Transcription details:
Episode Number: 86
Episode Name: Making a Case for Peace
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Episode Description: In this week’s episode, our behind the scenes people get the spotlight! Zech and Jen Houser, who work as interns for On Earth Peace, team up to share their stories of working to build peace while studying at Duke Divinity School. Welcome back to the new season of the Dunker Punks Podcast!

Speakers in audio file:
S1: Dana Cassell
S2: Zech Hauser
S3: Jen Hauser

Transcription:
Dana: Hey Dunker Punks. Welcome back. Here's a question for you. How does peace fit in with your faith?

[Intro Music]

D: Welcome back to the podcast. I’m one of your hosts, Dana, and this is our first episode after that special summer series slash hiatus. And I am super excited to be your host for this one, because Zech and Jen, who created this episode, are actually members of my own congregation. And they’re in their last year of seminary at Duke Divinity School here in Durham, North Carolina. And they created this episode as part of internships that they're doing for their degree in seminary with On Earth Peace. I love Jen and Zech, and I am really glad they're part of our congregation. Neither one of them grew up in the Church of the Brethren, but they have both come to claim it as their home. And the peace position of our church, I think, was especially attractive to them.

Zech and Jen talked about this year’s International Day of Prayer for Peace, and this year's theme is The Case for Peace. Sometimes I think that those of us who did not grow up with this strong emphasis on peace in our faith life, but came to it later, whether by chance or through disillusionment. Sometimes I think those of us are better able to articulate why peace is important. You know, I grew up in the Church of the Brethren, and peace was just always a part
of it. And so when I went away to seminary, with people who weren't part of what we call peace church traditions, all of the sudden I had to start talking about why, I thought peacemaking was important and to articulate it and put words to it. Sometimes being challenged to explain why something is important to us can be really good for our walk of faith. So I wonder. Have you thought about that? Have you thought about what your case for peace is? Here's Jen and Zech. Maybe their reflections will help you articulate your own.

[Background music, fades as Zech starts talking.

Zech: This is Zech Hauser, the On Earth Peace Youth and Young Adult intern as well as the Dunker Punks podcast intern, here with my wife, Jen, who is the Peace Day organizer with On Earth Peace this year.

Jen: Hello. I'm Zech's wife, Jen. Zech and I have been members of the Church of the Brethren for a little over a year, and we're currently in our pre-licensing year of the ordination process through the Church of the Brethren. We are entering our third and final year at Dick Divinity School. Together, we have one beta fish named Aleph and a cat named Molly.

Z: So, Jen, with us being sort of recent converts to the Church of the Brethren, what drew you specifically to the C. O. B.?

J: Well, when I started attending Duke in the fall of 2017, like any good seminarian, I want church shopping all over our city. I wanted a nice, big, nondenominational church where I could hide in a crowd, where I didn't have to be seen or heard. However, after a few church experiences with bad theology and bad community, we decided to check out the Brethren. We found Peace Covenant Church of the Brethren and, well, we never left. I found myself enjoying the tiny church vibe, much more than I thought it would. It felt good to be welcomed and remembered by everyone, each and every week we were there. I became a member in May of 2018.

Z: Yeah. I remember a few of those churches that you dragged me along to before we found our way to Peace Covenant. They weren't necessarily bad churches, but they also weren't quite, the right fit for us. Uh, was kind of an isolating experience. Even the big, crowded nondenoms we attended, we kind of felt alone, I think. But, since we're studying theology, what about the Brethren of theology has been appealing to you?

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J: Well, your family was a different flavor of Brethren before the Methodist Evangelical United Brethren merge. So I guess technically, I married into it. But you just didn't know it yet.

Z: Yeah, I guess that's fair. But really, though, what about the Brethren have you come to love over the last year?

J: Well, I was drawn to the Brethren because I attended Messiah College in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, which was Brethren in Christ. And I liked many of their stances on peace and peace related issues. (unintelligible) divinity school is Methodist. However, their lack of beliefs about anything and their generally conservative nature really deterred me from their denomination. Since I was familiar with Anabaptism, I decided to try the Church of the
Brethren, because of their more progressive stances on various topics, especially women in ministry. I grew up in a non-denominational church which did not allow women to speak in church, let alone preach or teach. It was important to me to find a denomination which allowed me to thrive into my calling as a teacher/pastor. Well, what about you? What do you like about the Brethren?

Z: Well, one thing for me is definitely the Brethren’s concern for their neighbors. There are a lot of ways that the global church cares for individual communities. But there's also something special and unique about the way that the Brethren have cared for strangers and those in distress. And similar to what you said, on a more personal note, I think the Brethren theology of calling has been incredibly refreshing for me. It's been strange transitioning into the Brethren community, to find people that seemed genuinely concerned about where God is calling me and to what ministry God is calling me.

J: I agree. I also enjoy the Brethren calling system. It really does feel refreshing to what we have been used to in the past. I think that calling out gifts in others is really important and necessary for the church to survive in the future, but also for building community and strong relationships. I think I've really grown closest to other Brethren who have affirmed and realized my call to ministry.

Z: So what drew you then specifically to work with On Earth Peace?

J: Well, as you know, Zech, at Duke Divinity School, we need internships to could(?) be completed for our field education credit. These internships typically look like one being placed in a small, rural, Methodist church in the middle of North Carolina as an associate pastor. But I did a few of those already, and I wanted something new. This summer I wanted something a little different and more in line with what I believe. Being new to the Church of the Brethren, I wanted to have an internship that was within our denomination. I wanted to get the chance to meet Brethren from more than just my tiny, amazing little church in North Carolina. But specifically drawn to interning with On Earth Peace, because I agreed with many of their stances on controversial topics such as the LGBTQ community, or and non-violence. I felt this internship would help me learn more about the Brethren denomination as well as developing my own stance on different peace issues. During my time with On Earth Peace, I've learned a whole lot about radical peace.

Z: That idea of radical peace is, really interesting. Can you explain a little bit more what you mean when you say that?

J: Well, when I say radical peace, I don't necessarily mean sitting in a circle singing Kumbaya or ensuring that everything is quiet (already use?). In fact, sometimes I think that radical peace means the opposite of quiet. It means actively standing up for your neighbor and their rights. It means ensuring that others truly love the image of God that is in everyone, just like Genesis states. Radical peace means loving those who are different than you and accepting their differences, feeding those who are hungry, protesting, and even calling your senators.
Z: So, where do you see this loud and riotous peace at work in the Church of the Brethren now?

J: Well, I was particularly excited about the latest gun, our statement against gun violence put out by the denomination after the two tragedies that occurred in El Paso and Dayton earlier this last month. I have also witnessed countless acts of Brethren congregations helping their communities by providing sanctuary for refugees, donating time, goods, and money through Brethren Disaster Ministries and other organizations, and actively loving their neighbors who may not be like them. From my short experience, it really seems the Brethren are good at loving others and helping those who typically get pushed to the margins. This summer I was able to attend my very first Church of the Brethren Annual Conference. I had the privilege of sitting at a non-delegate table with people from all over the country and of different ages, different genders, and who believe different things. Yet, each of us at our non-deno, non-delegate table came together and really thought about how each of our congregations help those who are struggling in their communities. This really brought me hope for the future of the church in a time when Christians typically get a bad rap.

Z: Yeah, I think that the idea of churches working clearly with their communities is something amazing and a definite part of radical peace. But, you talked a lot about specifically congregational things. How then do you see your work with On Earth Peace fitting into that radical peace?

J: Throughout this internship, over the past year, I've learned about the difference between positive and negative peace. According to the theory of Kingian nonviolence, positive peace is not just sittin...sitting idly by and remaining quiet in times of trouble. Positive peace is actively confronting the injustices of the world, and working towards the ability for all to live in peace with one another. It looks like people of different ethnicities eating and living together, eliminating poverty, loving your neighbors no matter who they are, and plenty of other examples.

On the other hand, there is negative peace, which is often largely at play in the church. Oftentimes, in our circles, we may hear that there is not enough peace in the world. Here in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, last year, students and activists from U. N. C. brought down the statue of Silent Sam. And many community, community members complained that they were disturbing the peace, when in reality, they were trying to bring a more radical, positive peace to the community, by removing the daily reminder of slavery and racism that still exists today. My work with On Earth Peace has helped me to learn the difference between positive and negative peace, and it has helped me actively work towards a theology and lifestyle of positive peace. I've also learned more about radical peace through planning our Peace Day campaign.

J: Can you tell us a little bit more about that campaign? What's Peace Day?

Z: So Peace Day or the International Day of Peace, is typically held on September 21st each year. Peace Day was unanimously established in 1981 by the United Nations to provide a global goal for all humanity to work towards peace. The General Assembly declared this day to commemorate and strengthen the ideals of peace, both within and among all nations and peoples. This year marks the 13th consecutive year for On Earth Peace’s Peace Day campaign. Many
interns have gone before me to create and promote On Earth Peace’s Peace Day campaign each year. This year's theme for Peace Day is ‘Making the Case for Peace’. Since I did not grow up Brethren, I did not know much about peace before this internship. And it was sort of my sense that maybe other Brethren or other Christians, were not really sure how peace fit in with their faith either. So the purpose of this year's campaign was to try to help Brethren and other Christians understand, well remember why peace is important for our faith. After all, Jesus came as the Prince of Peace. He came to liberate the poor, feed the hungry, heal the sick. These are all acts of peace so people can experience the peace that only God gives us.

Z: So, you said that the theme was Making a Case for Peace, right?

J: Yeah.

Z: So, what is your case for peace?

J: That is a great question that I’ve been thinking about a lot over the past few months. Personally, I believe that Jesus came to bring peace. But he did not do so quietly. Yes, Jesus spent time with God in prayer, alone. But he also preached some wild sermons, broke some rules and liberated those on the margins while doing so. He gave a voice to those who had none. He healed on the Sabbath. He fought against the political powers that be. Jesus came to bring peace that liberated others so they too could experience true peace from God without any oppression from humanity.

Z: And how does that peace fit into your larger faith?

J: Peace has become such a central part of my faith since becoming Brethren. Yes, I constantly seek to be at peace with God. Yet I also strive to work towards liberating my neighbors who may be oppressed. I do all I can to try to feed the hungry, clothe the homeless, love those who hate people like me and love those who others hate. I love and care for those who are different for me. This is important to my faith, because I firmly believe that we, as Christians are called to live like Jesus. We are called to care for and love our neighbors and our enemies. Yes, a personal relationship with God is important for our faith. But what will God say about our ability to care for and love our community? I believe that my faith is comprised of both a personal relationship with God and ensuring that those in my community can experience faith. But I've been talking a lot. What about you? What is your case for peace, and where does it fit into your faith?

Z: Well, I think similarly to what you said, peace is incredibly connected for me to the ideas of justice and love. You spoke a lot about Jesus’s unquiet peace, and I think that that kind of peace, isn't just a mindless acceptance of the status quo. To me, that peace seems authentic to the ministry of Jesus. This was the guy that flipped tables, and argued with Pharisees, and continued to prove that God's peace cares for the marginalized. Healing the sick, feeding the hungry. All that stuff was almost an insult to the powers that be, and yet it made a peace better than the peace that the Pharisees were striving for. As for how it fits into my larger faith, I see peace as a key motivator behind social justice and caring for neighbors. I seek safety for refugees because they deserve to have that kind of security and that kind of physical peace. I want to feed
the hungry, not just because Jesus does it, because they deserve to have the peace that comes
with knowing where their next meal is coming from. But marginalized and hated deserve care
because they need peace, just as much as I do, if not more so, than I do.

J: Well, as we like to say in seminary when responding to the question, “What would
Jesus do?”; flipping tables is always a valid option.

Z: So, besides flipping tables, which I don't think is necessarily what you want people to
take away from our talk, what kind of activities can people or churches or communities do to
celebrate Peace Day?

J: There are a plethora of activities that you can choose from to celebrate Peace Day this
year. You can google the ‘people supper’ and find out how to host a supper for your community,
where people can gather together over a meal and discuss tough questions that are plaguing our
world. On their website, you will find some materials with different questions, you could ask. All
people really need to bring is themselves and maybe a covered dish if you decide to go with the
potluck route. Personally, I have never met a Brethren potluck that I didn't like.

Z: I'll agree to that point. I think that everywhere that we've travelled for the summer with
On Earth Peace, the one thing that has remained constant has been the amazing food that we’ve
found.

J: Another thing is you can google ‘campaign nonviolence’ for a list of activities that are
happening all over the world that are related to peace. Some are protests, some are gatherings,
some are prayer services. Simply search for their action list and find an activity to attend near
you. You can also add your own Peace Day celebration to their list. Peace Day activities are
happening all over the world, so there may be plenty of options for you, depending on where you
live. And if there's not an activity happening near you, maybe try planning one and putting it on
their website.

Z: So, these ‘Campaign non-violence’ is, one of the partners that we have. But do you
guys have any information directly on, On Earth's Peace’s website for Peace Day?

J: Absolutely. On our website, which is on earth peace dot org slash peace underscore
day, underscore 2019 (onearthpeace.org/peace_day_2019) you'll find all of these actions plus a
few more. We have some Peace Day checklists that you can complete. There is, there are two
options. One option is for children, and one option is for adults, and each of these checklists
include plenty of fun activities for you and or your children to complete together to promote
peace within your community, such as: saying hello to others or picking up trash.

Z: Those activities sound like great ways to do peace on smaller scale. But what if you're
interested in, some of the bigger issues? What if you're interested in stuff like migrant families?
How can we get involved with caring for those marginalized neighbors?

J: You can google Mennonite Central Committee or Borders Perspectives to find out
more information about creating welcome kits for migrant families who enter the United States.
They may need supplies like toiletries or clothing, and their websites will have more information about what supplies you can gather, and where and how to send them.

Z: So, all of these activities sound great. But what if you're in a tiny church and everybody's busy and you really only have time to maybe mention it during the Sunday service? What could you do in that case?

J: Well, I'll highlight one more option, then. You can hold a prayer for peace service in your community or church, to celebrate and pray for peace throughout your community, and the entire world. You can even plant or resurrect a Peace Pole on your church or private property so all can be reminded that peace shall prevail on earth. You can google Peace Poles for more, for more information. Again, you can find all of these options on our website, which is on earthpeace.org/peace_day_2019. And as you plan your celebrations and you carry your celebrations out, we encourage you to post pictures or stories or anything else you wish to share on social media with the hashtags “Peace Day 2019” and hashtag “The Case for Peace”.

Z: Awesome. It sounds like Peace Day could be a really great way to put this idea of a loud, active, boisterous peace into practice in today's world. Jen, thanks so much for being willing to sit down and talk with me about this work that you've been doing.

J: Well, we are married. There's no seriousness. I enjoyed getting to discuss our faith together as well as promoting Peace Day and our work with On Earth Peace.

D: I love that line from Jen. She said that she had learned that Jesus came to bring peace, but he did not do so quietly. Jesus spoke up, and he spoke out. In my little congregation here in North Carolina, we've started talking about how we can be who we are, which includes people who follow Jesus’s example to be active peacemakers. We can be who we are out loud. We don't have to be something we're not, or pretend or put on a fake smile. But, who are we? And are we willing to be that out loud, in public? How about you? How will you explain the ways that peace in particular is an important part of your faith? How will you make your case for peace?

D: Thanks for listening, Y'all. The Dunker Punks podcast is produced by a group of people near and far who are committed to the radical, peacemaking, out loud ways of Jesus. This episode was created by Zech and Jim Houser, who were On Earth Peace interns. I'm your host, Dana Cassell. Jacob Krause edits the show and creates the awesome music. Kerrick van Asselt creates graphics, Dean Feasenhiser transcribes every episode, and Suzanne Lay manages all the pieces of production. Arlington Church of the Brethren hosts and sponsors the show and On Earth Peace provides out, ongoing outreach and production support. You can find the entire archive on iTunes and online at arlingtoncob.org/dpp. And, you can connect with us on social media at Dunker Punks Pod or by emailing us at DPP at arlingtoncob.org. Stay tuned for our next uh, episode, which should be really awesome. Our friend Ben Bear interviews Sharon Flaten, who's living and
serving in Nigeria with Sisters and Brothers there. Until then, Dunker Punks keep living, working following that call to be radical peacemakers.