A Cloud of Witnesses

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. - Hebrews 11:8-9

Biblical stories about how the Hebrew Patriarchs responded in faith to God’s call motivate how the New Sanctuary Movement goes about its work today. Just as Paul talks about the “cloud of witnesses” (Heb. 12:1, referring to Abraham, Sarah, ... Moses ...) that surround us, people who walk alongside immigrants under threat of detention or deportation are reminded that “we have that cloud of witnesses with us, cheering us on, and right now is our moment.”

Immigration, Sanctuary, and the Church

This is a report from the family peace retreat at Elverson, PA, with about 50 participants. The adult program leaders were Peter Pedemonti, co-founder and Director of New Sanctuary Movement in Philadelphia, and Tammy Alexander, Senior Legislative Associate for Domestic Affairs in the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Washington, Office.

“People on the Move: A Migration Exercise,” led by Tammy Alexander, was a family activity that began the weekend conversation about immigrants, refugees, and sanctuary. What happens when you are uprooted from your homeland? What can you take with you? What will you have to give up along the way? What are the chances that you will arrive safely in a new homeland? Will you be welcomed or accepted in a foreign country? What new language, customs, and practices will you need to learn to survive in a new place?

Peter Pedemonti began morning Bible study with the story of his own family’s journey and the origins of Philadelphia’s New Sanctuary Movement (NSM). Peter’s father is from Italy and his mother is from England. His father came to the U.S. after World War II, because farmers up in the northern Alps didn’t have any food. He later moved back to Italy, met his wife, and they came to Hartford, Connecticut. That’s where Peter grew up with stories of why they left Italy and some of the struggles they had when they came to this country. People in Hartford often took advantage of Peter’s grandmother because she didn’t speak English, just as racism is now a frequent experience for immigrants of color in the U.S. when compared to the relatively privileged status of white immigrants.

Peter began working for the New Sanctuary Movement (NSM) from its beginning about 10 years ago. He moved (continued on page 2)
to Philadelphia to join the Catholic Worker House of Grace at a time when there were growing rates of workplace raids and immigrant deportations, and proposed legislation in the U.S. Congress was hostile to immigrants. So a small group of clergy, some immigrants, and some allies started coming together about the situation. They discovered that a lot of people in Philadelphia were engaged with immigration issues, but nobody was organizing in the faith community. So little by little, maybe one day a week, they began organizing, in coffee shops and in living rooms, slowly, until one day they had a movement. They left the Catholic Worker and started to do this full time.

The New Sanctuary Movement (NSM) is a faith-based organization, working with 28 congregations in Philadelphia; half of them are Latino and Indonesian immigrant congregations, and half are allies. NSM engages its congregational leadership and members in three ways:

1. leadership development and education,
2. accompaniment, and
3. organizing campaigns.

Accompaniment means walking with families facing deportation. Accompaniment is not to provide legal representation – people who provide accompaniment aren’t lawyers; but what they can do is stand in solidarity. So, much of it is going to court – just showing up in immigration court or criminal court or probation check-in with a group of 5 or 10 or 15 people, as a witness. They form a little prayer circle in front of the court; they come in and wait in front of the court room with two goals in mind: (1) surround the person with community, really get their back in that situation; and (2) command accountability, because the guys in the court know that folks are watching them. It’s not that the presence of NSM will automatically win the case, but there have been occasions, when after the person’s case is presented and seven people stand up to leave, the judge asks, “Oh, is that the New Sanctuary Movement?”

Once, when a man from Mexico was working with one of the NSM synagogues, an accompaniment group walked into the courtroom, and some of the members announced who they were – that they were from a local synagogue. The prosecutor got really agitated, and said, “We're not the Nazis here; we're not going to just drag him away.” And everyone was taken aback by the choice of words.

There is something uplifting about having that visual representation of God’s presence in the courtroom, in a place that is so destructive, that does so much harm, and that makes decisions on laws and codes that are arbitrary and without morals. Bringing the power of God’s love into that environment does something to bring people hope. There are many times when NSM has seen people win cases that they did not think were possible -- when people come out of it saying, “This is a miracle; this is God.” For those of us who are immigrant allies not directly affected by immigration law, this is an opportunity to see how the system works and moves us into exploring why so many people are in detention and deportation.

Organizing Campaigns. NSM works on grassroots campaigns to stop anti-immigrant laws, or proactively for laws that reflect their values: love for our neighbor, welcome for the stranger .... And so right now that might look like fighting undocumented deportations; and right now NSM has a local campaign to stop towing cars of immigrants or people of color who don't have driver's licenses.

US Immigration Policy

The past several U.S. presidents (Clinton, Bush, Obama, and Trump) have progressively escalated U.S.-Mexico border security and deportations, primarily for the benefit of major corporations that supply security-related services, justifying their wasteful spending with unsubstantiated claims about immigrants and more recently using overtly racist language.

Why does the U.S. Border Patrol have the authority to conduct warrantless searches and detentions up to 100 miles from U.S. borders? Last October in Texas, a 10-year-old was taken from a hospital and placed in detention, for example; and in January, Border Patrol agents in Miami boarded a Greyhound bus and demanded that all of the passengers show proof of U.S. citizenship or a passport with a stamp of entrance. Or, what is the point of building more walls along the U.S.-Mexico border when unauthorized border crossings are at a 45-year low? Last year (FY2017), there were 19,437 Border Patrol agents who apprehended 310,531 people, which amounts to 16 apprehensions per agent per year. (continued on page 3)
Immigration, Sanctuary ... (continued from page 2)

Last September President Trump announced that he would end DACA* as of March 5, 2018, unless Congress provided authorization for the program. The U.S. Senate finally agreed to take up debate on DACA and other immigration-related legislative issues during the week following the peace retreat, so retreat participants wrote about 40 letters to Members of Congress. The letters were hand-delivered, and some participants followed up with phone calls to Pennsylvania’s Senators as the debate continued for several days. After all the debate, Congress once again decided to do nothing, but federal courts have blocked the President’s attempt to end DACA – at least until the Supreme Court hears arguments several months from now.

* DACA - Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, a program started under President Obama that allows undocumented young adults who came to the United States as children to apply for temporary legal status that allows them to work and attend college in the United States.

Resources on Current Issues: direct links to these free resources are posted at http://efpjc.ppjr.org

Immigration
- “Undocumented and Awkward” is the title of a series of you-tube video clips that explore the reality of daily life for undocumented youth and young adults, produced by a creative arts project known as Dreamers Adrift. Any of these video clips will make a good discussion starter for people who want to become allies with undocumented immigrants.

Gun Violence
- The UCC (United Church of Christ) has a 5-part Bible study, "Faith vs. Fear” and other gun violence resources.
- Mennonite Central Comm. has several resources on gun violence, including a Gun Violence Prevention guide.
- Sojourner's Magazine has many articles on gun violence.
- Ceasefire NJ has recent commentary on the Parkland massacre and related topics.

Twenty years ago, Congress banned the CDC (US Center for Disease Control) from doing gun violence studies, so it's not easy to get good research data that gives a clear picture about gun violence in this country.

Drone Warfare
- Drone warfare is a moral and spiritual issue. The Pennsylvania Council of Churches is seeking congregations to Learn More About Drone Warfare. Several videos and study guides are available to guide you as you begin to understand how the use of drones hurts both those who are the targets and those who control them. Here's a little incentive:

Learn More about Drones ... and Receive $100 for Your Congregation.

www.pachurchesadvocacy.org/learn-about-drones-receive-100/

CPT Nonviolence Training Workshop

About 30 people gathered at Salford Mennonite Church on Feb. 17 for an introductory nonviolence training workshop led by Sarah Sommers of Christian Peacemaker Teams.

Mennonites have long practiced “non-resistance” to violence based on Jesus’ words in Matt. 5:38, commonly translated “Do not resist an evildoer.” However, three examples that follow (“turn the other cheek”, “coat and cloak,” and “go the second mile”), when understood in their historical context, seem to favor an alternative interpretation of Jesus words “Do not revolt or resist violently ...”

For example, in the first century a Roman soldier was permitted to compel a civilian to carry his pack for a Roman mile. But a soldier could be punished if he did not reclaim his pack after one mile. Thus “going the second mile” would be a creative non-violent act of resistance that could land a soldier in trouble.

Participants reflected on the many forms of violence – both individual and structural, and Martin Luther King’s principles of non-violence, which assert, for example, that the end result of nonviolence is redemption and reconciliation, rather than destruction of one’s enemies.

To be effective, nonviolence requires training and practice, and for major conflicts it requires intense preparation. The Nashville lunch counter sit-ins in 1960 which ultimately led to desegregation of Nashville businesses, followed weeks of intense preparation under the leadership of Rev. James Lawson, including anticipating the response of police and city leaders, and planning strategies that win over allies (such as other victims of economic/racial/gender injustice) and eventually win over opponents.

The workshop also included a practice session with hassle-line exercises in which a line of nonviolent activists faces a line of antagonists – demonstrators vs. counter-demonstrators, or demonstrators vs. police, for example.
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 efjc.ppjr.org/undoracism for “Tools for Racial Healing.”

Healing Communities Training (Lancaster area)

Healing Communities, created by the Annie E Casey Foundation and faith leaders from across the theological spectrum, is a framework for ministry to persons returning from or at risk of incarceration, their families, and the larger community.

March 17, 2018 (Saturday, 9:00am-4:00pm) Lebanon, PA for people supporting reentry from prison. Cost: $25.
Trainer: Rev. Sandra Strauss, Pennsylvania Council of Churches
Location: Church of the Good Shepherd United Methodist
1500 Quentin Rd, Lebanon, PA 17042
For details and registration, see: www.pachurchesadvocacy.org/events/

Faithful Advocacy for Criminal Justice Reform: Principles & Practice

This is the last of three events (in different locations) organized by Pennsylvania Council of Churches with Mennonite Central Committee.
Registration: $20. See www.pachurchesadvocacy.org/events

April 15, 2018 (Saturday, 1:30-5:30pm), Lancaster Brethren in Christ Church, 1865 Fruitville Pike, Lancaster, PA 17601.
Apr. 16 (Fri. 9am) - Legislative visits


Registration: $225 until March 17
(For details and registration, see www.advocacydays.org)

April 28, 2018 (Saturday: 9:30am-1:00pm) Allentown, PA
Immigrants: I’d like to help out, but ... Here’s How!
This event will focus on ways that individuals and congregations can become allies with refugees and other immigrants in our local communities.
Location: St. Luke’s Lutheran Church, 417 N. 7th St
Allentown. For details and registration: http://sanctuary.ppjr.org

April 29, 2018 (Sunday, 2-5pm) in Center City Philadelphia
15th Annual Interfaith Walk for Peace and Reconciliation
“Recognizing the One in All of Us.” For details, see www.interfaithpeacewalk.org/2018-peace-walk

The Poor People’s Campaign:

• A National Call for Moral Revival
This moral movement is a revival of Martin Luther King Jr.’s Poor People’s Campaign in 1968. The campaign is focused on ending Systemic Racism (including voter suppression), Poverty, The War Economy and Militarism, and Ecological Devastation. Campaign Co-Chairs are Rev. Dr. William J. Barber, II and Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis.
(See www.poorpeoplescampaign.org, including an extensive “audit report” prepared by the Institute on Policy Studies)

• Pennsylvania - Poor People’s Campaign:
This Campaign is from May 13–June 23, 2018 and will feature six weeks of nonviolent civil disobedience in 25 State Capitals centered around four broad issues:
1. Ending the War Economy. 3. Ending Systemic Racism
2. Ending Ecological Devastation 4. Ending Voter Suppression
Pennsylvania’s coalition currently includes March on Harrisburg, Put People First, CADBI, ACTUP, Global Women’s Strike, New Sanctuary Movement, and others.

March on Harrisburg” is now in its third campaign, arranging meetings across Pennsylvania in January through March, focused on two legislative issues:
- end gerrymandering (HB-722, SB-22)
- end unlimited “gifts” (bribes) to State Legislators (HB39, SB132)
Tactics include meetings with State Legislators, demonstrations, and a sit-in at Daryl Metcalfe’s office. Metcalfe, who refused to meet with them, chairs the House State Government Committee, blocking reform legislation.
Web: www.marchonharrisburg.org

March 17, 2018 (Saturday, 2:00-6:00pm) Lancaster, PA
“Immigration: A Christian Conversation” This free and public event will feature talks by two prominent Biblical scholars and authors: Dr. Eric Barreto from Princeton Seminary who will present A Gospel on the Move, and Dr. Greg Carey from Lancaster Seminary who will discuss Immigration and Migration from a Biblical Perspective. The afternoon also features a panel discussion with refugees and immigrants, and Kathleen Dick Leslie, legal counsel to World Relief Services, speaking to Strangers Among Us: The Facts on Refugees & Immigration. Sweet and savory ethnic snacks will be served. Co-sponsored by Citizens Immigration & Refugee Action Committee and Church World Service Lancaster.
Location: Highland Presbyterian Church, 500 East Roseville Rd., For registration: see www.lancasterinterchurchpeacewitness.org

March 24, 2018 – Washington, DC, and many other cities
“March for Our Lives.” On March 24, the kids and families of March For Our Lives will take to the streets of Washington DC (on Pennsylvania Ave) to demand that their lives and safety become a priority and that we end gun violence and mass shootings in our schools today. (see www.marchforourlives.com/)

April 7, 2018 (Saturday, 8:30am-3:15pm) Allentown, PA
“For Such a Time as This” Annual food & hunger training event with Bread for the World. Workshop topics include: 1) The 2018 Farm Bill, 2) Pennsylvania Poor People’s Campaign; 3) U.S. Budget overview; 4) Mass Incarceration / Reentry; Public Policy Advocacy Basics. For details, see http://bread.ppjr.org
Location: First Presbyterian Church, 3231 Tilghman St., Allentown

See efjc.ppjr.org for additional details and related stories.