



New York State COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

JANUARY 17, 2017 NEWSLETTER

This week, we will inaugurate the 45th President of the United States. The news commentary will focus on who supported Donald Trump and who did not. People have the right and duty to offer their political voice in the public square and to engage with a political party as part of the democratic process. As Americans, we will once again witness a peaceful transfer of power from one president to the next. As a Christian, I find myself more focused on the policies and the laws emanating from Washington and our state capital. Regardless of my own political affiliation, I am first a disciple of Jesus and want to know how these laws and policies will build up our commonwealth and especially empower and lift up the poor and the vulnerable in our society. For pastors and chaplains, as we live into our calling, it can be especially confusing and even frightening to figure out how to speak and act as a person of faith especially if you lead worship in a theologically and politically diverse community of faith. It's a challenge to sort through the fog of tweets, political posturing, organizational politics and church and state budgets, in order to keep our eyes on what is most important. The Gospel, of course, presents us with the right focus and helps us to be brave.

On Sunday, I heard a sermon by The Reverend Dr. Amy Butler who is Senior Minister at Riverside Church. It is entitled, "Brave". [Click here for the text](#). Butler urges us to:

- 1) Act and speak with the conviction of our faith
- 2) Speak prophetically for and with those most at risk
- 3) Work for relationship which moves us towards reconciliation

As we draw on Dr. Butler's advice, I think about the Gospel reading for January 22, (Matthew 4:12 to 25) where Jesus calls on us to repent to make way for the Kingdom of Heaven. Following his call to repentance, he summoned fisherman to drop their nets and follow him. He called them to a life of a discipleship. It's curious to me that the very first ministry that Jesus did with his disciples was to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom by curing every disease and sickness among the people.

Last week, the United States Senate and the House of Representatives voted for enabling legislation to repeal the Affordable Care Act. The repeal could mean that 30 million people in our country would lose their health insurance. I think about all the people and their families sitting in our pews or our prison cells, who without respect to their political preferences, could be at significant financial and health risk if the ACA is repealed. The ACA has its limitations. It could be improved to cover more people and reduce high deductibles. In this sense, a replacement plan might make some sense but only if it truly improves upon the ACA and expands access while making insurance more affordable. It would seem that if access and

affordability is the goal, that the replacement plan would be something like Medicare for All. At the very least, a public option should be introduced to compete with private insurers which might pull their pricing down. It's complex but we have a duty to pay very close attention to the details and be brave in speaking up. The goal here is to heal and cure people regardless of their politics. So right now as an act of discipleship, we have a duty to pay attention and lift up our voice to proclaim the good news to enact policies which do not inflict harm but cure disease and sickness. As always, we encourage you to support the New York State Council of Churches that our work can continue and strengthen. [Please click here to donate.](#)

In faith.



Peter Cook

Executive Director

CHAPLAINCY CORNER

Our prayers are with the Reverend Bruce Hersey, Chaplain at Hale Creek Correctional Facility, who mourns the loss of his father. Please offer your care and comfort to Bruce and his family.

INCARCERATION AND REENTRY FROM PRISON

Mark Your Calendars! On Friday and Saturday, May 12 and 13, 2017, The Northeast Reentry from Prison Collaboration will hold its second annual conference at the Stoney Point Conference Center. The Conference will focus on helping congregations and other organizations across the Northeast and Pennsylvania, strengthen their ministries to help returning citizens find jobs and housing and reconnect with their families. The New York State Council serves on the steering committee for the collaboration which has been supported by the Synod of the Northeast, Presbyterian U.S.A. and Brick Presbyterian Church.

“13th” If you would like to learn more about the history of Mass Incarceration, please look at the documentary “13th” which can be viewed on Netflix. [Click here to view the trailer.](#) It might be a good film to be discussed in your congregation.

Raise the Age- In the state of New York, there appears to be mounting political support for legislation to no longer prosecute and incarcerate 16 and 17 year-old youth. New York is only one of two states left which put people into the adult system instead of moving them to Family Court. [Here are links to recent news clips.](#) While we applaud the forward movement, we remain concerned that youth accused of violent crimes will be excluded from the legislation and continue to be prosecuted and incarcerated in the adult system.

STOP REPEAL OF AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

On Friday, January 13 the House of Representatives joined the Senate in voting to continue the process that could ultimately repeal the Affordable Care Act. There are promises made to introduce a replacement plan. The only replacement plan should improve and expand the ACA and not cause anyone to lose their insurance. Many of our denominational partners have organized efforts to stop this repeal or to ask no repeal go into effect with out a better plan. For example, here is a link to the [United Church of Christ's anti repeal efforts](#).

We urge you to continue to call your Congressperson at 866-426-2631, you will be asked to enter your zip code and you will be connected right away to your Congressperson. You can call anytime and leave a message. After calling your Congressperson call your U.S. Senator to thank them for voting against repeal or to express your displeasure with their vote to repeal. Please share your own situation and story and let them know you are a constituent. In New York, call Senator Chuck Schumer (202) 224-6542 and Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (202) 224-4451. Both have voted not to repeal. In addition to your Congresspeople, you can call Speaker Ryan's and McConnell's offices. There are also five senators who might be more inclined to change their vote when it comes to actual repeal. They include:

Senator Bob Corker - (202) 224-3344
Senator Lisa Murkowski - (202) 224-6665
Senator Rob Portman - (202) 224-3353
Senator Susan Collins - (202) 224-2523
Senator Bill Cassidy - (202) 224-5824

Another action you can take is to attend any number of rallies which will continue to unfold in the coming weeks. In Albany, on Friday, January 20, the New York State Council of Churches will participate in a rally in Lafayette Park at 11:00 A.M. as we encourage our [Save My Care](#) bus tour. Click here for the [Flyer about the Albany event](#). Here is the [Washington Post article](#) about the Save my Care tour.

Many parishioners from our churches in New York are also planning to participate in the [Women's March on January 21](#) in Washington D.C. Other sister marches will take place in New York City at 11am and Albany at 4pm.

WILL THE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING FOR SUPPORTIVE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING FINALLY BE SIGNED? PROGRESS IS POSSIBLE.

On Sunday, January 15, Governor Cuomo announced a renewal plan for 421A (a tax abatement for developers to build affordable housing in New York City) Agreement on 421A apparently was holding up Senate Leader Flanagan's signature on the Memorandum of Understanding to release 2 billion for supportive and affordable housing. It appears that 421A has now garnered the support it needs which the Governor says will release the money for the MOU. A signature from Assembly Speaker Heastie is also required. We urge you to closely follow the progress on the MOU to see that the promises are actually kept. [Click here for an article](#) from the Albany Times Union.

On Friday, Marc Greenberg, Interfaith Assembly for Homelessness and Housing, Assemblyman, Andrew Hevsi (D, Queens) and Mike Finnoch, Executive Director, Shelters of Saratoga spoke out in favor of the MOU on Capitol Tonight. [View the interview here](#). This program followed a

press conference we held earlier at the Capitol where we delivered 25,000 letters calling for the signing of the MOU. Rev, Peter Cook, Bishop Howard Hubbard, and Susan Zimmet, Hunger Action Network joined Marc, Mike and Andy in speaking. [See photos and the article](#) from the Albany Times Union here.



PETER COOK ADDRESSES MASJID As-SALAM

Peter Cook joined religious leaders to address a large crowd at Masjid As-Salam to offer support from the New York State Council of Churches for our Muslim brothers and sisters. Click [here for the text](#) of the address. Imam Abjulkadi Elmi, joined Imam Rehman *Yaki* from Muslim Community Center of the Capital Region and Imam Djafer of the Al-Hidaya Islamic Center in sponsoring and leading this event to counter prejudice against Muslims and counter misunderstandings. The next meeting will be held on February 12 at the Al-Hidaya Islamic Center on Troy Schenectady Road in Latham. Details to follow.

MOMENTIVE STRIKE

Peter Cook joined workers who continue into their third month on strike against Momentive in Waterford. They do highly skilled and dangerous work which creates products from water-seal to adhesives for the space shuttle. They are striking just to hold on to their healthcare and retirement. There was a big protest on Friday in NYC against Apollo Equity which holds a significant share of Momentive.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Ezra Prentice - On January 16, a press conference was held at the Ezra Prentice Homes in Albany. Numerous officials spoke. Significantly, there was a promise to complete an air study by the Department of Environmental Conservation by the spring. The air study needs to be coupled with a concurrent traffic study by the Department of Transportation. The traffic study has yet to be authorized. The studies are a necessary pre-step to figure out what to do with polluting truck traffic. In addition, there is a call to deal with oil train traffic which has subsided but will

increase as the oil market improves resulting in resumption of transportation of Baaken Crude. Great concern was expressed that the new administration will roll back safety measures and environmental protections already in place. The residents have really suffered too long and it's frustrating that finding a remedy does not come quicker. Here is a [link to a news story](#) about the press conference. Pictures from the press conference and video footage of the environmental hazards and noise pollution from trucks and trains are available on [our New York State Council of Churches Facebook page](#).



THE POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN

Over Martin Luther King, Jr. weekend, many denominations across the country including the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. highlighted ways to get involved in the Poor People's Campaign. First conceived by Martin Luther King, the Campaign is now centered at the Kairos Center at the Union Theological Center in New York City. The [Poor People's Campaign](#) complements the Moral Monday/[Repairers of the Breach](#) movement led by the Reverend Dr. William Barber, The Reverend Dr. James Forbes, The Reverend Traci Blackmon, Sister Simone Campbell and Liz Theoharis. The Labor Religion Coalition of New York and the New York State Council of Churches continues to participate in the movement and invites your congregation to participate.

New York State Council of Churches

Remember to [visit our website](#), we value your partnership in ministry with us. The New York State Council of Churches relies on contributions to carry out its ministry, [please donate](#). Also, [like us on facebook](#) and [follow us on twitter](#)