Annual Fundraising Appeal and Many Updates from New York State Council of Churches

We are now in the middle of Advent where we have the opportunity, amidst the holiday bustle, to pause and reflect, and anticipate good things yet to come. The name Advent is derived from the Latin word, adventus, which means “coming.” During this season, we prepare our hearts for the birth of the Christ child, celebrated on Christmas day and the 12 days thereafter, and the second coming which ushers in the promise of justice in the land. This dual emphasis on the Christ child born in a humble setting to itinerant parents combined with the promise of a new reign of love and justice, leads us to lift up those in our society who we often regard as worthless or weak, including the poor, the ill, the immigrant, the incarcerated, women, and children. From it’s inception in the late 19th century, the New York State Council of Churches has offered tools and perspectives that people of faith or of no faith can utilize to live out Advent values everyday of the year.

At the present time, the Council strives to:

· Help people lift up their voice in the halls of power to shape laws and public policy which stop discrimination and lift up people who are poor and disenfranchised.

· Certify and support chaplains who offer a beacon of hope to those who are incarcerated in the New York State Department of Corrections or confined in other state institutional settings.

· Help congregations reclaim their historic role as leaders and participants in their neighborhood and cities to make them more welcoming to people of all races and incomes. Part of our work means making better use of our buildings and property to fulfill our mission and bless our communities. At present, we facilitate this work through our Who is My Neighbor seminars.

· Fiercely live into Jesus’ call that all shall be one, by embracing the messy but essential ecumenical work of the church at the local, state, national and global level to bring down walls of division, promote human rights and religious freedom, and encourage people of all ages to grow in faith and understanding.

Will you support our varied ministries?

To underwrite our ministry and work, we invite you to make a gift to the New York State Council of Churches. Please click here to see our annual appeal and make a donation. We are very grateful for your support.

OUR NEW WEBSITE – WWW.NYSCOC.ORG

We are pleased to have reconstructed our website to have it be more of a resource for all. The site allows people to easily submit events and actions they would like to promote which will be prominently profiled on our site. We have also created a community development page to support congregations as they look to reach out their neighborhoods and cities and better use their property for a variety of purposes. You can always go to our site to see updates in real time on coming important actions and events across the state.
EVENTS, ACTIONS AND PROGRAMS

NEXT WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR SEMINAR IS JANUARY 28 ON LONG ISLAND

Please join us for our next Who is My Neighbor Seminar scheduled for January 28 (snow date February 5) at Community Reformed Church in Manhasset on Long Island. We will examine the ways to advocate for more racially and economically inclusive communities in Long Island and how we can use, improve and restore our buildings and property to better bless our community while addressing financial and deferred maintenance challenges. At the seminar, we will reference the recent three year study on violation of fair housing laws on Long Island by Newsday. Please click here to learn more and to register for the Who is My Neighbor Seminar on Long Island, January 28 and also seminars in Saratoga Spring on March 17 and Syracuse on May 19.

You can also see a recent write up in Real Estate Weekly, by Jolie Milstein, Executive Director of the New York State Affordable Housing Association, about our seminars. The Reverend Peter Cook, Executive Director of the New York State Council of Churches and Jason Labate, Esq. from Goldstein Hall Attorney’s at Law shared a presentation, Won't You Be My Neighbor: Breaking the Barriers to Creating Affordable Housing, at Pace University Land Use Law Center's 18th Annual Alfred B. Delbello Land Use and Sustainable Development Conference.

ACTION IN SUPPORT OF SWEAT BILL TO COUNTER WAGE THEFT

The Assembly and the Senate passed the SWEAT Bill which would prevent wage theft. There will be an action on Tuesday, December 17 from 11 to 12 outside the Governor’s office, 633 Third Avenue in Manhattan to urge him to sign the bill.

According to Flushing Workers Center, National Mobilization Against Sweatshops, Chinese Staff and Workers Association and Laundry Workers Center and other Worker Centers:

"An estimated $1 billion in wages is stolen from workers in New York State every year. When workers stand up against wage theft, employers close up shop (only to reopen under a new name), transfer their assets and empty their bank accounts. By the time workers win in court or the Department of Labor, there is no money to collect. The SWEAT bill will stop this problem by allowing workers to freeze the employer’s assets so workers can actually collect their stolen wages. The SWEAT bill will become law if Governor Cuomo signs the bill. On November 20, hundreds of workers rallied outside of Governor Cuomo’s office to demand he sign the SWEAT bill immediately. Workers delivered a letter to his office. We have yet to hear a response. Workers have waited long enough. Let’s return to his office on Dec 17 and demand an answer! Governor Cuomo: will you continue to protect law breaking bosses who cheat NYS workers? Or will you stand up for workers, many of whom are immigrant workers, women workers and low-wage workers, and sign the bill into law? Time is running out.”

In addition to attending the rally, everyone is urged to call Governor Cuomo and let him know you support the bill! Urge him to sign it into law immediately! (518) 474-8390. Here is a background article which explains the struggle with wage theft.

ACTION IN SUPPORT OF MENTAL HEALTH HOUSING ON DECEMBER 19, 11:00 AM, NEW YORK CITY

All are invited to join the Interfaith Assembly on Homelessness and Housing, people of faith and our many allies on Thursday, December 19th at 11 am at 633 3rd Avenue in NYC, in front of
Gov. Cuomo’s NYC office, in supporting the Bring it Home Campaign which seeks to increase the funding to 40,000 “mental health housing” units statewide whose reimbursement rates have lagged significantly behind their operating costs for decades. Click here to register for more details about the campaign and to register for the December 19 action while offering signature for a sign on letter in support of this legislation.

VICTORY FOR HOUSING FOR THE HOMELESS IN NEW YORK CITY

We give thanks to the New York City Council for approving a proactive program to house the homeless in the city after a sustained campaign by House Our Future in which the New York State Council is a participant. The City Council garnered a veto-proof majority to persuade Mayor DeBlasio to give up his opposition to this effort and embrace this new initiative to take a proactive step to address the homeless crisis which besets the city. For more background on this exciting development, click here to read the news coverage in the Gothamist.

GREEN LIGHT LAW GOES INTO EFFECT ON DECEMBER 16

We were pleased to join the widest possible coalition to advocate for a law that now makes it possible for undocumented immigrants to apply for driver’s licenses in New York. The law goes into effect on Monday, December 16. Two appeals from county clerks in Rensselaer and Erie County were rejected in Federal Court clearing the way for the law to go into effect. Here is an editorial in support from New York Daily News.

PARTIAL ELIMINATION OF CASH BAIL, DISCOVERY AND SPEEDY TRIAL LAWS GO INTO EFFECT ON DECEMBER 16.

We give thanks for the criminal justice laws which were passed in the 2019 legislative session. In spite of some opposition to implementing the partial elimination of cash bail, speedy trial and discovery reforms from some District Attorney’s and politicians, Governor Cuomo, Senate Leader Cousins, and Speaker Heastie are holding fast in defending these laws which will go into effect on January 1.

While we are pleased with the Governor’s support of elimination of cash bail for misdemeanors and non violent felonies, we are very disappointed that the Governor vetoed two bills last Friday, widely supported by criminal defense attorneys in New York that would have expanded the operations of charitable bail organizations to provide cash bail up to $10,000 for violent felonies and a law which would have given public defenders easier access to their clients’ rap sheets.

COLLEGE BEHIND BARS

Many across the country saw the documentary by Ken Burns, College Behind Bars on public television on the Bard Prison Initiative at Bedford Hills and Eastern Correctional Facilities where The Reverend Dr. Cheong Mo Yang serves as the Protestant chaplain at Eastern and The Reverend Cleveland Thornhill serve as Protestant chaplain at Bedford Hills. We commend the Governor Cuomo and Acting Commissioner Anthony Annucci, and Deputy Commissioner of Programs, Jeff McKoy, at Department of Corrections and Community Supervision and staffs of Eastern and Bedford Hills for affording access to these facilities and making it possible for residents to tell a powerful story of how higher education has transformed their lives. The Council advocates for much greater expansion of higher education programs through out our state prison system.
TOWN HALL ON MASS INCARCERATION

Join a grassroots and legislative effort to end the human rights atrocities taking place behind bars across New York State, including death by incarceration and the torture of solitary confinement. The town hall will take place on Thursday, December 19th @ 5:00 PM at the Albany Public Library (Howe Branch), 105 Schuyler Street, Albany, NY. Come take part of a conversation to learn about how you can get involved and take part and join the movement to pass critical reforms here at the Capitol in Albany to #HALTsolitary and #FreeOurElders! The evening will include a cultural performance and refreshments will be provided.

SCREENING OF EMPIRE STATE RUMBLINGS

On Thursday, December 18, from 7 to 9 join the Labor-Religion Coalition and Poor People’s Campaign in Albany for a wine and cheese reception, film screening and discussion of EMPIRE STATE RUMBLINGS, a documentary filmed by a team of activist videographers over Forty Days of Action launching the New York State Poor People’s Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival in the spring of 2018. Click here for more information and to register.

ADDRESSING WEALTH INEQUALITY IN NEW YORK STATE

The New York State Council of Churches has proudly joined with the Fiscal Policy Institute and other groups to last couple of years to address wealth inequality in New York. In the coming legislative session, we will continue to call on our lawmakers to lift New York’s very regressive 2% spending cap which has penalized poor and middle class New Yorkers. We will also join a wide group of partners to ask the wealthiest New Yorkers to pay more in order to offer tax relief to poor and middle income renters and homeowners and improve instead of cut social services, health care, education, and infrastructure improvements. A foretaste of the proposals we will place before the legislature were highlighted at event sponsored by the Fiscal Policy Institute on December 9 in the capital. Here is an interview on the Capital Press Room with Ron Deutsch, Executive Director of FPI to talk about the path to a more just New York along with a round up of other press coverage on public radio outlets. You can also see the Fiscal Policy Institute’s recent publication, The Unequal State of New York by Jonas J.N. Shaende, PhD, Chief Economist and Brent Kramer, PhD, Senior Economist at Fiscal Policy Institute.

We were also pleased to support the Working Family Tax Relief Act which would expand the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) for families with children and strengthen it for workers not raising children. The legislation would also make the Child Tax Credit (CTC) refundable, allowing children in families with lower incomes to fully benefit from the program. Click here to learn more.

FAITH LEADERS STANDING WITH NURSES AT ALBANY MEDICAL CENTER

Faith leaders gathered on the steps of Albany City Hall with the nurses of Albany Medical Center and New York State Nurses Association, along with members of Albany Common Council and Albany County legislature, to call on Albany Medical Center to negotiate a fair contract with their nurses. 20 months ago, after several tries, Albany Medical Center nurses formed a union by a vote of 2 to 1. Since that time, they have struggled to get Albany Medical Center to bargain in good faith. Click here for coverage in the Times Union and click here to see the letter issued by faith leaders in the capital region in support of the nurses.
ANNUAL YOUTH LEADERSHIP FORUM IN WASHINGTON DC

41 young people and chaperones will participate in the New York State Council of Church’s Youth Leadership trip to Washington D.C. to reflect on justice and public policy under the guidance, Aimee Hong, Director of the United Methodist Church Seminar Program. The trip includes a visit the National Museum of African American History & Culture. Students from the following churches will participate: First Presbyterian Albany, Hebron United Presbyterian Church, Westminster Presbyterian Church, Henrietta United Church of Christ, Plattsburgh United Methodist Church, Queensbury United Methodist Church, Indian Lake United Methodist Church, Adirondack Community Church, Unitarian, First United Presbyterian Troy, and New Covenant Presbyterian. We had a space limit and regret that we were not able to accommodate everyone who applied. We invite people to apply for the 2021 Youth Leadership Forum.

In faith,

Peter Cook

Executive Director