

Commitment to Collective Liberation
A living document at Kirkridge Retreat & Study Center
Last updated 2/12/24

At Kirkridge, we recognize that none of us is free until all of us are free. We are committed to collective liberation, the dismantling of systems of oppression, and the unlearning of the lies of supremacy and inferiority among human beings and between us and the more-than-human world.

We recognize that Kirkridge Retreat and Study Center is located on Lenape land, and that the Lenape people are the perpetual spiritual stewards of this place. We seek to come into relationship with the Lenape nations, to support their sovereignty, and to collaborate with them in the tending of this place.

Kirkridge Retreat and Study Center is a gathering place for everyone seeking to live humanly in a violent world. Steeped in the peace- and justice-loving traditions of radical Christianity, and in the long struggle for LGBTQ+ liberation within that faith tradition, Kirkridge intends to welcome people of all faiths, as well as people of all races, ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, ages, and abilities, as well as to center the needs of those who have been most harmed by historic and ongoing social inequities.

We recognize that retreat spaces are not equally accessible to all people. Corporate capitalism has resulted in vast wealth inequality within the United States, and many cannot afford to access this refuge. We are committed to maintaining a robust scholarship fund and an equity fund used to facilitate access to retreat for progressive activists and movement organizations led by Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC) and poor people.

We acknowledge that we have not always lived up to our aspiration of broad welcome. Kirkridge has been shaped by settler, white, middle- and owning-class, Christian, able-bodied assumptions, practices, and policies. We have internalized those ways of being ourselves. As a result, some have felt unwelcome here despite our best intentions to extend hospitality to all.

To address this failure, and because we know that our own liberation is bound up with those who have been systemically most excluded, we commit to the following practices, knowing that we will do them imperfectly and cultivating both gentleness and resolve in ourselves and one another:

RECOGNIZE HISTORY AND CONTEXT: We seek to be honest and transparent about power and how it moves here, now, and how it has moved historically, here and throughout the local and federal bodies that have shaped each of us. We look squarely at the pain of our collective history and recognize that anger, fury, and grief are appropriate and understandable responses. We bear in mind that our privileges may have limited our experiences and understanding. If something doesn't make sense or reflect our experiences, we will consider that this might be a result of social location.

PRACTICE SELF CARE AND RESPONSIBILITY: We support each other in taking exquisite care of ourselves (taking breaks, getting snacks, opting out) and each other (attending to access needs, opening doors, helping out after checking for consent). We seek out our own learning around systems of oppression, question our inherited assumptions, and recognize this as a part of our own liberation and self care.

WELCOME FEEDBACK: When someone offers us feedback around the impact of our words or behavior, we recognize it as a gift. We resist the urge to defend or explain and take time to reflect on what has been shared. We recognize that defensiveness can arise from unexamined privilege.

SEEK APPROPRIATE SUPPORT: We talk through feedback we have received, questions we have, and feelings of shame, guilt, grief, and defensiveness with trusted people who have privileges similar to ours. We do not ask people who have been harmed to take care of us.

ADDRESS IMPACT: We recognize that harm can occur even when we don't intend it. We address impact without allowing shame and defensiveness to take us over, learning to tolerate the discomfort that arises when we make mistakes. We recognize that mistakes are human and that perfectionism is a hallmark and wound of white supremacy.

PRACTICE RESPECT: We learn how people identify and refer to them that way, using correct pronouns and other designations. We do not touch people, their assistive devices, their service animals, or their belongings without consent. We check in before discussing topics that may be activating, such as sexual abuse, diet and weight, transphobia, or racism, especially across lines of difference. We intentionally do the sometimes-hard work of cultivating relationships across generations, recognizing that we need the wisdom of elders, youth, and children.

MAKE SPACE: We make space for others to speak and welcome silence as a contribution. We cultivate slowness in the service of depth, resisting a culture of urgency and allowing agendas to shift as needed to address what is arising in the group. We nurture genuine, mutual friendships with Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color, as well as poor people and nonchristians, so that we can invite leadership from, without putting undue pressure on, these groups. We do not assume silence is agreement but actively seek ways for people to safely say no and express dissenting viewpoints. We expect and accept a lack of closure.

VALUE EMBODIED KNOWING: We value the signals our bodies give us and attempt to pay attention to them. We recognize that those of us with the most privilege have been trained out of our bodies so that we will stay numb to the suffering generated by our ways of living. We refuse to become hollow shells of ourselves, and we grieve the extent to which this happened to us.

EMBRACE RAGGEDNESS: We are being made new, bit by bit. We welcome first-draft thoughts, shadowy intuitions, hunches, ancestral whisperings, and half-formed visions. We resist the tendency to let perfectionism prevent us from acting or speaking.

EXPLORE PARADOX: We recognize that many things can be true at once and experiment with replacing binary *either/or* thinking with *both/and* possibility.

PRACTICE TRANSPARENT COMMUNICATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY: We demonstrate trustworthiness with each other and all our constituents by letting information flow freely. We acknowledge that sometimes people who have been targeted for oppression need to speak first privately with one another; when we need to do that, we do it with the intention of gathering support to bring harmful

behaviors out into the open. We recognize interdependence and avoid outsourcing responsibility to single leaders, no matter how gifted.

CALL IN: We serve each other's and our collective flourishing by speaking up about harmful words, behavior, or policy when we see it, with help from others if needed. We seek redemptive, reparative relationship rather than shaming and shunning. We work to soften the hard places inside us. We refuse to throw anyone away or to separate ourselves out as "the good ones." We recognize that these systems have infected all of us.

CHANGE SYSTEMS: We expose, resist, and/or seek to transform every external system of oppression as we do the internal work of decolonization. As a retreat center, we offer respite, support, and sustenance so our guests can continue the work of seeking change in whatever ways they are called.

SEEK TRANSFORMATION BEYOND INCLUSION: We come to this work ready to be changed and to make changes in the organization and in our lives. We are excited to see how much more fabulous we can be, together!

RESOURCE WITH THE LAND: In all of this, we seek to be in mutually supportive and restorative relationship with this land and with the Lenape people who are its indigenous people and its perpetual spiritual caretakers. We recognize that there is nothing too big or too hard for these three-hundred-million-year-old stones to hold with us. We also recognize that everyone who passes through this place leaves traces. We pray that the traces we leave will serve the flourishing of life, dignity, and liberation.

These practices will be included in the Personnel Policies, read in community gatherings, used in workplace meetings, and posted in retreat buildings. We know that we will fail at these practices repeatedly. We still wish to be held accountable to them. We hope and believe that our failures, if we are willing to be honest about them, will be generative.

References and inspirations

- Womanist Working Collective
- Decolonizing the Psyche

- Whidbey Institute Community Equity Principles:
<https://whidbeyinstitute.org/community-equity-principles/>
- Soulfire Farm's Safer Space guidelines:
<https://www.soulfirefarm.org/about/safer-space/#:~:text=Do%20not%20take%20the%20more,Respect%20people's%20physical%20boundaries.>
- The characteristics of white supremacy culture developed by Tema Okun and Kenneth Harding: <https://www.whitesupremacyculture.info/characteristics.html>