

# Voices to the Capitol



## Meditation

May 2015

*“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)



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

*Andrea*

## 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](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.

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;*



Replica of a solitary confinement cell (exhibit at EAD)

*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 2<sup>nd</sup> advocating for the end of family detention

# Legislative Action

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](https://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](http://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 26<sup>th</sup>.  
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 31<sup>st</sup> (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](mailto:amparet08@yahoo.com)

# Legislative Contact Information

(updated Jan. 2015)

**President Barack Obama**  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW  
Washington, DC 20500  
Comment line: 202-456-1111  
[president@whitehouse.gov](mailto: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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://www.sasse.senate.gov)

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

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

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

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