

Peace and Justice news



June 2018 Vol. 14, No. 3

Peace and Justice News

Eastern District Conference
Franconia Mennonite Conference
Mennonite Church USA

An occasional newsletter for local
church peace representatives

Contents

- **Looking for Jesus?** 1
- **End Mass Incarceration** 1
– Pretrial Reform



- **The Poor People's Campaign** 3



- **Resources on Current Issues:** 4
– Migrants, Refugees, and Displaced People
– Reclaiming Jesus / Civil Discourse
– ACT to End Racism
– Sanctuary Everywhere
- **A Season and a Time**
Peace & Justice in transition 4
- **Peace and Justice Calendar** 4

Contact us:

Robert Walden, editor
1508 W. Market Street
Bethlehem, PA 18018-6406
pjnews@pjc.ppjr.org
<http://efpjc.ppjr.org/>

Looking for Jesus?

Jesus said to them, 'Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me.... All of them deserted him and fled.

– Mark 14:48-50

"I was in prison and you visited me." – Matthew 25:36

Jesus arrested, Jesus in prison ... are we looking for Jesus in the right places? Matthew's words seem pretty clear: If we actually go to visit prison, we don't take Jesus in with us. He's already there!

Harold Dean Trulear tells about a conversation with one of his students at Howard University who was uncomfortable with the idea of pastoring the sort of people who end up in jail. Trulear puts it this way: "We've got to take stuff out of the Bible if we don't like those people. You've got to get rid of Genesis, because Joseph was an inmate. If you don't like those people you have to get rid of the book of Jeremiah, because Jeremiah was in solitary confinement. If you don't like those people, you've got to get rid of the book of Daniel, because Daniel was a two-time loser, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were on death row. If you don't like those people you've got to get rid of the book of Revelation, because John was locked up when he wrote that. If you don't like those folks, you've got to get rid of 1st and 2nd Peter, because Peter got locked up. The church prayed for him all night long, but when he was released and came home, the church wouldn't let him in. If you can't deal with inmates, you can't tell the story of John the Baptist. If you can't deal with inmates, you can't talk about Paul, because when he wrote, 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,' he was an inmate."

Ending Mass Incarceration

The Pipeline to Prison: Pretrial Reform

What is the purpose of jails and prisons? Is it to protect people from doing harm to themselves and others? Or is it perhaps that we live in a perverse society that relishes punishment? Or does our massive prison population reflect failure to address a host of other justice issues?

Although prisons are usually portrayed as providing a deterrent to violent or anti-social behavior, it is frequently the case that prisons themselves perpetuate racism and violence, which is reflected in high recidivism rates. In Pennsylvania, about 40% of people released from prison are rearrested or reincarcerated within one year of release, and over 60% within three years. Many people get started on the path to prison because of traumatic childhood experiences (physical, sexual, or psychological abuse or neglect, etc.), and the more severely people are punished (as children or adults) the more violent they become.

There are well-documented "evidence-based" practices – alternatives to traditional criminal justice practices – that can reduce both the number of people incarcerated and recidivism rates. Since county agencies and local officials (county commissioners, district attorneys, judges ...) make many of the decisions about how the criminal justice system operates when enforcing state laws, some

(continued on page 2)

Ending Mass Incarceration (continued from page 1)

significant reforms can be implemented within each county.

Pre-Trial Reform: End Cash Bail

The United States is one of only two countries (along with the Philippines) that uses cash bail. A person arrested (or family member) who cannot come up with the full amount of bail will need to pay a non-refundable fee, typically 10% of the bond value, to the bail bond company.

Anyone who cannot afford to pay bail may lose a job, housing, and personal belongings while sitting in jail, sometimes for months** without being convicted of a crime. Paying bail (or not) is often a major hardship for someone who is poor.

Last year New Jersey eliminated cash bail state-wide and realized a 20% drop in jail population during its first year of operation. While this change is expected to result in significant long-term savings, there are transition costs associated with repairing a broken system, and jail employees cannot readily be reassigned to other responsibilities.

What are the Alternatives to Cash Bail?

Judges may use a risk-assessment evaluation to determine whether a defendant needs to be incarcerated, and phone call reminders about court dates can be just as effective as bail to ensure that someone shows up in court.

- People accused of violent or sexual offenses, or deemed a flight risk would probably not be released. In New Jersey, for example, defendants charged with escape, murder, rape, or robbery automatically get no-release recommendations.
- The judge may require conditions for staying out of jail until a case comes to court, such as checking in with the court periodically, drug testing, reporting to rehabilitation, doing community service, or electronic monitoring.
- In 2007, **Allegheny County** (Pittsburgh) adopted a new risk-assessment program that ranked people newly arrested as low, medium, or high risk for failure to appear (FTA) in court or new criminal activity (NCA) if released. At least 30% of defendants identified as “low risk” are now released without cash bail. (Cash bail is still required for medium-risk defendants, often with other conditions; and high-risk defendants are not released.)
- In April 2018, **Northampton County** Corrections (in Easton, PA) began a similar diversion program for people who are identified as “low risk” offenders. These offenders are released without cash bail as long as they continue to meet the court’s conditions.

• In July 2016 **Philadelphia** launched an Early Bail Review (EBR) program that reduced its jail population by about 20% . The EBR program allows case review within five days for individuals in jail for non-violent offenses who have cash bail of \$50,000 or less and no other reason to be held in prison. This has given people an opportunity for early release, rather than forcing them to remain in custody because they can’t afford a relatively small bail. About 84 percent of defendants who received an EBR hearing have been granted release and, of those, 90 percent appeared at their next court date.

This year Larry Krasner, a civil rights lawyer who became Philadelphia’s District Attorney in January, has instituted policies designed to further reduce incarceration. For example, he has instructed his prosecutors not to press charges for possession or use of marijuana, not to request cash bail for most nonviolent offenses, and requiring prosecutors to tell the judge how much it will cost taxpayers to keep a defendant locked up for the recommended sentence (at an estimated cost of \$42,000 per year). In spite of Krasner’s new policies, judges often still require cash bail or render sentences in excess of the DA’s recommendations.

But, as a result of the declining jail population, Philadelphia Mayor Jim Kinney announced in April that the city’s oldest jail, the dilapidated House of Corrections, will be closed in 2020.

With state funding now available for corrections strategic planning and more citizen groups pushing for prison reform, we are starting to see modest reforms in a number of Pennsylvania counties. But, as reported in previous stories,† Pennsylvania has a host of systemic issues apart from the jail and prison system itself that affect both pre-trial and reentry decisions, such as: racial bias in police arrest rates (for example, drug arrest rates in urban neighborhoods are often very different from suburban communities or college campuses); inadequate treatment



(continued on page 4)

**In Pennsylvania, a “speedy trial” is defined as 365 days; that is,

PA County Bail	Berks	Bucks	Lehigh	Montgomery	Northampton
Total Cases	6,713	9,476	6,654	10,835	4,633
Monetary Bail	3,149	2,616	2,672	3,362	2,036
Unable to pay	1,962 (62%)	1,266 (48%)	1,926 (72%)	2,043 (61%)	1,003 (49%)
Median Bail	\$10,000	\$25,000	\$10,000	\$5,000	\$10,000
Average Bail	\$66,004	\$82,121	\$28,762	\$35,558	\$29,205

the state has a year to bring someone to trial after their arrest or the charges against them must be dismissed.

†See, for example, **Peace & Justice News**, Feb. 2016 and Aug. 2016: efpjc.ppjr.org/pjnews/pjn1602.pdf and efpjc.ppjr.org/pjnews/pjn1608.pdf

The Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival

Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, 'Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbour in your land.'

– Deut. 15:10-11

Woe unto those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the homeless child.

– Isaiah 10:1-2

"Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise..."

– Luke 3:11



What is the Poor People's Campaign about?¹ Why should it be of concern to us?

Fifty years ago in 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference began a national Poor People's Campaign focussed on what King called "*the triple evils of poverty, racism, and militarism ... forms of violence that exist in a vicious cycle.*" That campaign was interrupted by King's assassination as he addressed striking sanitation workers in Memphis.

On May 13 (Mother's Day) after several years of planning, the **New Poor People's Campaign** began a 40-day **Season of Moral Resistance** which involves marches, rallies, meeting with legislators, art, music, popular education, and civil disobedience in Harrisburg, PA, and many other state capitals as well as Washington, D.C.

The Campaign has four central themes:

- 1) Ending Poverty
- 2) Ending Systemic Racism
- 3) Ending Environmental Devastation
- 4) Ending the War Economy

• **Poverty and Inequality:** **140 million people live in poverty today**, not because people are lazy or unwilling to work hard, but because politicians have blocked living wages and healthcare and undermined union rights and wage increases while passing laws that cut basic safety net programs. The **richest 1%** in our country own **more wealth** than the **bottom 90%** combined.

• **Systemic Racism:** School district funding varies widely across Pennsylvania and is strongly biased against districts with the highest percentage of minority students. Also, poor, minority, and mentally ill people in Pennsylvania are over-represented in arrests and incarceration rates. For example, Pennsylvania's population is about 11.8% Black and 7.0% Hispanic; but of the people incarcerated in Pennsylvania's county jails, 38% are Black, 12% Hispanic, and over 40% are identified as mental health cases.

• **Government Reform:** Some Pennsylvania laws and practices invite corruption and reinforce bias against poor and minority people. But we can, for example, end gerrymandering by adopting a process of legislative redistricting that is not under the control of political party

leaders and tighten Pennsylvania's ethics rules that now permit unlimited "gifts" (bribes) to state legislators.²

Voting rights are more restricted in the U.S. today than 50 years ago because of new voter ID laws and other tactics to limit access to polls for poor and minority citizens.

• **Environmental Devastation:** Since 1998, there have been 5,712 significant oil and gas leaks or ruptures on U.S. pipelines. And since 1964, there were more than 2,400 spills from offshore drilling in U.S. waters. The largest of these was the Deepwater Horizon "BP" oil spill in 2010, which accounted for 95 percent of oil spilled in the past 50 years. And Pennsylvania's 11,000 Marcellus shale wells have been poorly regulated allowing methane (natural gas) to leak into the atmosphere even though methane is a potent greenhouse gas.

Toxins from more than 1,100 coal ash sites throughout the country gradually leach into water bodies and groundwater, or get released in catastrophic spills.

• **Militarism** defines us as a nation when we **spend 53 cents of every federal discretionary dollar on the military** and only **15 cents on anti-poverty programs**. Our nation's moral narrative is shaped by so-called Christian nationalists who have forgotten Scripture's calls for us to care for the sick, women and children, immigrants and the poor – the least among us.

If all of this sounds very political, it is! But it is not partisan politics; rather it is based on principles that appear again and again throughout the Bible; and the Campaign provides the church an opportunity to reclaim its moral authority.

1. Pennsylvania Campaign: www.papoorpeoplescampaign.org
U.S. Campaign websites: www.poorpeoplescampaign.org
www.facebook.com/anepppc

2. Specific legislative proposals to end gerrymandering (HB-722, SB-22) have been poisoned by legislative leaders in both House and Senate (see fairdistrictspa.com/updates); and bills to tighten ethics rules (HB-39, SB-132) have been locked up in the State Government Committees of the House and Senate respectively since early last year.

Peace and Justice Calendar

Undoing Racism Training and Resources

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 efpjc.ppjr.org/undoracism for "Tools for Racial Healing"

Healing Communities Training

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.

June 23, 2018 (Saturday, 9:00am-4:00pm) Bethlehem, PA for people supporting reentry from prison. Cost: \$40.

Trainer: Rev. Sandra Strauss, Pennsylvania Council of Churches
Location: Unitarian Universalist Church, 424 Center Street, Bethlehem, PA.

For details and registration, see:

www.pachurchesadvocacy.org/events/

Drones: Protest and Peacemaking

June 30, 2018 (Saturday, 12n-2pm) Horsham, PA.
Monthly protests at Reaper Drone Command Center, Horsham Air National Guard Station. (Last Saturday every month.)

For details, and other related events see:

www.brandywinepeace.com/events/

A Season and a Time

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die ... - Ecclesiastes 3:1-2

The EDC/FMC Peace & Justice Committee, without a chairperson for several years, is no longer meeting, and there are currently no plans for a 2019 peace retreat. Inquiries about future Conference-sponsored peace & justice work may be directed to Barbie Fischer at the Conference office:

BFischer@FranconiaConference.org

A brief history of the Peace & Justice Committee is included in the February 2015 issue of Peace & Justice News (page 3), posted at <http://efpjc.ppjr.org/pjnews/pjn1502.pdf>

The existing Peace & Justice website and newsletter archive will remain for the time being, perhaps with occasional updates on news and events of general interest at efpjc.ppjr.org

PJN editor Robert Walden continues to be engaged in justice work on a variety of issues, which includes chairing the *End Mass Incarceration* committee of POWER-Lehigh Valley. He also serves on the Board of Directors and chairs the *Justice & Advocacy Committee* of the Lehigh Conference of Churches in Allentown.

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

Migrants, Refugees, and Displaced People

These video recordings of keynote presentations at the 2018 Ecumenical Advocacy Days (April 20-22) can be a resource for groups working on public policy advocacy.

- Tammy Alexander (MCC-Washington office), policy presentation on U.S. domestic issues and slides (PDF).
- Remembering Martin Luther King, Jr.,
Panel discussion : Where do we go from here?
- Presentations, sermons, stories: by Congressman Rev. Emmanuel Cleaver II, Rev. Dr. Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, Bishop Ricardo Ramirez, and others.

advocacydays.org/2018-a-world-uprooted/speakers/

Reclaiming Jesus

• A Confession of Faith in a Time of Crisis

(signed by Tony Campolo, Ron Sider, Richard Rohr, Jim Wallis, Walter Brueggemann, and many others)

"We are living through perilous and polarizing times as a nation, with a dangerous crisis of moral and political leadership at the highest levels of our government and in our churches. We believe the soul of the nation and the integrity of faith are now at stake. ..."

- The website includes the full **Confession of Faith** as well as a 5-week curriculum on **Civil Discourse**, and a 9-week **Bible Study / Discussion Guide**.

www.reclaimingjesus.org

A.C.T. to End Racism

The April 4th rally on the Washington, D.C. mall, organized by the National Council of Churches on the 50th anniversary of Martin Luther King's assassination included speeches by prominent religious leaders, some of which are posted at:

www.rally2endracism.org/the-launch/

"Sanctuary Everywhere" resources

From American Friends Service Committee: It's about the community coming together to protect targeted communities from state violence—including immigrants, people of color, Muslims and other targeted religious groups, or LGBTQ people.

www.afsc.org/sanctuaryeverywhere

Ending Mass Incarceration (continued from page 2)

programs for drug and alcohol addiction; insufficient housing for prison survivors; and now that most of our state mental hospitals have been closed, insufficient group homes and support services for people with mental disabilities. And even in communities where most of these resources are available, services need to be consolidated into one-stop social service centers (for ID, jobs, housing, drug testing, parole check-in, etc.) to make them accessible for people returning from jail or prison.