

# Pathways to Peace

Topeka Center for Peace & Justice Newsletter

Winter 2025



## Upcoming Event: MLK Celebration

The Topeka Center for Peace and Justice will host its annual Martin Luther King Jr. celebration January 20, 2025, at New Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church, 2801 SE Indiana St. This will be a community-wide celebration of the life and message of Dr. King. The event will feature music, prayer, and reflections from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. The keynote speaker will be Lt. Colonel Bryan Gregory. The theme is "Where do we go from here? Reclaiming the dream."

This is a good opportunity for each of us to reflect on Dr. King's message as well as consider what it means to work for justice. While we may take different approaches, the call to be a peacemaker stands for each of us as we are all connected. The event will begin with supper at 5:30. Martin Pittier is catering our event with chili and cinnamon rolls. The program itself will begin at 7pm in the New Mt. Zion sanctuary. The event is free, but we will collect an offering to offset costs.

- Gabriel Pennington

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## Catalyst for Peace Youth Panel

Youth and their parents are invited to Catalyst for Peace, a youth panel discussion about the impact young people can make on the world using non-violence techniques. Youth will learn how young people from age seven to eighteen took part in the Civil Rights movement in our country. As they identify areas in today's culture that are in deep need of peace, they will explore ways that their personal commitment to non-violent action can make a difference.

Come hear the wisdom of youth at this event on Feb. 23, 2025, from 1-3 p.m., at the Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library. The Topeka Center for Peace and Justice and the Black American Blueprint Collective will sponsor Catalyst for Peace, which is open to the public.

- Donna Gilchrist

## CATALYST FOR PEACE YOUTH PANEL

SUNDAY, FEB. 23RD, 1-3 P.M.  
TOPEKA & SHAWNEE COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY



SPONSORED BY THE TOPEKA CENTER FOR PEACE & JUSTICE  
AND THE BLACK AMERICAN BLUEPRINT COLLECTIVE



## Letter from Executive Director

2024 was an awesome year for the Topeka Center for Peace and Justice (TCPJ). We partnered with several organizations such as the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Brown Coalition, YMCA, YWCA, Topeka 501, Shawnee County Court and District Attorney, and many other organizations. We increased our employee compensation to include PTO, a matching 401K, and a benefit to be contributed to employee health insurance. I have worked with the Poor Peoples’ Campaign concerning a living wage, ensuring that everyone on the staff is employed equitably. What is “peace”? Peace means different things to different people. At the TCPJ, we want our staff to have peace of mind while doing peace and justice work.

We are excited about our financial accomplishments from 2021 through 2023. Within the last few years, our funding sources have doubled. Without our staff, board, and community this would have been impossible. My goal is to continue to be financially responsible and a good steward by growing our revenue through multiple funding streams as we have done in the last few years.

Total Revenue	2021	2022	2023
	\$155,803.00	\$171,273.00	\$443,507.00

In 2021, we started having our books reviewed yearly to ensure that our funders will have a view from an independent Certified Public Accountant. We have been blessed with outstanding reviews so far. I would like to thank my staff and board for their accountability.

We met Supreme Justice Thurgood Marshall’s son John W. Marshall for one of the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Brown Coalition programs. Also, Mrs. Leola Brown Montgomery attended the event in which her daughter, Linda Brown, was one of the original members of the Brown vs. Board of Education case.

As we continue to partner with many local, state, national, and international organizations to increase our visibility, the TCPJ will continue to focus on restorative practices.

- Carl Frazier



*Pastor Carl Frazier, Mr. John W. Marshall, Mrs. Emersen Frazier Freeman and Mr. Zachary Freeman.*



*Mrs. Leola Brown Montgomery, Pastor Carl Frazier, and in the background, Mr. John W. Marshall.*



TCPJ is in many schools in Topeka including Robinson, Ross, and Eisenhower. We received a special invitation from Jardine Middle School for its Career Day. It was good to see so many professionals from the Topeka community.



*Pastor Carl Frazier with other professionals for Jardine's Career Day.*



*Pastor Carl Frazier with Mr. Kaleb Barber, School Counselor at Jardine Middle School. Mr. Barber organized Career Day.*



*Pastor Carl Frazier, Linessa Frazier, Robin West, Dr. Reuben West.*



*Dr. Reuben West and Pastor Carl Frazier*

Pastor Frazier and his wife, Linessa, were glad to be able to take international speaker, Dr. Reuben West, and his wife, Robin, to breakfast at First Watch. It was nice to share the TCPJ vision and develop a relationship with all people, including local and international speakers.

Pastor Frazier has been working with Val Vanderluis, General Manager/Executive Director of KTWU TV station, to bring the legendary Alvin Brooks to Topeka, along with Kevin Wilmont, who produced Mr. Brook's new movie. We are finalizing an event that includes a book signing, a viewing of the new movie, and a Q&A session after the movie. We hope this will bring the community out. Keep an eye out for more information!



*Mr. Alvin Brooks and Pastor Carl Frazier*



Finally, we are excited about our 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary this year with Mrs. Glenda Washington, a new TCPJ board member, as the event chair. We will have more information available on this event in the future. Stay tuned!

- Carl Frazier

## ***A Warm Welcome to New Board Members!***



The Center for Peace and Justice is excited to welcome Dr. Ithar Hassaballa, Christina Lewis, Lisa Davis Douglas, and Glenda Washington to the 2025 Board. Each of these women is an outstanding leader, and TCPJ is proud to have them as part of the organization.

Dr. Ithar Hassaballa is currently serving as Senior Analyst & Strategy Team Leader at the Kansas Health Institute. Dr. Hassaballa has held numerous leadership positions in Kansas promoting health equity and has led Together Helping Reduce Youth Violence for Equity (ThrYve) Youth Violence Prevention Program in Kansas City, KS. Her expertise includes work in the United States and abroad. Born in Sudan, Ithar writes that she is a Kansan with a global heart.



*Dr. Ithar Hassaballa*

Christina Lewis is an elementary school teacher in Wakarusa, KS. She possesses strong expertise in behavior management, creative thinking, trauma informed teaching, and collaborative skills with diverse persons. Christina is especially interested in using restorative practice skills in the classroom, and looks forward to partnering with TCPJ in making the world a more peaceful place.



*Christina Lewis*

Lisa Davis Douglas currently works as Administrative Secretary in the Kansas Attorney General's Office, but her passion is helping the underserved in Topeka. As the Outreach Coordinator for New Mount Zion Baptist Church she has planned a Back-to-School Fair which has grown to serve over 500 students. Through her efforts, the church has assisted a plethora of people, and Mrs. Davis Douglas won the Northeast Kansas Women of Excellence Award for her work in the community.



*Lisa Davis Douglas*

You may know Glenda Washington through her work at the Greater Topeka Partnership. Recently retired as Chief Equity and Opportunity Officer of that organization, Mrs. Washington excels at strategic planning and management, marketing, business development, and volunteer development, among many other skills. Mrs. Washington has jumped right into board work, chairing the planning committee for the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration of the Topeka Center for Peace and Justice.



*Glenda Washington*

Thanks to each of these amazing women for being part of the Topeka Center for Peace and Justice. We look forward to partnering with you to expand the work of TCPJ, reaching more and more people with the transformative skills of restorative practices and mediation.

- Donna Gilchrist





## Growing in Peace at the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Peace Party

The Topeka Center for Peace and Justice’s 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Peace Party was held on October 10, 2024, at Grace Episcopal Cathedral. “Growing in Peace” was the theme of the event, which celebrated the contributions towards peace and justice that the Center and many local individuals and organizations have made in the community.



Dr. Robert Kenagy, Keynote Speaker

The festive event brought together people from many different backgrounds who are passionate about service to humankind, equity, and reconciliation. It featured delicious food, music of many different types, peace-themed decorations, and words of inspiration and encouragement.

Dinner was catered by J Rocks Smoke House, and local entertainers provided music before and during the meal and during parts of the program. Attendees had the opportunity to bid on many original and culturally diverse items in the silent auction.

Melissa Brunner, the News Director of WIBW-TV, skillfully emceed the program for the third year in a row. The event included a welcome from Rev. Carl Frazier, the TCPJ Executive Director; reflections by Maddax and Maguire Mullens on being in the Center’s Restorative Leadership and Advocacy 101 program for youth; a video presentation about nominees for the Center’s 2024 Peacemaker Awards and announcements of the award winners; an official greeting from the City of Topeka by Christina Valdivia-Alcala, Deputy Mayor; and a keynote address by Dr. Robert Kenagy, President and CEO of Stormont Vail Health.

Individuals and organizations that were honored with Peacemaker Awards that evening were:

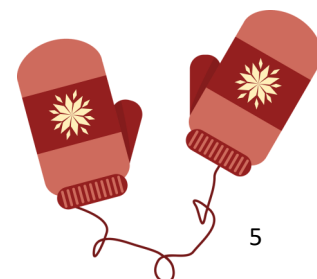
- Billie Hall, recently retired executive director of the Sunflower Foundation (Bill Beachy Award)
- Kristen Shook and Le Roy Alston (Individual Awards)
- SENT and the Work for Success program of Mirrors, Inc. (Organization Awards)
- Spencer Lindsay, Founder and Ministry Director of Working Men of Christ Ministry; and Mary Flin of the Urban Ministry Institute (Faith-related Organization Awards)
- Relyn Strom, principal of Robinson Middle School; and Stormont Vail Health (Education Awards)
- Sophia Ellington (Youth Award)



We greatly appreciate everyone who attended and everyone who helped with the event. Plans are already underway for the 2025 Peace Party, which will be a special celebration of the Topeka Center for Peace and Justice’s 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary! Watch for more details to come. In the meantime, please continue to help our community and world “grow in peace!”

Shelby Ross, TCPJ Board Member,  
Pastor Donna Gilchrist, TCPJ Board Chair,  
& Pastor Carl Frazier, TCPJ Executive Director at the  
2024 Peace Party

- Carol Christensen





## #GIRLUP: Social Media Campaign

In October 2024, we were pleased to initiate a social media campaign aimed at collecting and assembling 30 purses filled with hygiene products. Following feedback from both staff and students regarding instances of bullying related to hygiene concerns, these items will be distributed to participants of #GIRLUP at Robinson Middle School and Topeka High School. We extend our sincere appreciation to the TCPJ community for its prompt and generous response—your support has been truly uplifting. The #GIRLUP end of the first-semester party and purse giveaway took place in December 2024. Participants laughed, embraced each other during karaoke and enjoyed snacks provided by Shawnee County LHEAT.

We are excited to announce that we will be hosting another hygiene giveaway after Spring Break, and we invite you to contribute as you are able. Items needed are scented lotions, deodorants, lip balms or gloss, body sprays, purse-size hand sanitizers, small journals, letters from women in the community to empower the #GIRLUP participants, gift cards or donations.

In January 2024, TCPJ began collaborating with Robinson Middle School through our Restorative Leadership Circles. During these sessions, participants expressed a preference for the name #GIRLUP, which we wholeheartedly embraced as part of our commitment to addressing the unique needs of our female youth. Participants convene weekly, and each session begins with individuals sharing one recent accomplishment and one challenge they have encountered, as well as the skills they employed to navigate those challenges. Throughout our meetings, we engage in collaborative discussions to explore potential solutions, as well as celebrating each participant’s progress through supportive verbal acknowledgments of #GIRLUP.

- Regina Platt



### Community Pillar Award

In December 2024, TCPJ participated in the One Topeka Family “Stop the Violence and Celebration of Topeka Concert.” The Center was honored by Curtis Pitts, President of the International Institute for Improving Race Relations, as a Community Pillar. The Topeka Center for Peace and Justice was acknowledged for its commitment to building a better Topeka. It was amazing seeing the young people, different university representatives, and diverse leadership all in one place celebrating the city.

- Regina Platt





## ***Understanding the Power of Dialogue Circles: Restorative Justice Training***

The November training was both informative and engaging. We had eight attendees who came in vibrant and ready to learn. Participants were challenged with the prompt of “Building a Better Topeka.” During the training, rather than striving for agreement or consensus, they were encouraged to share their unique perspectives. They charted out possibilities for a community they live in and value. Participants seemed activated to take action in their assigned fields of expertise. Here is the statement for the Dialogue Circle: To build a better Topeka, we must deal with the areas of literacy, homelessness, silos of people and organizations, disconnections with events and programming, the mental health crisis, and hidden history. The Mission: Instead of fighting to maintain our siloed positions, we must do the work to heal so we may build.



TCPJ Restorative Justice Manager, Regina Platt in conversation with TCPJ Board Member, Jonathon Noble at the Circles Dialogue Training.

## ***Benefits of Dialogue Circles:***

1. **Fostering Trust:** Engaging in dialogue allows participants to feel acknowledged and valued, which can significantly enhance trust within the group.
2. **Encouraging Inclusive Participation:** This approach promotes the involvement of all individuals, creating a welcoming environment where diverse ideas can be shared openly.
3. **Enhancing Listening Skills:** Dialogue cultivates improved listening abilities among participants, contributing to more meaningful exchanges.
4. **Inspiring New Ideas:** Collaborative dialogue can generate innovative ideas, diverse perspectives, and effective solutions to challenges.
5. **Facilitating Problem Solving:** Dialogue serves as a valuable tool for addressing issues and bridging differences among participants.
6. **Deepening Understanding:** It encourages individuals to appreciate different viewpoints without creating adversarial positions.
7. **Nurturing Creativity:** Dialogue can act as a catalyst for creative thinking and expression.
8. **Promoting Collaborative Efforts:** This practice fosters teamwork and collective action towards common goals.
9. **Enhancing Decision-Making:** Engaging in dialogue often leads to more informed and balanced decision-making processes.
10. **Boosting Productivity:** A dialogue-oriented environment can enhance overall productivity and efficiency.
11. **Cultivating a Sense of Connection:** This approach nurtures a sense of community and understanding among participants.
12. **Contributing to a More Inclusive Society:** Dialogue plays a vital role in breaking down barriers and promoting a society that values inclusivity and tolerance.

- Regina Platt



## Male Factor



In the December session, "The Value of Your Vision," the panelists thoughtfully addressed the critical importance of goal setting and the proactive management of personal narratives, which include aspects of mental, physical, and financial well-being. They highlighted the significant intergenerational impacts that these areas can have on our community. This enriching experience was extended to a diverse group of males in Shawnee County, primarily through word of mouth and various social media channels. We partnered with YWCA and are thankful to Courtland Davis for allowing us to use their facility.



*Front row seated: Pastor Carl Frazier, Mr. Dale Cushinberry, Mr. Lonzo Harrison, Mr. Kevin Wilson, and Dr. Rueben West  
Standing: Other participants in the November Male Factor event*

Participants ranged from elementary school-aged youths to retirees, and the discussions were lively and inclusive. The event fostered a sense of fellowship, complemented by food and laughter, and facilitated meaningful conversations focused on strategies to heal and strengthen the Topeka community. Attendees emphasized the value of creating such spaces, where everyone feels appreciated and their voices are heard. We loved this space, where many questions were asked of Mr. Kevin Wilson (who is a millionaire) about wealth. Also, many questions were asked as follow-up for the next meeting on March 15.

We were so blessed to have so many men of wisdom in the room who were originally from Topeka, especially Dr. Rueben West, who was able to drop by to give us a word of wisdom.



- Regina Platt



## Holiday Party

Thank you to the Topeka Center for Peace and Justice board members and staff for their contributions to the success and memorable moments at this year's Holiday Party, on Monday, December 16, 2024.



Everyone had so much fun playing games created by Regina Platt, Restorative Justice Manager. The many conversations and soft, smooth music made for a pleasant atmosphere to further enjoy the sharing of gifts and the delicious food provided by Chef Hall. All aspects of the party made a positive impact on all who were in attendance.

- Glenda Brown

## Goodbye (but not forever) to Some Wonderful Leaders!



The Topeka Center for Peace and Justice experienced an amazing year in 2024. I am so grateful for each board member and the talents they have shared with the Center. Thank you for your hard work!

We say goodbye to Pastor Clarence Newton of New Life Baptist Church. Pastor Newton has served faithfully as the Vice-Chair of the Board, led numerous committees, and gave freely of his time and energy whenever needed. Two outgoing board officers will mentor some incoming officers before moving off the board. Carol Christensen has served as TCPJ Board Secretary, tracking down meeting details and keeping us on track with her wonderful minutes and excellent questions. She has been an integral part of both the Executive Committee and the TCPJ Board, serving cheerfully on committees and always lending a helping hand. She will mentor incoming secretary, Mahin Para-Cremer, before stepping away from the board. Dr. Lou Saadi has kept the board informed of financial matters as TCPJ Board Treasurer. Dr. Saadi is TCPJ's Grant Wizard, bringing wisdom in the grant-writing process and helping the Center win funding through numerous grants. She too is always ready to help out wherever needed, including organizing the Peace Party Silent Auction. Dr. Saadi will mentor incoming treasurer, Jonathon Noble, Esq. I am so appreciative of the leadership, integrity, and expertise of each of these Executive Committee members. It has been a real joy to partner with them in peace and to observe the many ways they have championed the work of TCPJ. Although they will no longer be serving on the board, we know that they will continue to volunteer with the Center and promote peace throughout Topeka. On behalf of the Board and TCPJ I extend a heartfelt thank you to Pastor Newton, Mrs. Christensen, and Dr. Saadi.

-Donna Gilchrist

### Unveiling of New TCPJ 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Logo

2025 marks the 40th anniversary of the Topeka Center for Peace and Justice and the Center is excited to unveil our new logo. It will mark some great anniversary events through the months ahead!

"Pathways to Peace" is the theme for the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of TCPJ. The dove has been a symbol of TCPJ for many years. You can see the Circle Restorative Practice (discussed on page seven of this newsletter) reflected in the circle shape of the logo. In addition, important tenets of Topeka Center for Peace and Justice are featured around the circle. TCPJ is transforming lives throughout Topeka as individuals and groups learn peaceful pathways through mediation as well as restorative practices events like GirlUp, the Male Factor, She Circles, training within the public schools, Peace Camp, and restorative practices trainings with community members.

Be sure to watch for the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary logo at TCPJ events throughout 2025 and come celebrate TCPJ's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary at the 2025 Peace Party event coming in October.

- Donna Gilchrist

