to this new role as well as launching several new and exciting initiatives with the Center.

More than ever, we are committed to promoting alternatives to violence in ourselves, our community, and the world and it’s a good time to take a look back over all that we’ve accomplished, as well as the work we’ve set ourselves for the future.

Since its first presentation, Arun Gandhi in 2003, the Ashland Center for Nonviolence has been a witness for peace in America’s rural heartland. We have always sought to be relevant to local needs while also making a difference beyond our communities. This is what ACN stands for—local action with national impact.

These are some of the new projects we took on over the last year. With your help, we:

- hosted our first annual conference.
- launched the ACN Scholars program, admitting the first class of scholars for Fall 2015.
- held peace-themed art and essay contests for school children throughout Ashland and Richland counties.

One of the highlights of the year for me was the opportunity to meet civil rights legend, C.T. Vivian, who spoke to a crowd of 650 attendees on Martin Luther King Day.

Now as I look ahead to the 2015–2016 academic year, I am recommitting myself to the good work of thinking and acting creatively for nonviolence and to the many opportunities to collaborate with others throughout our communities and our nation on projects that deeply matter to us all.
The Ashland Center for Nonviolence was born amidst the anger, indignation, and rage that many of us felt about the coming invasion of Iraq. Anger is an effective quick-acting fuel, but it burns out when the source of the anger is taken away. That’s why so few of the Vietnam protest movements turned into peace building initiatives.

We were initially fueled by that anger but we recognized the need to develop education and witnessing. This was not out of nobility. Our commitment reflected the reality of life in this country. We had just seen how Congress and the American people could be roused to support a war very few wanted. We recognized it would take a long time to educate people to be skeptical enough about violence and war that they would seek different ways to resolve conflict.

We committed to exploring and promoting alternatives to violence. How, we asked, do we manage conflict so that it does not create violence? How do we manage conflict between nations, between groups, between neighbors, and among family members? How do we manage our own personal conflicts?

This became and remains the challenge: to learn to confront anger and conflict in ways that reduce violence and lead to reconciliation.

Among the many obstacles to peace is the deeply held belief that war and violence are unavoidable in our world—that conflict and tension are inevitable and simply part of human existence. But there is a better way and so we work actively on campus and in the community to challenge the usual thinking.

We have had presentations and workshops on restorative justice, on forgiveness, on creating a caring community, and on hate groups. We have challenged stereotypes and listened to marginalized voices. We have helped people learn to be mediators and to lead circles, a powerful way to help create dialogue and build community.

We have much to learn by studying the great voices of the past, the theorists and the practitioners of nonviolence. As we study them, the greatest thing we have to learn is that they were human: full of contradiction, full of flaws, and sometimes riddled with paradox.

At first those failings are off-putting—our heroes are not always heroic, and they are sometimes downright confusing. But here’s the point: they did good and sometimes great things in spite of their failings. That means that we cannot hide from the challenge by saying that we are too frail or too flawed. It is frail and flawed human beings who have always done the work.

I am sometimes amazed at what has been accomplished since ACN began. Yes, we began with anger at the invasion of Iraq, a war that has now cost hundreds of thousands of lives, mostly Iraqi, and over a trillion dollars, mostly American. Yet from that anger has come an on-going organization committed to exploring and promoting alternatives to violence.

At the same time, I am still frustrated at how much remains to be done. I am reminded that it took 200 years to end chattel slavery and it took 200 years to bring basic legal rights to women. Our war-making and war-justifying machinery is as deeply entrenched as was slavery and as was the “need” to subjugate women. We need to be prepared for another 200 year campaign, but that does not mean waiting around. The first abolitionists and the first ones speaking out for women’s rights did not stay home because it was going to be a long struggle. We, too, have much to do.

It astonishes me that it was only a little more than a year ago that I stepped down as Executive Director. But stepping down, as people called it, has not been stepping aside; it has been passing the baton in a relay race. It is a good feeling.

John Stratton served as executive director from ACN’s beginning until 2014.
Our region got a real treat when Ashland played host to Rev. Dr. C.T. Vivian. Now 92 years old, Dr. Vivian is a well-known hero of the civil rights movement. He was a personal friend of Martin Luther King, Jr., a freedom rider, and leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. He helped organize nonviolent campaigns for civil rights in Selma, Birmingham, Nashville, and other places. Dr. Vivian is an American Baptist minister and a determined and longtime advocate for nonviolence. He continues to be an eloquent defender of democracy and speaks about nonviolence as a moral and spiritual conviction rather than primarily a political one. In 2013, President Obama awarded Vivian the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

“It was more than a pleasure and an honor to meet Dr. C.T. Vivian. I would not be where I am today if it were not for the work he did, including staring death in the face on several occasions. He fought so that I would be here, and that is something I will never forget.”

— Benjamin Black, AU Senior
The last year has been very challenging for those who hope and work for a peace that can be sustained in the long run through the consistent application of justice. From Ferguson to Baltimore and with so many other places and people in between, communities have been speaking out about police brutality, especially where racial bias is at work in the injustice.

Following Dr. Vivian’s visit to Ashland, which sparked a number of constructive conversations about race, ACN worked with the Ashland University Center of Religious Life and Multicultural Student Services to take a group of students to see the film Selma in January, followed by a vulnerable and enlightening discussion about racial justice. Many minority and international students shared how they experience race on campus and in other areas of their lives. A number of good connections were fostered; these will help ACN better address issues of race, justice, and violence in the future. Starting in Fall 2015, ACN will have a student intern dedicated to these issues.
RESOLVING CONFLICT

TALK, Ashland Community Mediation Services, began as a partnership between the Kroc Center (Salvation Army) and the Ashland Center for Nonviolence. We began at the request of several social service workers in town who wanted another alternative to dispute resolution for the community.

Developing mediation is a natural undertaking for ACN as mediation reduces conflict and promotes reconciliation in many situations.

We have mediated disputes involving families struggling to take care of elders, severance pay, payment for services, and landlords and tenants. Recently we began parenting-time mediations, where we help parents who have separated or divorced work out the details of visitations.

We have trained mediators, some of whom work with TALK and others who use mediation in their jobs.

We have also provided training in the circle process to support groups, teachers and student teachers. The circle process allows people to share stories, concerns and possibilities with one another in a way that builds community.

“Mediation training has helped me hone my listening skills as I seek to ‘tease out’ the presenting issues and interests of individuals in conflict. What I have learned is that most individuals can generate their own solutions when aided by a trained and impartial mediator, resulting in an agreement which benefits both parties. The mediation process restores my faith that human beings can resolve many of their conflicts when in an atmosphere of being listened to and understood.”

— Judy McLaughlin, TALK Mediator

Sarah Fairchild
TALK Mediator
and Social Service Coordinator, Northeast Ohio Division of The Salvation Army

“Being trained in the skills of mediation has bled into multiple areas of my life. As a case manager for families in crisis I find that I use the skills daily. I have become a more objective listener and use more neutral language which helps create stronger boundaries while also developing stronger healthy professional relationships with my clients. I often use mediation as we build a case plan.

As a mother with two children mediation is constantly being used to resolve conflict. In the past I may have said “because I said so and that is that,” but using mediation helps my children be heard and this helps resolve whatever the issue is to meet everyone’s need. As a spouse I have become a better listener to my husband and I have found now that it is easier to put myself in his shoes. Which in turn helps him respond better to me.

Mediation can be used subtly or obviously, but there are few days without some sort of conflict and I find that mediation has become invaluable to me and am grateful for the training and opportunity to use these skills as it has helped me grow in every area of my life.”
On Saturday, March 28, ACN held its first annual conference: “Considering the Challenges to Nonviolence: Practical and Theoretical.”

This was an exciting opportunity for over fifty guests and eleven presenters to engage in some uncompromising self-criticism as proponents of nonviolence. A wonderfully diverse group of scholars presented an array of papers that raised questions for those of us committed to nonviolence to reflect on and discuss.

Our keynote, Dr. Robert Brimlow of St. John Fisher college, unsettled us with the sheer range of difficulties at supposing nonviolence to be the answer to the problem of evil in the world by asking serious questions: What about Hitler? What about ISIS? Perhaps best of all, we made some new friends and connections from around our region.
STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION
Fiscal Year 2014 – 2015

REVENUE
Ashland University $21,458
Gifts $8,509
Events $3,631
Total Revenue $33,598

EXPENSES
Personnel $23,592
Office Expenses $1,883
Travel $672
Programming Costs $9,905
Total Expenses $36,052

Revenue minus expenses ($2,454)
Carryover balance from prior year $10,247

BALANCE $7,793

Additional Revenue
(Gifts for Scholars support) $9,506
STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS
ASHLAND CENTER FOR NONVIOLENCE

- Allan Andersen
  member of the Ashland community, small business owner
- David Aune
  associate professor of Religion, Ashland University
- Doris Cannon
  member of the Ashland community
- Wyndy Corbin-Reuschling
  professor of Ethics and Theology, Ashland Theological Seminary
- Linda Fry
  peace and conciliation advocate, Church of the Brethren
- Abraham Ndungu
  Ashland Theological Seminary student and adjunct professor at the Ohio State University
- Tyler Olson
  program manager, Conflict Resolution and Peace Studies Certificate Program, Cuyahoga Community College
- Robby Roberson
  assistant professor of Hospitality Management, Ashland University
- John Stratton
  member of the Ashland community, professor emeritus of English, Ashland University and former executive director of ACN
- Tom Snyder
  director of the Master of Divinity cohort program, Ashland Theological Seminary
- Emily Wirtz
  Ashland University student
alternatives
to violence

PEACE
conflict
resolution
equality

JUSTICE
compassion
reconciliation
understanding
caring

ASHLAND CENTER FOR NONVIOLENCE

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