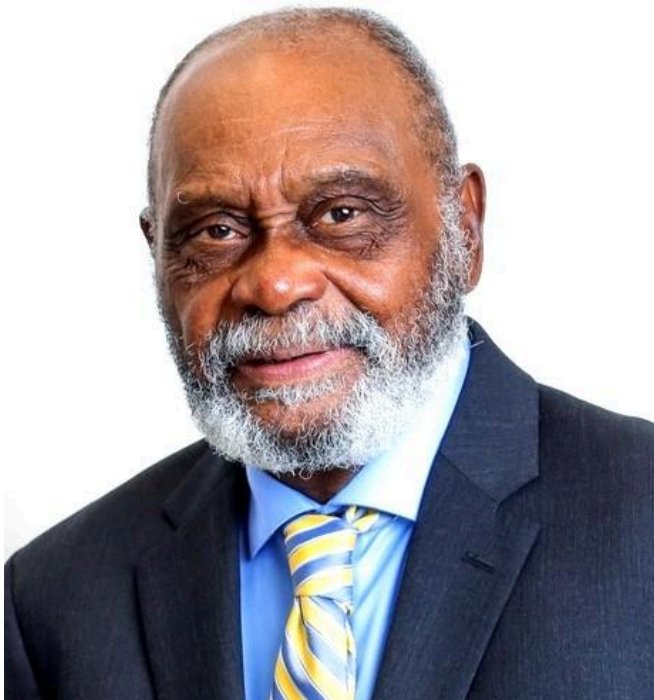




## 2025 Page Annual Conference



Rev. Peter J. Johnson  
Founder,  
Institute for Nonviolence

Peter Jerome Johnson was born in 1945 in Plaquemine, Louisiana. The middle of five children, his mother, Evelyn, was a domestic, and his father, William, also known as "Big Bill," was a lumberjack and president of the local NAACP. Peter's grandfather was active in civil rights issues in the 1930s.

His foray into civil rights took place as a teenager when he convinced a hometown gang of young

toughs, calling themselves the Trojans, to transform themselves into an NAACP youth chapter in which Peter served as president. He attended schools in Plaquemine and decided to attend Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. By reaching Southern, he was almost a full-time civil rights worker. His motto was, "Have a picket, will travel".

His early career was spent with civil rights icon Dr. James Farmer and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). At the age of 18, Peter started going to jail in the Civil Rights movement. During this time, in 1963, he helped organize the Louisiana delegation to the historic March on Washington, where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered his famous "I Have a Dream Speech."

Peter became involved in the Anti-War Movement against the Vietnam War in the Mid-1960s. He helped organize protests and marches in Washington, D. C., involving thousands of anti-war protesters. He assisted in the moratoriums and laws being passed in Washington, which were directly connected to the War. He was also involved in the Garbage Strike in Memphis, Tennessee, as he assisted Dr.



King with the Poor People's Campaign. Peter was in New York City preparing to speak in Harlem about the Poor People's Movement when he received word that his mentor and leader, Dr. King, had been shot and killed in Memphis, Tennessee. That day was to change Peter's life forever as he came face to face with the inhumane side of the movement.

After King's death, Peter was sent to the Carolinas to help organize and unionize the Black Garment Workers. Over 5,000 women organized and formed the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union. After his work in the Carolinas, Peter was called back to Atlanta to begin working on the release of the movie on Dr. King's Life titled "Montgomery to Memphis," which was financed and produced by Sydney Poitier, Harry Belafonte, and Samuel Livingston. His involvement with this movie brought Peter to Dallas, Texas.

Peter arrived in Dallas in 1969 to organize the showing of the movie about Dr. King's life. He was immediately faced with the knowledge that out of 800 cities in which the movie was to premiere around the world, Dallas would be the only city to say 'no'. His persistence and previous skills with negotiating and seeking assistance outside of Dallas forced the city leaders to show the movie.

In 1970, Peter next set his sights on the giant grocer Safeway. The largest grocery store chain in the Southwest had a reputation for accepting Black dollars but not hiring Blacks at their stores as cashiers and managers. He organized a boycott of the chain, which lasted for more than a year and resulted in the chain's executives agreeing to a covenant in which Blacks would be hired in positions in the front of the store, not just the back.

Peter then organized and led a Campaign Against Hunger and Malnutrition. He felt it was appalling that a city as large as Dallas had no place for emergency food for the homeless, dispossessed, and poor. During this campaign, he went on an 18-day hunger strike on the steps of Dallas City Hall. His hunger strike resulted in the Dallas City Council establishing Operation Assist, which provided monies to establish an emergency food program. The other result was the establishment of the Department of Human Resources, which works with Welfare recipients and poor working families.

Peter next focused his attention on politics. Dallas was originally an at-large, city-wide system. He felt this was unfair to Black and Hispanic people. He pushed



for the formation of single-member districts. He worked with activists to file a federal lawsuit against the City of Dallas. The result of the lawsuit and protests was the '8-3-1' system with eight city council members being voted in single-member districts, three at large, and the mayor citywide. Several lawsuits later, this system would evolve into the current '14-1' system in which the mayor is the only position elected citywide. This also resulted in paid city council members, which did not exist in Dallas.

For more than 20 years, he has had the country's most successful and organized gun buy programs. His gun buyback initiative has been replicated in Los Angeles, Atlanta, Chicago, New York City, and other major U. S. cities. He has also been at the forefront of the immigration issue, assisting in organizing one of the largest mass gatherings of Hispanics in the country when more than 500,000 Hispanics converged on Dallas for a peaceful rally in support of immigration laws. Peter is also working with the governments of Sierra Leone, Senegal, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to provide much-needed medical supplies in each of those countries' fight against severe health conditions and to identify and assist with human rights atrocities in the Congo.

Peter is currently the founder of the Peter Johnson Institute on Nonviolence and is working on an autobiography and documentary titled "Outside Agitator." He is a Visiting Lecturer at the University of North Texas—Dallas, teaching courses on "A Personal Perspective of the Civil Rights Movement" and "The Dallas, Texas Social Justice Movements: 1968-2018." He and his wife, Dolores, have two children, five grandchildren, and one great-grandson.