Voices to the Capitol

Meditation

“When all the prisoners of the land are crushed under foot, when human rights are perverted in the presence of the Most High, when one’s case is subverted – does the Lord not see it?”

(Lam. 3:34-36)

Breaking the Chains –
Mass Incarceration & Systems of Exploitation

“As people of faith and conscience, we call for respect to be shown to all people as bearers of God’s image. Jesus tells us to act humanely toward those we might consider “least” among God’s children. We are therefore concerned for the millions of men, women and children arrested, sentenced, incarcerated and returned home from incarceration throughout this country. The federal justice system should lead the nation in ensuring proportional and equitable accountability, not arbitrary and inhumane treatment. Unjust criminal justice practices and unnecessary immigrant detention run contrary to our faith and to our nation’s fundamental values of basic dignity, due process and human rights.”

(Ecumenical Advocacy Days 2015 – Our Faith Convictions)

Prayer

God of justice, give us your wisdom to advocate for laws that truly restore our communities, heal our divisions, stop neighborhood violence, and result in communities where all people are respected and no one has to live in fear. Let us be powerful signs to others of your presence so that no one can doubt that you are in our midst caring for us.

http://www.healingjusticecoalition.org/juvenile_justice_week.html#jjwfh_resources

Coming together for the Ecumenical Advocacy Days (EAD) - Around 1,000 Christians gathered in April in Washington, D.C. for the Ecumenical Advocacy Days (EAD) under this theme. This was the 13th such annual national gathering of men and women of faith who want to be a force for change for the betterment of all. This weekend is sponsored by the ecumenical Christian community and grounded in biblical witness and shared traditions of justice, peace and integrity of creation. The goal is to strengthen the Christian voice and mobilize for advocacy on specific U.S. domestic and international policy issues.

Thankful for all of the faithful Peace with Justice Advocates in our Great Plains Conference,

Andrea
The EAD Leadership Team wrote:

“A world that incarcerates so many and allows some to profit from the exploitation of slave, trafficked and forced labor remains far from the “beloved community” which we are all called to seek.”

“The U.S. makes up only five percent of the world’s population yet holds nearly a quarter of the world’s prisoners. Still, “imprisonment” is a worldwide problem and takes various forms, as everywhere people around the world remain trapped in detention centers, prisons, factories and drug wars that bind and dehumanize individuals for political or economic profit.”

“As people of faith, we denounce the elements in our world that justify such systems of exploitation and mass incarceration. At EAD we will confess our personal and corporate failure to break the chains of poverty, racism, and greed institutionalized in our laws, economy and social behaviors that collude to perpetuate such human exploitation and strip civil and human rights.”

“As people of Hope, we are reminded that Jesus’ radical message was one of liberation for all and restoration of right relationships. Through prayer, worship, advocacy training, networking and mobilization with other Christians, we will face the reality of mass incarceration and corporate exploitation and call for national policies that bring liberation both to the prisoner and to a world in need of restoration – all culminating with EAD’s Congressional Lobby Day on Capitol Hill.”

http://advocacydays.org/2015-breaking-the-chains/

Ecumenical Advocacy Days this year focused on two areas:

We call on Congress to reform federal criminal justice and immigrant detention policies toward the goal of ending unfair, unnecessary, costly and racially biased mass incarceration:

1. Adopt criminal justice and sentencing reform policies that incorporate an end to mandatory minimum sentencing;

2. Eliminate the detention bed quota for immigrants and implement alternatives to immigrant detention.

Representatives from United Methodist Women, National Justice for Our Neighbors, General Board of Church and Society and many other Methodists participated in a rally and march at the Dilley Detention Center in Texas on May 2nd advocating for the end of family detention
Contact your senators, representatives and the White House by letter, e-mail or phone.

Sample Letter # 1
[Date]
Dear Senator__________ , or Dear Rep.___________ ,
As your constituent, I urge you to support federal criminal justice reform legislation that would:
• Allow judges the discretion to fully consider the circumstances of individual cases to arrive at the most appropriate sentencing decision.
• Strike or reduce mandatory minimum sentences.
• Shrink the size of the federal prison system, particularly among people convicted of nonviolent and low-level offenses.
• Eliminate racial disparity and racial bias in sentencing.
• Prioritize alternatives to incarceration for individuals who pose little threat to public safety, and ensure accountability without the use of excessive punishment.

I support legislation like the Smarter Sentencing Act of 2015 (S. 502/H. 920), sponsored by Senators Mike Lee (R-UT) and Richard Durbin (D-IL) and Representatives Raúl Labrador (R-ID) and Robert (Bobby) Scott (D-VA), and the Justice Safety Valve Act of 2015 (S. 353/H.R. 706), sponsored by Senators Rand Paul (R-KY) and Patrick Leahy (R-VT) and Representatives Thomas Massie (R-KY) and Bobby Scott (D-VA), as intermediate legislative approaches to advancing these recommendations.

Sincerely,
[your name]
[your address] [city, state, ZIP]

Sample Letter #2
[Date]
Dear Senator__________ , or Dear Rep.___________ ,
As your constituent, I am deeply concerned about the detention bed quota policy and urge you to vote in favor of the Deutch-Foster amendment to the appropriations bill. This amendment will strike the quota language from the bill.

The United States has the largest immigration detention infrastructure in the world. The expansion of this system in recent years is partly due to the immigration detention bed quota policy passed by Congress under which 34,000 immigrants are held in ICE detention at any given time: “... funding made available under this heading shall maintain a level of not less than 34,000 detention beds.” No other law enforcement agency operates on a quota system. Many detained people are seeking protection from persecution, sexual assault, trafficking, and violence. The bed quota is a particularly egregious element of the immigrant detention system. I urge you to also contact other offices to gain support for the elimination of the quota as well as express your opposition to the bed quota in public statements.

Sincerely,
[your name]
[your address] [city, state, ZIP]
Additional Action Steps:

- Please “like” the new Peace with Justice Ministries of the Great Plains Conference facebook page: facebook.com/peacewithjusticeministriesgp

- The Mercy & Justice Team of the Great Plains Conference has made materials about gun violence prevention and our call to work for peace and justice available: greatplainsumc.org/gunviolenceprevention

- The Annual Conference workbook is available at http://www.greatplainsumc.org/preconferenceinfo
  Read the resolutions and petitions that were submitted and talk with your lay delegate and pastor about them.
  Several resolutions/petitions focus on peace and justice issues, e.g. environmental stewardship, the situation in Palestine and Israel, the acknowledgement of diverse beliefs regarding homosexuality, the establishment of a conference committee on disability ministries.

- This year at Annual Conference delegates for General/Jurisdictional Conference in 2016 will get elected. Once elected, contact the delegates and share your voice for peace and justice with them.

- Please keep the ten Micah Corps interns in your prayers who will start their internship on May 26th. They will:
  - grow in their spiritual walk with God,
  - link faith with social justice action,
  - learn from social justice experts in Nebraska, Kansas and Washington, D.C.,
  - strengthen leadership skills,
  - connect with Great Plains United Methodists across Nebraska and Kansas.
  http://www.greatplainsumc.org/micahcorps

- Let’s celebrate Peace with Justice Sunday on May 31st (or any other Sunday that works for your congregation)!

Thank you peace advocates for all you do for peace with justice! Andrea
To read past issues of Voices to the Capitol go to: http://www.greatplainsumc.org/peacewithjustice

Voices to the Capitol is a resource with an alternating primary focus on peace/non-violence in one issue and on hunger/food justice in the next. It includes an invitation to use the gift of our voices to speak out on these issues by contacting our representatives and senators in Washington.

Voices to the Capitol is an electronic newsletter published by Peace with Justice Ministries, Great Plains Conference of The United Methodist Church.

To subscribe/ unsubscribe, contact Andrea Paret, Great Plains Conference Peace with Justice Coordinator, at amparet08@yahoo.com
President Barack Obama
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20500
Comment line: 202-456-1111
president@whitehouse.gov

KANSAS

Sen. Jerry Moran
United States Senate
361A Russell Senate Office Building,
Washington, DC 20510-1606
Washington: (202) 224-6521
www.moran.senate.gov

Sen. Pat Roberts
United States Senate
109 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-1605
Washington: (202) 224-4774
www.roberts.senate.gov

Representative Tim Huelskamp, 1st District
United States House of Representative
1110 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20414-1601
Washington: (202) 225-2715
www.huelskamp.house.gov

Representative Lynn Jenkins, 2nd District
United States House of Representative
1526 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-1602
Washington: (202) 225-6601
www.lynnjenkins.house.gov

Representative Kevin Yoder, 3rd District
United States House of Representative
215 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-1603
Washington: (202) 225-2865
www.yoder.house.gov

Representative Mike Pompeo, 4th District
United States House of Representative
436 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-1604
Washington: (202) 225-6216
www.pompeo.house.gov

NEBRASKA

Sen. Deb Fischer
United States Senate
383 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-2708
Washington: (202) 224-6551
www.fischer.senate.gov

Sen. Ben Sasse
United States Senate
B40E Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510-2707
Washington: (202) 224-4224
www.sasse.senate.gov

Representative Jeff Fortenberry, 1st District
United States House of Representatives
1514 Longworth Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-2701
Washington: (202) 225-4806
www.fortenberry.house.gov

Representative Brad Ashford, 2nd District
United States House of Representatives
107 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-2702
Washington DC: (202) 225-4155
www.ashford.house.gov

Representative Adrian Smith, 3rd District
United States House of Representatives
2241 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-2703
Washington DC: (202) 225-6435
www.adriansmith.house.gov

To look up addresses of stateside offices, go to:
http://www.contactingthecongress.org/