

# 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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**December 9, 2017**



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## Peace and Justice Committee

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## Speaking of National Priorities ...

*Hear the word of the Lord, O King of Judah sitting on the throne of David—you, and your servants, and your people who enter these gates. Thus says the Lord: Act with justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the orphan, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place. -Jeremiah 22:2-3*

From ancient times governments have almost always put the interests of the rich and powerful above those who are poor and powerless, as even the **Code of Hammurabi** – the Babylonian written code of law makes clear. Israel’s prophets were called to speak truth to power: to kings and religious leaders, reminding them of God’s priority for protecting the rights of vulnerable people. Following that tradition, Jesus and his apostles also confronted religious and political leaders, even though Israel at that time was an occupied territory. How should we, as followers of Jesus and privileged citizens of the world’s most powerful nation, speak to government today?

## Voting: What’s in it for us?

**Why Vote?** Elections, voting, and representative government are a means for making community decisions on issues that may be controversial, and such democratic processes can render decisions without resorting to violence or threat of violence to settle disputes, provided all contenders have confidence that voting is fair.

Certainly not all elections are fair, particularly when some people who have a stake in the outcome are excluded from voting or when the election process is skewed to favor a particular party or candidate or policy. There are many different systems of voting throughout the world, some of them more “fair” than others, but probably there is not just one system that is “ideal” in all situations.

In America – and especially in Pennsylvania – elections really do matter, especially regarding whether public policies favor the interests of rich and powerful people or the interests of poor and vulnerable people – widows, orphans, strangers (*Deut. 10:17-19*); or sick, hungry, imprisoned (*Matt. 25:31-46*). Pennsylvania has often been called a “swing state” in national elections. In the Nov. 2016 election, for example, when vote totals for the two leading presidential candidates were less than 1% apart, the winner was awarded all 20 of Pennsylvania’s electoral votes (about 3.7% of the total 538 electors).

### Pennsylvania’s vulnerability to voting fraud

There is probably no such thing as a completely robust state or national voting system, or at least not with current technology; but there are a number of system characteristics that influence the credibility of election results. A few Pennsylvania counties use paper ballot systems which are relatively secure, while the majority of Pennsylvania voters cast their ballots on electronic voting machines which are vulnerable to hacking and undetectable tampering.

A reliable voting system needs to meet at least two requirements, which together impose challenging constraints on any electronic voting system:

- 1) Auditability, which is the ability, if needed, to recount votes after an election and be reasonably certain that the votes counted match the ballots cast; and
- 2) Privacy, to prevent voter intimidation, coercion, or vote-selling.

*(continued on page 2)*



## Pennsylvania "Clean Slate" Workshop\*

**Saturday, Oct. 28:** About 20 people gathered at Salford Mennonite Church for conversation about Pennsylvania's criminal justice system and preparation to meet with state representatives on "Clean Slate" legislation. The workshop included several high school students who are members of the Amnesty International Club at Dock Academy.

Joan Porter, a Board member of the Pennsylvania Prison Society, spoke about her interactions with people at Graterford prison, and responded to many questions. Porter, who has been visiting prisons for about 35 years, got started working with prisoners at the Bucks County Jail because of her passion for literacy. Since then she has visited just about every state prison in Pennsylvania, leading workshops and meeting with prisoners. For the past 25 years Porter has been an "Official Visitor" (as Prison Society volunteers are called) at Graterford once or twice a week.

Graterford is a maximum security prison that includes "lifers" (men who are sentenced to life in prison without parole); and some of those lifers volunteer to provide hospice care for other men at the prison. Lifers at Graterford also lead restorative justice training sessions for younger prisoners, with the assistance of outside volunteers like Bobby Smisko, a member of Methacton Mennonite Church. Smisko says that the training is offered periodically throughout the year in two formats: as ten weekly classes, or as a two-day (Friday-Saturday) intensive workshop. Graterford is one of the three state institutions where male prisoners entering the system are sent for diagnostic screening and classification, which typically takes four to six weeks; so there are always new people who can benefit from the training.

**Nearly 25% of Pennsylvania's prisoners are awaiting trial. They haven't been convicted of anything; they are jailed while waiting to be seen by a judge.**

Porter says that we're asking the criminal justice system to cure many of the ills of society, most of which have nothing to do with criminal justice, but no one else is willing to take responsibility for them. Pennsylvania could provide mental health facilities and drug treatment programs, for example, at far lower cost than warehousing people in jail.

Pennsylvania is one of the most punitive states in the nation; with more than 80,000 Pennsylvanians in state prisons and jails. We also have the greatest number of juvenile lifers – people who as juveniles were sentenced to life without parole.

Plea-bargains are a favorite tool of District Attorneys, because it means that 95% of cases are settled out of court; only 5% go to trial. People will accept plea-bargains even when they are not guilty -- especially if the plea bargain allows them to get right back to work, a major concern for someone whose family or relatives depend on their support.

For someone too poor to afford a good lawyer or to pay the cost of a bail bond or to sit in jail for weeks awaiting trial, a plea bargain can be very compelling, but it also carries the stigma of a criminal record that frequently leads to problems with employment, housing, education, or other public benefits later on, even if one is not actually guilty of a crime.

### Javier Flores – at home after Sanctuary\*

On October 11, Javier Flores Garcia, having won his deportation case, stepped out of Arch St. United Methodist Church where he had been living since November 2016.

Javier, a 40 year old Mexican father living in Philadelphia since 1997 went into Sanctuary shortly after the November elections of last year. In 2004 he was stabbed multiple times and left for dead, and worked with local law enforcement to capture his assailants, making him eligible for a U-visa. Yet he was deemed deportable because of previous deportations which were the result of him trying to always reunite with his family. Javier then spent 16 months in detention at both York and Pike County Detention Center. His son, Javier Jr., developed post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after seeing his father arrested at gunpoint. After release from Pike County Javier was given three months to prepare for deportation, while his U-visa application was still pending, and therefore made the difficult decision to enter Sanctuary. He is now living at home with his family in Northeast Philadelphia.

Javier was granted a waiver for his re-entries which allow his U-visa case to move forward and grants him deferred action while he waits for his case to be determined by USCIS, which could take a year or two. In the meantime he has been granted working papers and will be free from the fear of deportation.

### Aftermath of the ICE raids in Philadelphia

New Sanctuary Movement is seeking donations for bail bond to assist immigrants who are still in detention at York County Prison, following the ICE raids in September which rounded up 107 immigrants in Philadelphia. Bail bond, which ranges from \$5,000 to \$15,000 in this case, can force families to choose between paying for rent, food, or medicine, and paying for the release of their loved ones.

Juana, whose husband and brother were picked up in "Operation Safe City," spoke about her experience to Philadelphia media. "I needed to tell my story, and the experience my family is going through, so other families know what is happening, take precautions and speak up."

\* Our web page, [efpjc.ppjr.org](http://efpjc.ppjr.org), includes links to many resources related to the stories on this page.

# Peace and Justice Calendar

## Undoing Racism Training and Resources

### “Changing Racism: A Personal Approach to Multiculturalism, Inclusion and Equity”

– April 20-22, 2018 (Fri. 5:30pm - Sun. 3:00 pm)

This session will be at Desmond Hotel in Malvern, PA

There are a number of local groups (such as SURJ - *Standing up for Racial Justice*) that are meeting on a regular basis in eastern Pennsylvania to address personal and systemic racism. Contact us for assistance in getting in touch with a group near you.

See [efjpc.pjpr.org/undoracism](http://efjpc.pjpr.org/undoracism) for “Tools for Racial Healing.”

## Drones: Protest and Peacemaking

Nov. 25, 2017 (Saturday, 12n-2pm) Horsham, PA.

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

For details, and other related events see:

[www.brandywinepeace.com/events/](http://www.brandywinepeace.com/events/)

## November 12, 2017 (Sunday, 1:30-5:00pm) Allentown Immigration & Sanctuary - A Workshop for People of Faith.



Topics include an overview of the US immigration system and policies, "sanctuary cities", sanctuary congregations, street sanctuary; refugees and immigrants. Also, what's involved in becoming a "Sanctuary Congregation": An overview of legal and practical implications, and resources for

beginning conversation within your congregation. There is no charge for registration, but donations will be accepted.

**Sponsors:** Lehigh Conference of Churches/Justice & Advocacy and Grupo de Apoyo e Integración Hispanoamericano.

**Location:** St. Luke's Lutheran Ch., 417 N. 7<sup>th</sup> St., Allentown.

For details and registration, see <http://sanctuary.pjpr.org>

**November 12, 2017, (Sunday at 2pm)** Harleysville, PA

Anne Yoder, will speak on World War I conscientious objectors, telling some of the history of non-religious and religious C.O.s, as well as about her new website that will showcase over 650 of their diaries, letters and statements. **Location:** Mennonite Heritage Center, 565 Yoder Road, Harleysville, PA

## U.S. 4<sup>th</sup> National Climate Assessment Report

A *Climate Science Special Report* authorized by Congressional legislation in 1990 and compiled by experts at leading government scientific agencies and universities will be released this month. The report concludes that it is "extremely likely" that human activities are the "dominant cause" of global warming, and that global warming is now causing more extreme weather patterns. Look for the report and related resources at [www.globalchange.gov](http://www.globalchange.gov)

See <http://efjpc.pjpr.org> for additional resources related to events and stories in this issue of Peace & Justice News.

**December 9, 2017 (Saturday, 10:45am - 7:30pm)** Bethlehem  
**58<sup>th</sup> Annual Christmas Peace Pilgrimage**, from Nazareth to Bethlehem, PA recalling the journey of Mary and Joseph. Guest speaker after supper will be **Roberta Meek** whose presentation topic will be **“We Who Believe in Freedom Cannot Rest: Racism in the Current Era”.**

See the enclosed flyer or [www.peacewalk.org](http://www.peacewalk.org) for details.



**February 9-11, 2018 (Fri. evening- Sunday noon)**

**Winter Peace Retreat at St. Mary of Providence** retreat center (Elverson, PA)

Adult program: **“Immigration, Sanctuary and the Church.”**



This painting from 'Entry of a Refugee' by Walter Linderoth (1881-1964) is used by permission.

There will also be activities for children.

For more information, see <http://peaceretreat.pjpr.org>

## Faithful Advocacy for Criminal Justice Reform: Principles & Practice

Advocacy event on the “Clean Slate” legislation that has passed the PA Senate, organized by Pennsylvania Council of Churches with Mennonite Central Committee. (Similar events were held in Harrisburg and Harleysville in fall 2017. See report on p. 3)

**Registration:** \$20. See [www.pachurchesadvocacy.org/events](http://www.pachurchesadvocacy.org/events)

**Jan. 13, 2018 (Saturday, 1:30-5:30pm)**, Lancaster Brethren in Christ Church, 1865 Fruitville Pike, Lancaster, PA 17601.

**Jan. 19 (Fri. 9am)** - Legislative visits

## Federal “Tax Reform” legislation

Now that Congress has adopted a Budget Resolution (with the support of all Pennsylvania Republicans except Brian Fitzpatrick), debate begins this month on the GOP plan for “tax reform.”

The process by which the “Tax Cuts and Jobs Act” has been cobbled together and the title itself already offer a significant clue about who really benefits from its provisions. To start with, none of the bill’s subtitles mention “jobs” or “employment,” but the proposed legislation negotiated in private exclusively by one political party, does indeed include **major tax cuts for corporations and wealthy individuals.**

Some (but not all) of Americans who are not in the top 1% would see lower federal taxes in the short run if this legislation is signed into law, but this bill creates a large budget deficit which will eventually be offset by **cuts in federal programs identified in the Budget Resolution, including Medicaid, Medicare, education, and infrastructure projects.**

\*For more details and analysis of the proposed legislation and its impact, see, for example, [www.cbpp.org](http://www.cbpp.org).

# Winter Peace Retreat

*on Immigration, Sanctuary,  
and the Church*



Painting by Alberto Ledesma, from his book *Diary of a Reluctant Dreamer* (Mad Creek Books, 2017); used with permission

Led by Tammy Alexander  
and Peter Pedimonti

February 9-11, 2018  
St. Mary of Providence Center  
Elverson, PA 19520  
[near Morgantown]

For more information see <http://peaceretreat.pjpr.org>

This year alone has seen many extreme measures being undertaken to threaten, dispossess and deport the immigrants who live in the United States, many of them all their lives.

**In this dark time, communities of faith have a calling and responsibility to respond with deep love, radical inclusion and bold action.**

During our weekend together Peter Pedemonti will help us to reflect on the Biblical roots of Sanctuary, its history, and present day application, and other ways that faith communities can stand in solidarity with immigrant communities. Tammy Alexander will guide us through some of the public policy issues that surround the Sanctuary movement and other efforts to help the immigrants in our midst.



Peter Pedemonti is a founding member and the Director of New Sanctuary Movement, and has been involved in social justice movements since 2001. He moved to Philadelphia to live and work with the House of Grace Catholic Worker.



Tammy Alexander is the Senior Legislative Associate for Domestic Affairs at the Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office since 2007. There she speaks and writes on U.S. policy related to immigration, the environment and human trafficking.

The Winter Peace Retreat has been held for over forty years, bringing together Mennonites who care about peace and justice to worship, to learn, and to share their stories together, as well as to inspire each one to be witnesses in their own settings. Besides adult sessions, there are also sessions for children ages 5-12 at the same time. Come and enjoy a tranquil retreat setting while learning together as followers of Jesus!

Sponsored by the EDC/FMC Peace & Justice Committee

Retreat Registrar:Carolynn Boyd, 610-489-9084, [fcboyd@verizon.net](mailto:fcboyd@verizon.net)

58th Annual Nazareth to Bethlehem

# Christmas Peace Pilgrimage

Saturday, December 9, 2017

## Walk the Road of Peace

For over 50 years people dedicated to peace have been gathering in Pennsylvania to walk the 10 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem on the second Saturday of December. The Peace Pilgrimage, symbolic of the journey of Mary and Joseph, provides all of us, those who walk, those who pass us on the highway, and those who read about the walk, with an opportunity to consider the true meaning of Christmas. The sight of 200 pilgrims walking with stars and peace signs inspires us to focus on the need for Peace on Earth. Consider walking with your family and/or friends. If you are concerned about your ability to complete the ten-mile walk you should know that there are both frequent rest stops and relief transportation.

## More than a Walk

Even if you are not able to join the pilgrims, please consider participating in our related events:

- Christmas Carol singing at the Central Moravian Church steps.
- Simple supper and message from our guest speaker at Christ Church at Market and Center Streets.

**Roberta Meek**, our evening speaker, who was born into an activist family in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, grew up knowing that freedom is *not* free and justice is *not* a guarantee. As a young girl, she had the unusual opportunity to meet Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was one of the key organizers of King's visits to the city. She has been engaged in labor, civil rights and social justice battles in Allentown. Her presentation is entitled "**We Who Believe in Freedom Cannot Rest: Racism in the Current Era.**"

**Registration:** To help us arrange sufficient food and bus transportation, please register at [www.peacewalk.org](http://www.peacewalk.org) and include the names of all people coming with you. You are welcome to come even if you have not pre-registered. (Note: Supper is provided, but not lunch.)

You may join at any point along the way; but keep in mind that the times listed are approximate. Dress appropriately for the weather; we walk in sun, wind, rain or snow. For more information, call Rick Dow at 610-865-5204, or the Lehigh Conference of Churches, 610-433-6421, or visit our website:

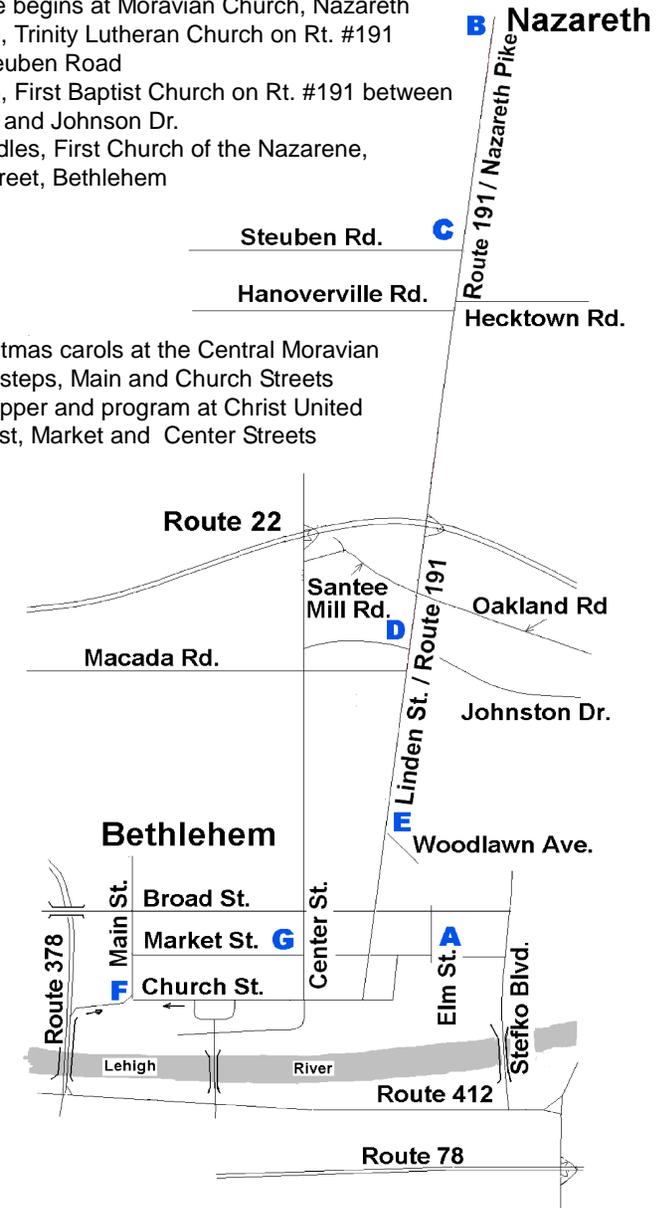
[www.peacewalk.org](http://www.peacewalk.org)



**Schedule:** Participants will meet in the parking lot at 520 E. Broad Street, Bethlehem (corner of Broad & Elm) before 11:00 AM. Buses will transport pilgrims to Nazareth Moravian Church on Center Square.

- A** 10:45 am Buses begin loading at Bechtel Building, (520 E. Broad Street, Bethlehem) to Nazareth
- B** 12:00 Pilgrimage begins at Moravian Church, Nazareth
- C** 1:30 pm Rest stop, Trinity Lutheran Church on Rt. #191 just north of Steuben Road
- D** 2:45 Rest stop, First Baptist Church on Rt. #191 between Oakland Road and Johnson Dr.
- E** 3:45 Light candles, First Church of the Nazarene, 1500 Linden Street, Bethlehem

- F** 4:45 Sing Christmas carols at the Central Moravian Church steps, Main and Church Streets
- G** 5:30 Simple supper and program at Christ United Church of Christ, Market and Center Streets



[www.peacewalk.org](http://www.peacewalk.org)

(Map is not to scale)