

LETTER FROM THE BOARD CHAIR:

Hello! My name is Gabriel Pennington, and I am now chair for the Topeka Center for Peace & Justice. I am excited to take on this role and see where the year will take us. I have served on the TCPJ Board since 2023. My family moved to Topeka in August of 2020, quite the time to establish oneself in a new community. However, we quickly came to appreciate all that Topeka has to offer. My time on the board thus far has been fruitful. I am encouraged to see the ways this organization works together to establish a just and peaceable community.



TABLE OF CONTENTS:

- Pg. 1 - Letter from Board Chair
- Pg. 2 - Letter from Executive Director
- Pg. 3 - 40th Anniversary Peace Party
- Pg. 4 - Male Factor
 - Girl Up/RLC
 - Open Mic
- Pg. 5 - Peace Camp
- Pg. 6 - Restorative Kansas
 - Peace Outreach Project (POP)

I currently serve as pastor at Southern Hills Mennonite Church in south Topeka. Previously, I've worked as an English teacher, wrestling coach, and jail chaplain. I also spend time volunteering with the PTO, Topeka Rescue Mission, Moving Ahead Partnership, and Topeka JUMP. Christa, my spouse, has worked in education, as well, for her entire career. We have two seventh grade boys. We enjoy being outside, hiking, camping, and fishing. I did not grow up Mennonite but found this faith tradition as an adult. My faith compels me to not just seek peace but actively work to make peace. My faith also calls me to see the inherent value and worth of all people. I see this as central to my conviction to serve on the TCPJ Board.

In my time on the board, I have been amazed to see the various streams TCPJ uses to water peace in our city. I have attended the "Whose Dream Is It" celebration of Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy. A highlight of mine was responding to the keynote speaker last year. I have attended several "Male Factors," at least one with each of my boys. My boys have also participated in Peace Camp. Of course, hosting the annual Peace Party is a joy, especially last year's 40th anniversary. I was also able to attend the Restorative Kansas Conference in Topeka last fall.

We held our annual board retreat recently. This is a time when we bring on new board members and reacquaint ourselves with the work of TCPJ. I am glad that TCPJ has actively sought a diverse board – diverse not just in faith and race, but also in work experiences. I am pleased that our board contains not just clergy, but health professionals and mental-health experts. I believe this gives us a better perspective on what peace actually looks like. This year, I challenged the board to consider what their expertise might be, knowing that we all have specific gifts. Further, as we consider who we are, we can pay attention to gaps and address them as they arise. I am sure 2026 will bring new obstacles, but I anticipate us turning them into new opportunities.

- Pastor Gabriel Pennington

[AS WE LOOK FORWARD, CLICK HERE TO REFLECT WITH A VIDEO HISTORY OF TCPJ](#)



LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:

In 2025, the Topeka Center for Peace and Justice took decisive steps to strengthen organizational stability and position the team for long-term growth. Guided by our belief that resilience requires adaptability, we implemented a strategic transition in response to an unexpected change in facility operations.

After our landlord sold the space that we had recently renovated and planned to continue to occupy, we moved quickly to ensure continuity of operations. With limited notice, we safely relocated furniture and equipment to secure storage and shifted to a flexible remote-work approach, while assessing options for a sustainable, mission-aligned office location.

In the interim, we have maintained uninterrupted service delivery by hosting mediations and key meetings at the public library, ensuring the community continues to receive timely support as we finalize plans for a financially sound, permanent space for staff and mediation work.

We strengthened the Peace Outreach Project (POP) by adding a new community partner to expand wraparound supports for youth and families. We're pleased to collaborate with Topeka SENT, which complements POP's prevention and intervention work through behavioral health services, a food bank, and family-focused resources.

At the same time, we pursued grant opportunities and secured continued, though slightly reduced, program funding. Because of decreases in funding, we had to make some reductions in administrative support by adjusting staffing hours, but we have been able to sustain core services and program impact.

Looking ahead, the Topeka Center for Peace & Justice is expanding its organizational capacity through a new initiative sponsored by Topeka Community Foundation. Selected as one of 10 participating nonprofits, we will receive targeted support to strengthen branding, fundraising, and communications. Our work is being guided by Kelley Consultants through a combination of in-person sessions at the library and Zoom meetings.

Despite some major headwinds, the Topeka Center for Peace & Justice has sustained strong service delivery and community impact. In 2025, we conducted more than 83 mediations and supported restorative practices in schools for almost 235 students, helping youth and educators strengthen communication, accountability, and conflict-resolution skills. We held several Male Factor events, providing opportunities for over 70 youth and professional men to talk about current issues, such as health and finances. We also expanded community healing efforts through a partnership with the Unitarian Universalist Church of Topeka to host healing circles. The positive feedback from more than 200 participants in three circles indicated these spaces are helping community members process current challenges, build connection, and move forward constructively. We plan to continue offering healing circles as a consistent, trusted outlet for reflection and dialogue. Meanwhile, around 30 students attended our 2025 Peace Camp, along with volunteers from West Side Christian Church, New Life Baptist Church, Washburn Rural School District 437, and the United Methodist Church. Finally, we held a very successful 40th anniversary Peace Party, chaired by Mrs. Glenda Washington, which saw about 200 attendees.

Now in 2026, we are energized by new board leadership, including our board chair, Pastor Gabriel Pennington, and additional members. To further strengthen organizational visibility and engagement, we are exploring a contract partnership with a public relations professional to review and enhance our programs, newsletters, website, and related communication materials.

Finally, we are prioritizing growth in individual giving, planned giving, and sponsorship support to ensure long-term sustainability. As we anticipate potential funding shifts in 2028 — particularly the need to diversify beyond select state grants that may no longer support certain programs — we invite our supporters to invest in this next chapter by contributing to and championing our work across the community.



Thank you,
Pastor Carl Frazier



40TH ANNIVERSARY PEACE PARTY

On October 30, 2025, the Topeka Center for Peace & Justice celebrated a major accomplishment — 40 years of promoting peace, justice, and community empowerment — with an unforgettable 40th Anniversary Peace Party. The celebration took place at The Topeka Zoo’s Kay McFarland Japanese Garden and Venue. The theme for the year’s Peace Party was “Pathways to Peace.”

The evening was full of joy, laughter, and connection. Guests enjoyed live music, a photo area to take pictures, a cash bar, and delicious meal consisting of salad, pasta, rice, meat dishes, and a cheesecake for dessert.

Throughout the evening, awards and certificates were presented to individuals and organizations who have demonstrated great commitment to promoting peace and justice across our community.

TCPJ was honored to welcome Topeka City Manager Dr. Robert Perez as the event’s keynote speaker. The Peace Party also included a silent auction where guests could bid on a variety of gifts, all to support the continuous work of the Center.

A highlight of the night was a video sharing the history of how the Topeka Center for Peace & Justice began 40 years ago. The video was created by Linessa Frazier and can be viewed by going to the “About Us” tab on the TCPJ website, www.topekacpj.org, or by clicking on the video linked at the bottom of the first page of this newsletter.

Since its founding in 1985, the Topeka Center for Peace & Justice has been a cornerstone of hope and positive change in the community. With the help of community partnerships, TCPJ assisted about 2,000 people in the last year, using resources like mediations, education, and other support services. The Center has empowered youth and the community to grow and steer towards a better future for decades, and it will continue to do so.

As the night came to an end, guests left inspired and excited to see what the future may bring for TCPJ.

The Topeka Center for Peace & Justice would like to thank everyone who attended and everyone who helped with the Peace Party. Thank you for helping make the 40th Anniversary Peace Party an amazing night to cherish and remember!

- Haven Jarrett



MALE FACTOR

The Male Factor is a restorative leadership initiative cultivating emotionally intelligent, accountable, and purpose-driven men across generations. It focuses on mastering emotions, conflict leadership, relationship-centered influence, and intergenerational mentorship. Strong men stabilize families. Stable men strengthen communities.

Mr. Zihindula Mulegwa is a trained Restorative Practitioner and Peace Agent who has been assigned to lead TCPJ's Male Factor programming. Now is the time to join the Movement! The following dates have been scheduled for Male Factor Community Dialogue Circles in 2026:

- April 11
- September 19
- November 14

On June 13, 2026, there will also be a Men's Seminar covering "Restoring Identity and Rebuilding Legacy." It will be a powerful leadership experience designed to equip men to lead without titles, master emotional control, de-escalate conflict, strengthen relationships, and influence their communities.

This is not hype. This is strategic male development.



TOPEKA CENTER FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE INC.

THE MALE FACTOR

RESTORING MEN. STRENGTHENING GENERATIONS.

The Male Factor is a restorative leadership initiative cultivating emotionally intelligent, accountable, and purpose-driven men across generations.

Join the Movement

- ✓ Emotional Mastery
- ✓ Conflict Leadership
- ✓ Relationship-Centered Influence
- ✓ Intergenerational Mentorship

Strong men stabilize families.
Stable men strengthen communities.



GIRL UP & RLC

We've recruited over 25 students at Robinson Middle School and 30 at Ross Elementary for Girl Up. At Eisenhower Middle School, we've been given the opportunity to provide mentorship to students and to speak and teach in advisor-based classes once a month with the sixth graders. Students and staff have learned that the Topeka Center for Peace & Justice Restorative Leadership Program and its Girl Up program are consistent and available when needed. We also remain connected with five high school students (three girls + two boys) attending Topeka High School, whom we met with through phone calls and one-on-one coaching sessions. It's an honor that these students have chosen to stay in contact with us.



OPEN MIC

In honor of Edith Snethen, one of our past board chairs who had a passion for spoken word, both J Rocks Smoke House and Shopper's Kitchen opened their venues in late 2025 to create a safe and family-friendly environment for artists to share their gifts and talents here in Topeka, Kansas. Themes included "Pathways to Peace," "Art, Love, Laughter, and Good Food," and "Recover All."

What topics would you like to hear about at future events like this? Do you or someone you know wish to share? Stay on the lookout for our next scheduled event; we would love to hold space with each of you.

- Regina Platt



PEACE CAMP 2025

THEME: PATHWAYS TO PEACE

Each summer during Peace Camp, the Topeka Center for Peace & Justice (TCPJ) invites local youth to a vibrant week of hands-on learning and community. The 2025 Peace Camp focused on “Pathways to Peace.”

At camp, elementary aged participants discovered personal strengths, learned about pathways to friendship, and gained breathing/calming techniques for life’s uncertain moments. Each day throughout the week, kids participated in “Peace Circles,” through which they shared their ideas and listened to the ideas of others. They enjoyed creating friendship bracelets, pathway pavers, and personalized t-shirts featuring the camp theme. The kids loved exploring the Capitol Building and were enthusiastic as they sprayed water from a fire hose, while learning about safety and peace from the Topeka Fire Department. In a peace rally at the Kansas Statehouse, the kids wowed listeners with a peace song, complete with motions.

Middle School Peace Camp participants took things deeper in their Peace Circles, diving into discussions about how they can be more peaceful in their everyday interactions and how they can help create peace in the community. Youth were lively as they created a meal together, engaged in a dance choreographed by one of the volunteers, and planted seeds representing growth and change. The Middle School Peace Campers energetically performed their dance and displayed beautiful and unique posters about “What Peace Means to Me” at the Kansas Capitol peace rally.

Thanks to the many volunteers who helped with Peace Camp in 2025 – YOU made it possible! Special thanks go to Shania Ward, Director of the Middle School Peace Camp, and Kit Pittier, Director of the Elementary School Peace Camp. These ladies spent endless hours putting together curriculum and coordinating details. Peace Camp also wouldn’t happen without the commitment and dedication of TCPJ staff, especially Carl Frazier, Regina Platt, and Amanda Saylor. Thanks to each for the many ways you provide support, facilitation, and coordination. Although Peace Camp is non-religious, local partners who provided building space and/or volunteers included New Life Baptist Church, West Side Christian Church, and United Methodist Church Peace Interns.

The beauty of Peace Camp is that the kids take what they’ve learned back to their families, schools, and communities. It’s a program that exponentially touches lives. TCPJ only charges \$35 per child to attend the camp (and scholarships are available). However, it takes much more money to put on Peace Camp, which includes activities, meals, and transportation. Your donation of \$35 could provide a scholarship for one child, or your donation of \$150 could cover a week of activities for one child. Donations can be made here: www.topekacpj.org/donate.html.



- Pastor Donna Gilchrist, Past Board Chair



RESTORATIVE KANSAS CONFERENCE 2025

The Topeka Center for Peace & Justice was honored to host Restorative Kansas 2025 with the assistance of the Restorative Kansas Committee, filled with practitioners from all over Kansas.

The morning began with heartfelt welcomes from staff, from the registration desk to the Powerhouse Conference Room at the gorgeous Sunflower Foundation here in Topeka. There were two learning tracks, and space was created for intergenerational connections between adults and high school students from nearby Seaman and Topeka West. The day reignited, refreshed, and engaged participants. Some stated it felt like a family reunion, allowing them to connect with like-minded individuals immersed in serving and uniting communities across the Midwest. Our event focused on restoration and renewal through circle dialogue, activities, and keynote speakers.

- Regina Platt



PEACE OUTREACH PROJECT (POP)

Can you believe that the Peace Outreach Project (POP) has successfully completed more than two years? Wow! How time hasn't stood still!

The partnership with Family Peace Initiative (FPI) began in July 2023 and ended June 2025. Many thanks to the hard work and partnership of FPI's former Assistant Director, Tish Taylor, and her group facilitators. As the project continues to expand and evolve, we look forward to leveraging our new wrap-around partnerships with SENT Topeka and Family Service and Guidance Center, now known as Astra Mental Health & Recovery.

As part of POP, the Topeka Center for Peace & Justice provided mediations, alongside an accountability board, for Shawnee County's court. The effort involved youth working with certified Supreme Court Kansas-approved mediators and trained volunteers on the Neighborhood Accountability Board.

None of this would have been possible without our Executive Director, Carl Frazier, TCPJ staff, and the TCPJ Board of Directors. With such a great working team, the Peace Outreach Project has been highly successful. During its 2023-2024 year, there were 123 program completion referrals. During the 2024-2025 year, 51 youth successfully completed the program. From July through December 2025, we received 43 POP referrals from courts, involving youth in the Shawnee County community.

Peace,
Glenda Brown (POP Manager)