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Looking for a Chance for Peace with New Fellows Program

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BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – A new fellows program at Illinois Wesleyan University is helping students discover new avenues for peace.

"Peace is not the absence of war. It is something much greater, that takes much more work," said Erma Stutzman, who, with husband John Stutzman, is sponsoring the new Peace Fellows Program at Illinois Wesleyan, which will offer student fellows mentoring and financial support for studies that forward the idea of peace and justice.



Peace Fellow Holly Aldrich (center) stands with John and Erma Stutzman.

"We all live in a fractured and violent world, not just internationally, but at all levels of society – in business, homes, marriages, personal contacts and the community," said John Stutzman, a retired urologist who has volunteered in violence-torn nations such as Haiti. "The idea of the program is to promote peace, justice and reconciliation."

A former member of the University Board of Trustees, Stutzman said he and his wife thought Illinois Wesleyan would be a strong place to start the Peace Fellows Program. "The number of colleges and universities instituting peace studies programs is increasing," he said. "We knew Illinois Wesleyan would be a good platform for a program here."

Formulated this spring, two students were selected to be the inaugural Peace Fellows. One of the students, junior Holly Aldrich of Elmhurst, began her studies this fall. "One of the reasons I chose Illinois Wesleyan is that it affords personal growth and the pursuit of that which I am passionate in a very challenging academic setting," said Aldrich, a Women's Studies major, who plans to expand her studies of involuntary female circumcision, and may use her fellowship to work in Africa. "What we have at Illinois Wesleyan are the tools for social change," said Aldrich. "We have a student population here that is responsive."

Students can apply for the program each spring, and some will be interviewed by a committee before being accepted as a Peace Fellow. Three years in development, the program requires students to focus the fellowship around their interests. "We have left the program flexible to keep open possibilities," said Peace Fellows committee member Paul Bushnell, professor of history at Illinois Wesleyan. "We could have students who major in history, science or environmental studies, each with the challenge to show us what will engage them and make their contribution to peace and justice stronger."

"I like the fact that I can really make the program reflect me," said Aldrich, who said she will view involuntary female circumcision as a disability issue, and compare it to her own experiences as a woman with cerebral palsy.

"These kinds of theories are being discussed throughout the world," said John Stutzman of Aldrich's studies. "I see the committee made a strong choice in Holly."

The second Peace Fellow, junior Daniel Burke from Monee, Ill., is currently studying abroad in Spain. "I decided to apply for the peace fellows program because one of my interests is environmental justice. As an environmental studies and Spanish double major, my main interest will be looking into environmental justice in the Hispanic community," said Burke, who hopes to begin research on areas such as water pollution and scarcity, as well as environmental conditions in factories along the Mexican-U.S. border, when he returns in the spring.

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