



Newsletter Featuring Upcoming Events and More – February 2016  
 Links to Partners in Ministry and Resources

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The New York State Council of Churches supports many Protestant denominations which offer care to over 7,000 local churches, The Council has a four-fold focus - **(ACEE)**:

**Advocacy.** The Council helps the local church have an organized voice to advocate for poor and disenfranchised in the halls of power. We believe that pastoral care necessarily involves advocating for changes in laws and policies which can have a significant impact on lifting people out of poverty.

**Chaplaincy.** We certify highly qualified Protestants, to serve as chaplains in the state Department of Corrections and Mental Health. We wish to ensure that employees and over 52,000 prisoners and patients in the state system receive quality pastoral care. We also seek to support chaplains in their ministry. We encourage pastors to apply for certification. Here is the link to [certification guidelines](#).

**Education and Worship.** The Council seeks to offer resources for Christian formation and worship. We highlight opportunities where we can learn and worship together while stressing our commonalities in Christ. We place a particular emphasis on the faith formation of youth and young adults.

With an ecumenical spirit, our newsletters are one way we offer resources and perspective to support denominations and the local churches they serve.

**Ecumenism.** With a spirit of generosity and hospitality, the Council stresses our commonalities in Christ and embraces Christ's injunction; "that they shall all be one".

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**Letter from Executive Director, Peter Cook**

As I begin as Executive Director of the New York State Council of Churches, I am eager to help local churches lift up those in need. Having served as a pastor for a long time, I am well aware that there are many pressures which can lead a congregation to draw inward and forget one of its most important vocations----to bring good news to the poor and the forgotten. And yet I also know that what people today seek in a church is

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one which is less interested its own self-preservation and more interested in losing its life for the Gospel. There are, of course, many worthy ways to reach out. Most churches, for instance, do food drives or provide small amounts of monetary assistance to pay someone's light bill. We may counsel people who are trying to make ends meet, offer to shelter to the homeless in our basements, or cook a meal for a shut in. These are all very worthy activities which help us get out of ourselves and serve others.

I know, however, that these acts of charity are not in and of themselves sufficient. Part of the pastoral care we offer must include advocating for changes in our laws and economic systems which can lift people out of poverty. Better yet, good societal policies can prevent people from being in poverty in the first place. For example, it was not very long ago that a family could be denied health coverage for a pre-existing condition. The Affordable Health Care Act outlawed the practice of denying coverage to people because of a pre-existing condition. Churches advocated for that change and it made a difference. As a pastor, my great sadness comes from thinking about how many people needlessly suffered financially, physically, and spiritually because of a cruel practice which was allowed to remain legal for far too long. Making changes in the law makes a difference. All the food cards in the world cannot have the same impact as a thoughtful societal change.

In our time, we are close to a very real possible change in the law which can lift millions of New Yorkers out of poverty by raising the wage to \$15.00 an hour by 2021. At present, 2.3 million New Yorkers work for wages which cannot bring them even close to getting above the poverty line. The state right now spends 7 billion dollars a year paying benefits to people who are not paid enough to be self-sufficient. Such welfare is not just provided to individual recipients but becomes an indirect way for tax payers to subsidize wages for corporations, churches, and not-for-profits. While we do not think raising the wage will fix all problems, it will have a wide ranging impact that goes well beyond what charity can do. It will offer

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NYSCOC News

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#### **Executive Committee**

We recently said good-bye and thank you to the Rev. Dr. Bill Levering (RCA), the Rev. Dr. D. Richard Will (PCUSA), and the Rev. Dr. Wilfredo Baez (UMC) for their service with us. We also welcomed the Rev. Shannan Vance-Ocampo (PCUSA) as she begins her ministry with our Executive Committee. She serves as the Transitional

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[The Episcopal Church Diocese of Albany](#)

much needed economic activity as people will have more money to spend to meet their basic needs.

We are also concerned about the strain that underpaid people places on family life. When parents work far too many hours to generate sufficient income, it can mean children are neglected. It also results in a massive reduction in leisure time which could be spent going to church, contributing to one's community, and caring for others. As human beings we are made to be in relationship. Working too many hours because of inadequate wages breaks down the relational bonds of our families, our faith communities, and our towns and cities which are so important to our thriving.

During this Lent, I invite us be of good courage, pick up the cross, take the rocky road, and offer ourselves to others through both our charity and also our advocacy in the public square.

Yours in Christ.

Peter

### **First Annual Awards Luncheon and Fundraiser - Mark Your Calendars!**

The New York State Council of Churches will hold its first annual awards luncheon and fundraiser on May 12, 2016 from 11:30am to 1pm at First Lutheran Church...in Albany. Prior to the luncheon at 10:00 we plan to offer a community listening time. The spring Executive Committee meeting will follow the luncheon at 1:15. More details will follow.

### **Advocacy Priorities for 2016**

We will focus our advocacy work for 2016 on addressing poverty in our state; including **raising the minimum wage, racism**, including Black Lives matter and refugee justice; **the environment**; and **prison reform** in NYS.

Presbyter for the Albany Presbytery.

### **Continuing Education Opportunities**

[Capital Region Theological Center](#)  
**Saturday, March 5, 2016**

9am-3pm, Radisson Hotel, Wolf Road, Albany

[Money and Power Symposium](#)

This day is dedicated to empowering preachers and other church leaders to use their authority as influencers to affect, through bold preaching and teaching, necessary economic and societal change, encouraging their congregations to help support and improve their communities and, perhaps, even the wider world.

**Keynote & Panel Discussion:** "Wages of Rebellion"

**Keynote Speaker:** Rev. Christopher Hedges, Ph.D., Journalist and Foreign Correspondent

[Diocese of Central NY](#)  
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[New York Conference](#)

We will address these issues through:

~Leading in prayer, teaching, and preaching about the biblical, spiritual and moral basis for our advocacy

~Providing resources and opportunities for our churches to make their voices heard

~Fostering communication between our churches and governmental leaders

~Educating congregations about specific public policy measures that call for action

~Being in direct communication with our elected officials to share the Council's positions.

### Visit your Legislators at Home Offices or in Albany

Consider scheduling an appointment with your legislator, or visit with them at scheduled public appearances (listed on the legislator's web site). It is easy to find your state legislators and their contact information if you are not sure who they are. Simply visit [Find your State Legislator](#) and type in your address. On that site, you can also see their voting records. Legislators who have not supported a wage increase in the past especially need to hear the faith voice. On our NYSCC web site, there is a resource about how to schedule and conduct a visit, use above link titled How to Take Action. The Rev. Brooke Newell, Director of Social Witness, will also help you in any way. She can be contacted at

[brooke@cjgreen.net](mailto:brooke@cjgreen.net) or 315-274-0224. Our hope is that individuals and groups will advocate for a \$15/hour minimum wage, and other issues they feel strongly about.

### LIVING WAGE

### Interfaith Lobby Day, March 2: Raise the Wage! #Faithfor15

Beginning at 10 AM at Westminster Presbyterian Church, 262 State St. Albany 12210; we are partnering with the Labor-Religion Coalition,

### Panel Moderator:

Dr. John Brueggemann, Professor and Chair, Dept. of Sociology at Skidmore College.

### [Pub to Pulpit Tour](#)

### Friday, March 11, 2016

7-9pm, Saratoga Springs United Methodist Church  
Jerry Herships leads AfterHours Denver, a bar church where people worship with a whiskey in their hand and make peanut butter and jelly sandwiches to serve Denver's homeless. Herships recent book, *Last Call: from Serving Drinks to Serving Jesus*, is a story of having and giving up on dreams, finding yourself, and finding how God can use you in unexpected ways. Come and hear this pastor/innovator tell tales of starting a church in a most unlikely manner with some amazing outcomes!

[Jerry Herships in Syracuse](#)

### Saturday, March 12, 2016

3-5pm, Meet the

[United Methodist Church](#)

[NY Annual Conference](#)

[Upper NY Conference](#)

**Councils of Churches**

[World Council of Churches](#)

[National Council of Churches](#)

**Race Relations**

**Denomination Focus**

All of our partner denominations in some way have decided to reflect on the question of race relations in its many dimensions. What follows are a series of initiatives and opportunities for action and reflection we have been able to identify. Please let us know what you are up to so that

the NY State Episcopal Public Policy Network and Reformed Jewish Voice on an Interfaith lobby day. Together we will learn more about the issue from a multi-faith perspective. The day will begin with an orientation session and will include lunch for participants. We will then meet with lawmakers at the NYS Capitol to share why this is so important to us.

**PLEASE SHARE this information with your networks.** Register to attend here - [March 2 Lobby Day Registration](#) Contact the Rev. Brooke Newell, Director of Social Witness, with any questions you may have - [brooke@cjgreen.net](mailto:brooke@cjgreen.net) or 315-274-0224.

### Fight for \$15



The Council continues to be actively engaged in the state-wide faith coalition working to raise New York's minimum wage to \$15 per hour. While we celebrate success in securing the new minimum wage of \$15 per hour for fast-food workers, we continue to advocate for a living wage for all workers, in accordance with our Social Creed (see link in right margin)

On **March 15**, a large-scale rally is being planned in Albany. For more information on this event, or to learn where upcoming regional events will be held, visit [www.raisethewage.org](http://www.raisethewage.org), or be in touch with our Director of Social Witness, The Rev. Brooke Newell at [brooke@cjgreen.net](mailto:brooke@cjgreen.net) or 315-274-0224.

**Ecumenical Advocacy Days 2016**  
[Ecumenical Advocacy Days for Global Peace with Justice \(EAD\)](#) is pleased to announce the 2016 theme

Author and Networking event in the Syracuse, NY area.

[Weird Church](#)

**April 7, 2016, 7-9pm**

Delmar Presbyterian Church Welcome to the 21st Century. *Weird Church* is a new book by Paul Nixon and Beth Ann Estock that explores the future of American religion looking toward mid century. It's a hard hitting look at the changes that are coming fast and the forms that are passing away. CRTC is pleased to host coauthors Paul Nixon & Beth Estock for a night of engaging conversation about the new world and church emerging from the ashes of Christendom.

[Northeastern Seminary](#)

March 18-19, 2016 at Roberts Wesleyan College in Rochester, NY.

[Participation in God's Mission](#)

Ministry and lay leaders, students,

we can be of support to one another. A book which is being widely read is the New Jim Crow by Michele Alexander. An older work which offers more in depth theological analysis is called Good Punishment? by James Logan. Also take note of an article by Madeline Cook on the issue of white privilege in an online publication she edits called [RadixMHC](#)

[The New Jim Crow - Reflection and Action](#)

The New Jim Crow - Reflection and Action Sundays @ 1:00 pm 2/07 - 3/13 Location: The Riverside Church, NYC. Co-Facilitated by Dr. Colleen Birchett Sponsored by the Riverside Church Education Department, this six-week "Think Tank" will engage in theological reflection and collaborate. The goal is to design strategies that can

for its national gathering in Washington, DC on April 15-18, 2016. **"Lift Every Voice! -- Racism, Class and Power."**

As Christians, we believe that leaders and policy makers are called to act and to govern in fairness and with justice for all! Like the persistent widow of the Gospel who demands that the judge hear her plea, we will not be silenced!

## MASS INCARCERATION

### Raise The Age | NY Lobby Day, March 8th:

Regretfully, New York continues to be one of only two states that automatically prosecute 16 and 17 year olds as adults in the criminal justice system. Two recent Executive Orders by Governor Cuomo highlight the need for a comprehensive solution for New York.

**Now it's time** for the New York State Senate and Assembly to do what is right for our youth and what is needed to make our communities safer by raising the age in 2016.

Raise the age legislation was included in Governor Cuomo's Executive Budget but we need to ensure the legislation stays in the budget. You can help.

This is an opportunity for youth and adults to speak with state lawmakers about raising the age of adult criminal responsibility in New York.

RTA-NY is beginning to organize buses from NYC and Long Island. At this time, if anyone is interested in participating from the Capital District or beyond, please fill out this [registration link](#) or send your name, address, and legislator information to [bhansen@ftnys.org](mailto:bhansen@ftnys.org), or call 518.432.0333 x2

8 for assistance signing up. Lunch will be provided.

[Raise the Age Information](#)

and community members are invited to attend an Interdisciplinary Theology Conference to be held at Northeastern Seminary at Roberts Wesleyan College in Rochester, N.Y.

Keynote speaker is Dr. Michael Gorman.

[Colgate Rochester Seminary](#)

March 28-31, 2016  
- Spring Lecture Week-

The theme of Spring Lectures is, "Wisdom is Found Among the Aged" (Job 12:12). Visit [www.crcds.edu/spring-lecture-week/](http://www.crcds.edu/spring-lecture-week/) for more information.

[Princeton Theological Seminary](#)  
April 26-29, 2016  
[Princeton Forum on Youth Ministry 2016](#)

All Things New! A forum for youth ministers excited about new possibilities. This year noted experts in the youth ministry field,

eventuate in dismantling the prison/industrial complex, mass incarceration, mass deportation of immigrants and Islamophobia. We will involve church members, former and current inmates and their families, community activists and local houses of worship.

[White Privilege Conference](#)

April 14-17, 2016 in Philadelphia, PA. The theme is

*Let Freedom Ring: Re-imagining Equity and Justice in the US.*

Many of our denominational partners will be participating in this event. Take advantage of this opportunity, this conference will not be within driving distance of New York in the years to come. If you register through your denomination, you may be eligible for a discount on the conference fee. Check with your

**Solitary Confinement is torture and it needs to end!** Advocacy Day in Albany - April 12, 2016

People from all over the state will come together to demand an end to this torture. We need the HALT Solitary Confinement Act A.4401/S.2659 to keep all people out of isolation in New York State prisons and jails. Click here for more information.

[New York Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement](#)

**Prison Re-Entry**

[Re-Entry and Prison Ministry Conference](#)

**May 6-7, 2016 at Stony Point Center, Stony Point, NY**

This event will focus on the trauma of incarceration and how it impacts three areas of re-entry: jobs, housing and family reintegration. We will also explore which trauma-informed ministries are addressing these areas effectively. Most of the speakers will be men and women who were formerly incarcerated.

Our primary purpose is for faith communities throughout the Northeast to learn and share effective re-entry ministries throughout New York, New Jersey, and the six New England states. What's being done in Bangor, ME may be useful in Trenton, NJ. Methods that help formerly incarcerated people in Buffalo, NY better adjust to life on the outside may be directly applicable in programs in Providence, RI.

All are welcome!

**Campaign Finance Reform Statement**

In December 2015, the Council's Executive Committee adopted a statement in favor of campaign finance reform, specifically targeted at overturning the Supreme Court's decision in Citizens United v. Federal Election

Kenda Creasy Dean and Mark DeVries will keynote.

**Youth Events**

**Ecumenical**

**Emory University**

Apply by March 1, 2016

[Youth Theological Initiative](#)

This summer academy is open to students entering their junior or senior year of high school, the dates are June 26-July 16, 2016. Applicants should have interest in the relationship between theology and public issues and a commitment to serving the public good through action and more.

[Duke Youth Academy for Christian Formation](#)

Apply by April 1, 2016

Residency at Duke Divinity School in North Carolina for one week - June 19-25, 2016 followed by a year of mentorship through June 2017. High School juniors

judiciary head.

Metro NY Synod  
ELCA

[Assembly May 19-21, 2016](#)

The assembly theme is "Confronting racism through connection, commitment, courage." Much more information at the above link.

Upstate NY Synod  
ELCA

[Synod Assembly June 5-7 2016](#)

In Christ One New Humanity is the theme with a mission to "Inform, Engage, and Equip the Upstate New York Synod to pursue racial justice."

The annual meeting of the United Church of Christ New York Conference will be June 10-12, 2016. The Rev. Dr. William Barbour, who began the moral Monday movement in NC will be the keynote speaker on Saturday morning, June 11. Watch the sermon he preached at

Commission. Prior to Citizens United, campaign finance legislation and case law banned corporate spending on independent expenditures and electioneering communications. Citizens United argued that these bans violated the First Amendment's right to free speech. In a 5-4 decision, the Supreme Court extended First Amendment rights to corporations, such that corporations can now use treasury funds to make independent expenditures and to pay for electioneering communications in connection with elections. Reversing the decision can be done in one of two ways: either a constitutional amendment (enacted by Congress) or a new legal case to come before the Court with a new ruling.

According to Jonah Minkoff-Zern, Co-Director of Public Citizen's "Democracy Is For People" campaign, it is especially crucial that influence-buying in politics be addressed in New York. In 2015, the leaders of both the Assembly and the Senate were indicted and forced to step down in the wake of accusations that they received bribes in exchange for political favors. This year, the legislature can take important steps to address this potential source of corruption. A bipartisan majority of the state Assembly has signed a letter calling on Congress to pass and send to the states a constitutional amendment to overturn Citizens United. Thirty-one New York state senators, including Republicans and Democrats - just one short of a majority - have signed similar letters. Right now, Republican state Senator Phil Boyle is actively circulating to Republican senators a sign-on letter that he authored calling for a constitutional amendment.

Sixteen states (California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Montana, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont and West Virginia) and the District of Columbia - and more than 650 cities and towns - have passed resolutions supporting an amendment. In New York, 21 local municipalities, representing nearly 10 million people, have called for an amendment, with Syracuse becoming the 21st in June. The municipalities are: Albany, Allegany County, Brighton, Buffalo, Caroline, Corning,

and seniors may apply for this unique opportunity to engage with Duke Divinity School faculty, Christian

practitioners, artists, community activists, mentors, and each other in learning how to nourish a life of faith.

DYA fosters an intentional community around worship and the study of theology. These concepts are introduced during residency and nurtured in the following year through mentorship, online forums and web-meetings. Participants are empowered to further explore their faith and baptismal callings through a community-based project that incorporates Christian practices such as hospitality, creative arts, servant ministry, justice, reconciliation, and reflection.

**Denominational**

Riverside Church,  
NYC.

[Rev Barbour  
sermon](#)

### **Clergy Renewal Program Lilly Endowment**

Have you ever thought about stepping away from your parish for a sabbatical but are unsure how to fund it? How can your sabbatical become truly a shared form of renewal for both you and your congregation? Every year, The Lilly Endowment provides generous renewal grants to pastors and their congregations. If you would like advice on how to prepare a competitive application, contact Peter Cook who successfully received a grant. If there are other pastors who have also had success securing this money who can offer to review applications, please let Peter know. The

Cortlandt, Danby, Dryden, Essex County, Guilderland, Ithaca, Mount Kisco, Mount Vernon, New York City, Peekskill, Sullivan County, Syracuse, Tompkins County, Troy and Yonkers. (Source, The Observer, 11/12/15). The Council invites you to join us in this work by contacting your legislators, asking them to call for an amendment. To view our Executive Committee's statement, visit our website at <https://sites.google.com/site/nyscouncilofchurches/policy-statements/campaign-finance-reform---citizens-united>. You can also be in touch with The Rev. Brooke Newell, Director of Social Witness at [brooke@cjgreen.net](mailto:brooke@cjgreen.net) or 315-274-0224.

### **Donations and Giving**

**Your financial support by one of the following ways is most appreciated:**

- \* Gift of cash or check
- \* Gift through electronic giving - [Donation Page](#) on our website
- \* Periodic electronic giving; such as monthly withdrawal
- \* Gift of stock, bonds, or other investments
- \* Gifts with current income for you - Charitable Gift Annuities, Charitable Remainder Trusts
- \* Bequest from your estate
- \* Name New York State Council of Churches as beneficiary of an insurance policy
- \* Name New York State Council of Churches as beneficiary of your retirement account (401k or similar) (individuals who are beneficiaries of retirement accounts pay taxes on funds as ordinary income)

Contact the fund development staff of your denomination and/or consult with your tax and/or legal advisors for specifics on which can work best for you.

New York Yearly Meeting of Friends at Powell House

April 22-24, 2016  
[Youth Institute 2016](#)

Living into Community Together, an action-packed joyous gathering for anyone interested in making their meeting a multi-generational faith community.

[Presbyterian Youth Triennium](#)

July 19-23, 2016 at Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana. Register by May 30, 2016. The Presbyterian Youth Triennium is a five-day event for high school age youth (entering freshmen through graduated seniors) and accompanying adult youth leaders. The Triennium is focused on equipping young people to be transformational Christian leaders and seeks to join the home churches of the attendees to help call young people into deeper discipleship in Jesus Christ. The Youth

deadline is April 15.  
Here is a link for additional information  
[Clergy Renewal Program](#)

For more information, please contact the Reverend Peter Cook, Executive Director by e-mail to [pcook@nyscoc.org](mailto:pcook@nyscoc.org) or by phone at 508-380-8289.

Triennium is a high energy, biblically infused and focused, youth friendly conference. Visit the above link for much more information.

[United Church of Christ National Youth Event](#)

July 26-29, 2016 at Walt Disney World, Florida  
Register by May 27, 2016. Families are invited to attend, not just youth.  
**Believe** is the 2016 theme, it is a charge, responsibility and call to action. The scripture Hebrews 11:1 captures the heart of this charge, "Now faith is the confidence that what we *believe* will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see." We invite our amazing still speaking youth to believe in themselves as leaders of faith sharing in the infinite work of our Lord in a diverse world calling each of us to serve.

