

Peace and Justice news



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Peace and Justice Committee
Eastern District Conference
Franconia Mennonite Conference
Mennonite Church USA

An occasional newsletter for local church peace representatives

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Contact us:

for subscription information
and for peace resources:

Peace and Justice Committee
c/o Robert Walden, editor
826 Tioga Avenue
Bethlehem, PA 18018-3320
610-861-0653
rwaldenpa@entemail.net
<http://efpjc.pppjr.org/>

The Wealthy Landowner

As [Jesus] was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, ‘Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: “You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.” ’ He said to him, ‘Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.’ Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, ‘You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.’ When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

– Mark 10:17-22

In this story, the man who came to Jesus seems to assume that eternal life is acquired by personal piety. But note that Jesus rejects his flattery and adds to the usual list of commandments (the Decalogue): “*you shall not defraud.*” The man’s possessions (i.e., his estate or farmlands) were likely acquired by taking advantage of peasant farmers (i.e., by fraud), as was typically the case for large landholders. Jesus asks the man to return to the poor what does not rightfully belong to him.

Jesus then explains to his disciples (Mark 10:23-30) that entering the kingdom of God – in solidarity with people who are poor and oppressed – is incompatible with hoarding one’s ill-gotten wealth.

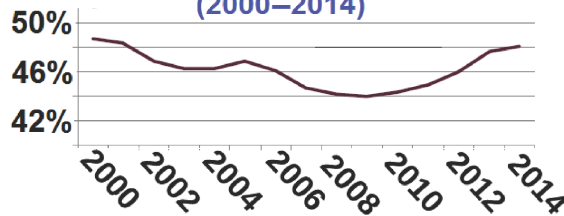
In our world, where the people who work to supply all the stuff we accumulate or consume are often far removed from us, and where our economic power often relies on systemic injustice, how can we hold each other accountable? What are the things occupying our time and attention that distract us from loving the sort of people that Jesus loved?

Growing Inequality: Time to Rethink the Global Economy?

Several recent reports show that economic inequality is continuing to grow both within the U.S. and world wide. The richest one percent of the world’s adults now holds almost as much of the global wealth as the other 99 percent, and just 80 super-rich individuals have as much wealth as half of the world’s population (3.6 billion people).^[1,2]

There are many factors which contribute to the growing inequality, some of them as old as civilization. What is new in our time is the almost incomprehensible wealth accumulated by a handful of individuals, and our collective ability to destroy the ecosystems that make our planet habitable.

Share of Global Wealth - Top 1% (2000–2014)



Source: Oxfam Issue Briefing, "Wealth: Having it All and Wanting More"

Of the world’s richest 1% (those with wealth – houses, cars, bank accounts, stocks, pension funds – in excess of \$700,000), about 40% are U.S. persons.

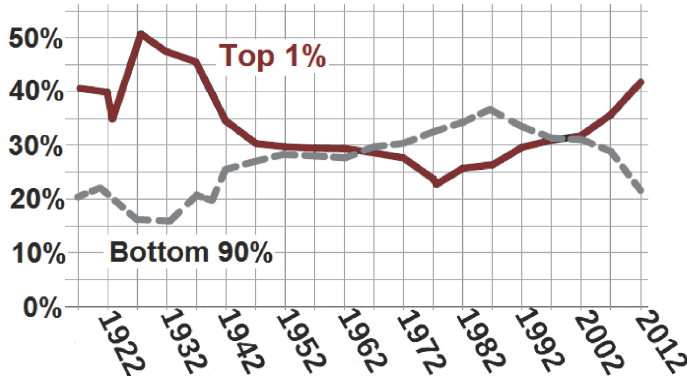
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Growing Inequality

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But wealth is also very unequally shared within the U.S., and the wealth gap in the U.S. has widened significantly in the past 30 years, to levels not seen since the Great Depression. While the richest 1% owns 41.8% of the wealth, the poorest 90% hold only 22.8%.^[3]

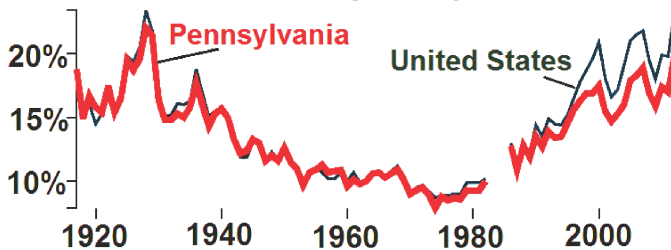
Share of Wealth of Top 1% & Bottom 90% United States (1917-2012)



Source: "State of the Dream 2015: Underbanked and Overcharged" www.faireconomy.org

Household income is another way to measure economic inequality. Higher income normally provides the ability to accumulate wealth more rapidly. The top one percent of earners in Pennsylvania have seen their share of income grow steadily in comparison to the rest of us since 1979.

Share of all income held by the top 1%, 1917- 2012

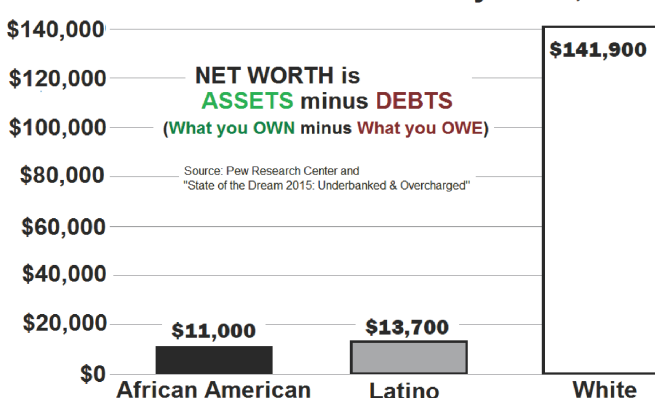


And since the end of the Great Recession in 2009, the top one percent are the **only** ones whose income has grown. The other 99 percent have actually **lost** ground since then.^[4]

Racial Wealth Disparity

For every dollar owned by the average White family in the U.S., the average family of color has less than a dime, and

Household Median Net Worth by Race, 2013



the gap has grown larger since the end of the Great Recession.

Why do people of color have so little wealth? Because for centuries they have been barred by law, by discrimination, and by violence from participating in government wealth-building programs that benefitted White Americans. Much of private wealth in the United States has been inherited, and even for people who do not inherit money after their parents' deaths, their family's education and social contacts and financial help from living relatives make a big difference.^[3]

What other major factors are driving inequality?

Many of the world's richest people also inherited wealth, including at least a third of the world's billionaires. For large corporations and wealthy individuals who have money to invest, lobbying is one of the most lucrative forms of investment. Tax laws, trade and investment policies, safety and environmental regulations can all have a substantial impact on the accumulation of wealth.

In the 1990's, the advent of the World Trade Organization and Free Trade Agreements gave corporations the ability to challenge any government regulations that interfered with profit-making, and the repeal of financial regulations put in place after the Great Depression allowed for the rampant speculation that led to the Great Recession of 2007-09.

Last year, Oxfam released a report^[5] which looks closely at major causes of economic inequality and proposes international policies in the areas of gender equality and women's rights, free public education and health care, wage and tax reforms that close the gap between worker and CEO compensation, and economic policies that focus on reducing poverty and strengthening democratic processes.

Opportunities for Change

Remedial changes are not likely to come quickly or easily because it is rare that systems of oppression voluntarily relinquish their power. But the "bottom 99%" are not powerless. For example, faith-based organizations in Pennsylvania and nationally are engaged in campaigns to raise the minimum wage, and 20 states have already approved wage hikes for this year.^[6]

Note: You will find direct links to all of these reports on the PJC web page: efjpc.pjpr.org.

[1] Oxfam International issue briefing: "Wealth: Having It All and Wanting More," (January 2015) www.oxfam.org

[2] Credit Suisse Research Institute: "Global Wealth Report 2014" (October 2014) www.credit-suisse.com/researchinstitute

[3] United for a Fair Economy "State of the Dream 2015: Underbanked & Over-charged," (January 2015) www.faireconomy.org

[4] Economic Analysis and Research Network Report: "The Increasingly Unequal States of America: Income Inequality by State, 1917-2012" (Jan. 26, 2015) www.earncentral.org

[5] Oxfam International report: "Even it Up: Time to End Extreme Inequality" (October 2014). <http://oxf.am/Ffd>

[6] "Raise the Wage PA" will host a gathering in Harrisburg on February 9th - see page 4 for details.

Peace and Justice ministries

Time to Update the Structure

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven - Ecclesiastes 3:1

Several situations have prompted a review of Peace and Justice ministries in Eastern District and Franconia Conferences, with the goal of developing a new structure for conference-wide peace and justice work.

- After a two-and-a-half-year experiment with a new model for peace and justice ministry in Eastern District and Franconia Conferences, conference leaders ended the contract with Samantha Lioi as Peace and Justice Minister as of November 30, 2014 because of insufficient financial support for that work.
- Although the majority of members of the Peace and Justice Committee (PJC) are now from Franconia congregations, the PJC is chartered by the Eastern District (EDC) constitution, and EDC has provided most of its operating funds.
- Eastern District Conference is itself in transition and has found it necessary to substantially reduce financial support for the Peace and Justice Committee.
- Although some of our recent events have engaged urban justice issues, people of color have been sparsely represented in meetings of congregational Peace Representatives, and absent from meetings of the Peace and Justice Committee.

What Happens Next

A proposal for reorganization of conference Peace and Justice ministries is being prepared for presentation to Eastern District and Franconia Conference Boards. The plan, which has emerged from several meetings that have included PJC members, local church Peace Representatives, and executive leaders of the two Conferences, proposes:

- 1) That a task force be formed to define the structure and funding, for a dual-conference Peace and Justice Committee.
 - The task force would be asked to complete its work within six months, allowing for formal action at Fall Assembly.
 - The task force would include (from both Conferences) Conference executives, congregational representatives (urban and rural), members of the current Peace and Justice Committee, and the Conference Youth Minister.
 - Staff support would be provided to facilitate the work of the task force.
- 2) In the interim, Jason Hedrick has volunteered to lead initial planning for next winter's peace retreat at Spruce Lake (February 2016); and
- 3) Carolyn Marinko has volunteered, with the assistance of Conference staff, to organize a spring gathering of congregational Peace Representatives.

EDC/FMC Peace & Justice Committee A Brief History

The Peace and Justice Committee (PJC) is a successor to the Peace and Social Concerns Committee (PSCC) of **Eastern District Conference (EDC)**, which goes back to at least the 1960's. During the late 1960s and 1970s, the PSCC was focused on international issues, including opposition to the Vietnam War, to nuclear weapons, and to South African Apartheid.

During the Vietnam War, the PSCC organized a "Boot Camp" for Mennonite youth to learn about conscientious objection and other alternatives to military service. The "Boot Camp" which was held at Kirkridge Retreat Center, eventually evolved into an annual winter peace retreat for families and the venue moved to Spruce Lake Retreat. The retreat grew to about 120 participants – adults, youth, and children – in 1999, but the two economic recessions that have followed and a growing number of congregations with their own winter youth retreats have led to lower attendance at the Peace Retreat in recent years.

In the 1980s the PSCC began oversight for three food programs – the Vegetable Basket Program (collecting donated fresh garden produce in summer for low-income families), the Grocery Bag Program (collecting grocery donations in winter for urban families in need), and recruiting volunteers and raising donations for the MCC Meat Canner. The Grocery Bag and Meat Canner programs are now managed by MCC's Material Resource Center in Harleysville, and the Vegetable Basket Program is managed by the Food Trust.

Franconia Mennonite Conference (FMC) also had a Peace Committee for a time, but it died in the early 1990s, and a later attempt to restart it was not successful.

With the merger of two denominations to form Mennonite Church USA, the EDC adopted a new constitution (in 2003) which changed the name of the PSCC to the PJC. It also changed the structure of the Conference Administrative Board (CAB) so that the PJC Chairperson is also a member of CAB, and it redefined the method of determining PJC membership.

Even before the denominational merger, the PSCC invited Becky Felton (of Perkasio Mennonite Church) to participate on the committee, and over the next several years other members of Franconia congregations were invited to join the PJC, until now the majority of members are from Franconia congregations.



Peace and Justice Calendar

Undoing Racism Training and Resources

[“Changing Racism: A Personal Approach to Multiculturalism, Inclusion and Equity”](#)

- **April 10-12, 2015** (Fri. 6:30pm - Sun. 3:00 pm)
 - **Oct. 30-Nov. 1, 2015** (Fri. 6:30pm - Sun. 3:00 pm)
- all sessions at National Christian Conference Center
1485 Valley Forge Road, Phoenixville, PA 19481

See efjpc.pjpr.org/undoracism for details on these sessions and MCUSA “Tools for Racial Healing.”

Feb. 9, 2015 (Mon. 12n-3 pm) Harrisburg

Raise the Wage PA campaign - labor, faith, civil rights, community and women’s groups will be gathered to advocate for an increase in the minimum wage from \$7.25 an hour to at least \$10.10 an hour. For details, see

www.pennbpc.org/raise-wage-pa-2015-kick-event

Feb. 13-15, 2015 Winter Peace Retreat at Spruce Lake

Steve Kriss and Jenifer Eriksen Morales will lead the adult program, **“Powerful Beyond Measure: An honest conversation about power, peace, and transformation.”**

There will also be activities for children, led by Patricia Hedrick. For details, see peaceretreat.pjpr.org

Feb. 21, 2015 (Saturday, 9am-5pm) Philadelphia

Resisting Racism Workshop with Ewuare X. Osayande

Despite all apparent progress, why does racism remain entrenched in American society? Resist Racism will address this question through a critical analysis of race as a social construct established at the very foundation of the United



States of America. This workshop will provide participants with an understanding of the development of race that grows out of the legacy of slavery and colonialism. Resist Racism provides participants with the necessary analytical tools to deconstruct race and work toward the dismantling of racism. Grounded in history and focused on the present, Resist Racism is a dynamic workshop experience inspired by faith in the justice movements that seek a liberated future for us all. See www.osayande.org/featured-event/
Location: The Berean Institute, 1901 Girard Avenue, Philadelphia.
Cost: \$40 Purchase tickets here: <http://resistracism.bpt.me>

Drones: Protest and Peacemaking

March 29, 2015 (Saturday, 12n-2pm) Horsham, PA.

Monthly protests resume at Reaper Drone Command Center at the Horsham Air National Guard Station.

For details, see www.brandywinepeace.com/events/

Feb. 28, 2015 (Saturday, 5:00 pm) Bethlehem, PA

LEPOCO annual meeting with **Stephen Miles** of **Win Without War** (www.winwithoutwar.org). **Location:** Wesley United Methodist Church, 2540 Center St., Bethlehem. For details and dinner reservations, see www.lepoco.org, or contact LEPOCO, 610-691-8730, lepoco@fast.net.

March 4-5, 2015 (Wed.,Thurs. evenings) Lancaster area
“The Deaths of Others: The Fate of Civilians and their Cultures in America’s Wars.” Dr. John Tirman, researcher, author and Executive Director of the Center for International Studies, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. A two day event co-sponsored with Franklin & Marshall College. (Free Admission: Offerings will be received.)

Mar. 4: 7:00-9:00pm, Elizabethtown Church of the Brethren, 777 South Mount Joy Street, Elizabethtown, PA

Mar. 5: 7:30-9:30pm, Franklin & Marshall College, 415 Harrisburg Ave., Lancaster, PA For more information, see www.lancasterinterchurchpeacewitness.org

April 17-20, 2015 (Fri. evening – Mon.) Washington, DC area
Ecumenical Advocacy Days “Breaking the Chains: Mass Incarceration & Systems of Exploitation”

Workshops on U.S. domestic issues, eco-justice, Latin America, Jubilee economics, Africa and the Middle East, co-sponsored by MCC Washington Office. The event will be held at the Doubletree Hotel in Crystal City, VA -- just across the Potomac River from Washington, DC. Begins Friday evening, and includes Congressional office visits on Monday.



Registration fee is \$199 (\$215 after March 19), which includes some meals. Lodging at the Doubletree Crystal City is an additional \$125 per night (plus tax) - but this cost can be reduced by sharing your room with others, and there are other lodging options. For further information. see www.advocacydays.org .

April 25, 2014 (Sat. 8:30am-3:30pm) Allentown, PA

“Feed Our Children – Restore Justice for Our Prisoners”
Lehigh Conf. of Churches spring advocacy event in partnership with *Bread for the World*. Location: First Presbyterian Church, 3231 Tilghman St.. Allentown. For details, see bread.pjpr.org.

Philadelphia Sanctuary for Honduran Immigrant

On November 18, 2014, **Angela Navarro** took sanctuary by moving into West Kensington Ministry (WKM), a member congregation of Philadelphia’s New Sanctuary Movement. Angela lived with a final deportation order for 10 years, and she was invited to remain on church property until her final deportation order ends.

Angela is a Honduran-born mother of two U.S.-born children, spouse of a U.S. citizen, a leader at her church, and has worked for years at a local restaurant. She has lived in the U.S. for 12 years.

After 58 days in sanctuary in West Kensington Ministry **Angela Navarro's** final deportation order was stopped on January 14.



There was a victory party for Angela on January 24th.

Angela and her husband Manrique on Jan. 17 after she officially left Sanctuary. Photo by Harvey Finkle.

For more details, see www.sanctuaryphiladelphia.org