Next week, the 2020 legislative session begins in New York. All of us are given another opportunity to advocate for a moral budget which better addresses the needs of poor, middle class, and low wealth New Yorkers.

While the stock market reaches new heights, millions of New Yorkers are looking at continued underemployment, flat wages and rising costs for housing, childcare, medical care, and food while paying too much of their income on high property taxes and other kinds of taxes. Schools are still owed 4 billion in foundation aid which disproportionately affects poorer rural, suburban and urban communities in every part of the state. These communities often have property taxes which are too high because the weight can’t be picked up by businesses which have left for more affluent communities which places even greater tax burdens on homeowners.

This year, the zeal to cut social services will be higher than usual as the state attempts to close a $6 billion deficit which is due largely to an increase in Medicaid costs. This is a forced austerity which would be unnecessary if the state had the courage to recapture some of the massive tax savings windfall which flowed to the very wealthiest New York Yorkers—mega millionaires and billionaires—who became much richer as a result of the 2017 Tax Cut and Jobs Act. Their windfall is supported by poorer and middle-class New Yorkers who pay higher percentages of their income on taxes than the very rich and saw little benefit and even a tax increase as a result of the 2017 law. We have always said that this forced austerity in New York is cruel and unnecessary and could be addressed by a more progressive state tax system and the lifting an artificially imposed 2% spending cap.

As we have for a long time, we will once again join many partners across the state to make the case for a reprioritized state budget which ask the very rich to pay a bit more while enhancing the social safety net for everyone else. We will also advocate for much large investments in clean energy infrastructure and more cost-effective bottom up economic development.

We will also continue to advocate for the rights of immigrants including the disclosure by state agencies of the number of children in their care who are separated from their families, prevention of efforts to overturn new criminal justice reform laws along with advocacy for parole reform and drastically limiting the use of solitary confinement.

Through our Who is My Neighbor Community Development and Housing Seminars in Long Island, Saratoga Springs and Syracuse, we will help faith communities make the case for more racially and economically inclusive communities in part through the construction of affordable housing. Through the seminars, we will also help churches better use their property to further their mission in their community by expanding rental space, building community centers, childcare centers, schools, public gardens and affordable housing.

We invite you to move out of your buildings to nurture relationships with many people in your neighborhood and city by offering your presence, your love, your hospitality and public witness particularly lifting up the lost and the lonely. Let us get out there and exercise our faith in the public square as we live into God’s promises for a more just world.

In Faith,

Peter
COMING EVENTS

Below is a summary of events coming up for you to exercise your voice in the public square. Please go to WWW.NYSCOC.org which is updated daily with actions and events (including all the ones below) as we learn about them. If you have an educational or justice oriented event which is occurring in your part of the state to whom you would like to invite others, please let us know and we will do our best to post it on our calendar. Click here if you would like to submit an event.

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR SEMINAR—LONG ISLAND, JANUARY 28

Click here to register NOW for New York State Council’s Who is My Neighbor seminar on Tuesday, January 28th (Snow date on Wednesday, February 5th) at the Community Reformed Church in Manhasset 9AM to 4PM.

Join New York State Council of Churches, Goldstein Hall Attorneys at Law, Pace University Land Use Law Center, Long Island Council of Churches, Community Development Corporation of Long Island, ERASE Racism, the Long Island Housing Partnership, and other religious and secular partners for a day of conversation with colleagues and experts that will inspire you to live into the biblical command of love our neighbor and our neighborhoods by:

*Thinking in new ways about your mission to reach out communities to revitalize and grow. How can our congregations work to offer hospitality to the stranger and strengthen a social fabric that can leave so many feeling isolated and fearful of others.

*Embracing the riches of your theological traditions, to address attitudinal and legal barriers which prevent your neighborhood and region from welcoming people of all incomes and races and helping them to live, work and participate in your local economy. We’ll help you identify the architectural, zoning, financial and social barriers in your towns that prevent inclusion and cause our economies to suffer. We will discuss how faith communities reclaim their visibility and leadership in their communities to make needed changes to build the community we want.

*Renovate and improve your property which may be underutilized, under supported, or in poor condition to further your mission. We will show a variety of real-life examples of congregations who have found creative ways to extend their mission and redevelop their property for the benefit of the community while improving space for fellowship and worship. Many have also built affordable housing, created arts and community spaces, planted community gardens and developed schools and educational programs.

Manhasset Seminar Draft Agenda January 28 2020 – Agendas will be adapted to include regional examples and perspectives for the remaining seminars in Saratoga Springs and Syracuse.
WEBINARS FOR CHURCHES ON PREPARING REQUESTS FOR PROPOSALS FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING

JANUARY 7 AND 16, 2:00 PM

As a faith community, are you seeking help in preparing yourselves to apply for funding for to use your property for affordable housing? Please join Enterprise Community Partners and Wells Fargo to participate in the Housing Affordability Breakthrough Challenge, a bold initiative designed to spark innovations that support housing affordability in the areas of construction, financing, and resident services and support. Click here to register and find out more information including a guide to preparing requests for proposals.

SECOND ANNUAL STATEWIDE ECUMENICAL ADVOCACY DAY

FEBRUARY 12, 2020 IN ALBANY

NEW POLITICS, NEW ACTION, NEW BUDGET

NEW HOPE FOR ALL OF NEW YORK

Are you interested in connecting your faith to issues of social justice and building a more equitable society? Join people of faith across New York State, representatives of the New York State Council of Churches and other secular and religious partners in Albany on February 12, 2020!

We will begin the daylong event with spiritual grounding, followed by basic advocacy training, workshops on issues including care for creation, immigration, criminal justice reform and housing justice and then finally visits to the offices of our elected officials. Michael Kink from Strong Economy for All and Ron Deutsch from the Fiscal Policy Institute will offer a state budget and legislative overview. They will be complemented by Christine Ashley, Quaker Field Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation, who will place the state budget challenge in a national context.

The cost of the event including lunch, refreshments and materials is $30.00. Please register for our February 12, 2020 NYS Ecumenical Advocacy Day by clicking here. You may also mail a check for registration costs to our NYSCOC office location, 1580 Central Ave. Albany, NY 12205.

If you have questions or would like more information, please contact The Reverend Peter Cook, Executive Director, New York State Council of Churches at pcook@nyscoc.org or 508.380.8289.

We invite you to come to Powell House the night before at 524 Pitt Hall Rd., Old Chatham, NY 12136 (4:30 p.m. Tues to 8:00 a.m. Wed) $75 fee includes overnight accommodations, supper and breakfast before you head to Albany. www.powellhouse.org or call 518-794-8811. An added bonus will be that Christine Ashley, Quaker Field Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation, will speak at Powell House, in Old Chatham on Tuesday Evening, February 11, and will then join us at the Advocacy Day on Wednesday.
CALENDAR

Sunday, January 5, Speaking Out Against Anti-Semitism

New York City, 11:00 AM

When anti-Semitism occurs, we stand up and stand together. Please join the New York State Board of Rabbis and others in participating in a march on Sunday, January 5. Meet at Foley Square at 11:00 AM. We will march across the Brooklyn Bridge to Columbus Park near (Cadman plaza) Click here for more information.

Schenectady, 7:00 P.M. Come to Congregation Gates of Heaven for a vigil and service at 7:00 PM located at 852 Ashmore Avenue. Click here for more details.

Tuesday, January 7, Black People’s and People’s State of the State

Join us as we make a case for a moral state budget at the People’s State of the State, January 7, 1:00 PM at the State Capital under the portico across from the Empire State Plaza. Click here for more details. There will also be a Black People’s State of the State in the War Room in the Capital at 11:00. We strongly urge you to attend both events.

Wednesday, January 8, State of the State and Health Care Advocacy

Governor Andrew Cuomo delivers his state of the state address at 1:30 PM. Click here for more details.

New York Health will make the case for improvements to our health care system and to call for enabling legislation to institute a single payer system in New York. Click here for more information.

Thursday, January 9, Housing Action

Join housing action groups across the state in Albany to advocate for just housing policies and expansion of funding for housing the homeless and affordable housing. Click here for more information and to sign up.

Clergy breakfast in the Bronx at 9:00 AM to discuss next steps in closing Riker’s Island. Click here for more information.

January 14, 10 AM, Capital. Poor Peoples Campaign Action

Join the NYS Poor People’s Campaign in Albany to demand that our elected officials prioritize people over profits in 2020. Click here for more information.

Coverage for New York’s children – Join the Schuyler Center at 9:00 AM for a briefing in Albany to learn how a lack of access to health insurance inhibits children from getting the preventive care they need. Click here for more information.
MLK Day Screening of “We Cried Power” in Albany

January 20th, 5:00 PM Albany, We Cried Power

We Cried Power is a documentary about the Poor People's Campaign, a bold new social movement to end poverty in the United States. For more information click here

10 AM – HALT Solitary Lobby Day in Albany

January 21· Albany, Advocacy for HALT Solitary Confinement Act Come to Albany to speak to your legislators about the inhumane and counterproductive use of solitary confinement and the need to pass the HALT Solitary Confinement Act. Click here for more information.

In faith,

Peter Cook

Executive Director