



Washington Report to Presbyterians

Spring 2015

From the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Office of Public Witness

Raising A Prophetic Voice through the Social Justice Policy of Presbyterians since 1946



Land of the Free on Lockdown

by the Reverend Dr. J. Herbert Nelson

In the United States of America, we incarcerate more people than anywhere else in the world. While the U.S. is home to five percent of the world's population, we nonetheless incarcerate 25 percent of the world's prisoners. Our claim to be the land of the free is scarred by the issues surrounding mass incarceration, which include the deep legacy of ongoing racism in this country, a private, for-profit Prison Industrial System, disparate mandatory sentencing that unjustly targets people of color and non-violent offenders, and a failure to live into God's call for restorative justice, which focuses on making relationship right and on restitution, rather than on retribution and punishment.

According to the Sentencing Project, 2.2 million persons are incarcerated in the United States. This represents a 500 percent increase over the past 30 years. The Prison Industrial System is responsible for the incarceration of one in three young

African American men – in prison, in jail, on probation, or on parole — yet mass incarceration tends to be categorized as a criminal justice issue, rather than a racial justice or civil rights issue (or crisis).

In the wake of the release of the United States Department of Justice's investigation of the Ferguson Police Department, it is clear that there are cases of long-term mistrust among marginalized communities. This mistrust and fear stems from a deep-seated practice by law enforcement to target and over-criminalize communities of color. It is difficult for any community, targeted by the very people who are called to protect them, to avoid the struggles of over-criminalization.

During my ministry in Memphis, TN, it was clear that once the perpetual cycle of the criminalization of a community begins, it negatively impacts households and generations of people. Children are impacted by the absence of an incarcerated parent. Jails and prisons become rites of passage for young people and whole communities of both young and older persons are destroyed by underground economies of guns, violence, sex trafficking, and too many lives lost prematurely to drugs and alcohol.



Continued on page 3

“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?”

- Lamentations 3:34-36

Where Are They Now?

Jessica Tate and What's NEXT for the Church?

Jessica Tate served as a Young Adult Intern in the Office of Public Witness in 2002-2003 and now is the director of NEXT Church (www.nextchurch.net). The NEXT Church National Gathering recently took place at Fourth Presbyterian Church in Chicago, IL, March 16-18, 2015.

NEXT Church is a network of leaders across the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) who are trying to figure out what it means to be God's faithful church in the 21st century. We live in a time when the church no longer holds the culturally-sanctioned position in our society to which we have grown accustomed and the institutional models of church that once served us are not serving us as well as they once did. You can easily see that on Sunday morning when you find more people on soccer fields and grocery stores than in worship. Moreover, our denomination no longer occupies its old place in the public consciousness that once knew Presbyterians were the ones who built schools and hospitals. Now, if we are known at all, Presbyterians are known for controversies. Rather than seeing this as a tragedy, however, those of us involved in NEXT Church believe that God's Spirit is moving us into something new. ***The leaders who participate in NEXT Church would like to help discover what is next for the church.***



The ongoing conversation and discernment of NEXT Church about where God is calling us has evolved into an annual national gathering that energizes leaders who attend and those who watch online; a series of regional gatherings at which leaders receive training, encouragement and the chance to build relationships; and an online presence that delivers dynamic content right to people's desktops and smart phones and invites them to connect virtually in monthly Church Leaders' Roundtables.



I am honored to be the director of this national movement and grateful for the systemic ways of thinking that I was exposed to in the PC(USA) Office of Public Witness thirteen years ago! From the Office of Public Witness, I went on to Union Presbyterian Seminary, where I received a Master of Divinity and Master of Arts in Christian Education. The grounding in reformed theology, biblical interpretation, leadership, facilitation, and understanding congregations as systems that I received at Union are helping to shape NEXT Church and the leaders who participate.

My first call was to Fairfax Presbyterian Church in Northern Virginia, where I served as the Associate Pastor for Christian Formation. It was (and is!) a wonderful congregation, deeply committed to each other and the community. While there, I was profoundly shaped by my work in and through VOICE (Virginians Organized for Interfaith Community Engagement), a community organization that works in and across congregations to develop power in the community to help shape it into a vision of God's justice. Through VOICE, our congregation worked alongside community members (in and outside of the church) to create more affordable housing, provide

Continued on page 3

Land of the Free on Lockdown, *continued*

Continued from page 1



The question we are raising at this year's Compassion, Peace and Justice Training Day and Ecumenical Advocacy Days pertains to more than ending mass incarceration. We are raising deeper questions –

"How do we restore communities that have experienced a historically negative impact by the criminal justice system in the United States?"

"How do we eradicate the corporate takeover of the United States and other countries across the globe, which leads to the denial of human dignity and violations of human rights?"

For us, as Presbyterians, these are the related questions that we ought to raise and take back to our local communities and congregations. Our hope is that both of these training events will be a time of deep introspection as to how Jesus Christ is calling you to be a disciple at a deeper level of engagement.

Let's come together with a mind to End Mass Incarceration and Break the Chains of Systems of Exploitation.



Save the Date!
Ecumenical Advocacy Days
April 16-19, 2016

Where are They Now? continued

Continued from page 2

access to dental care, and demand that banks reinvest in the neighborhoods devastated by the foreclosure crisis.

As I think back to the threads that weave through the tapestry of my life and vocational moves thus far, I can see the ways in which I have been shaped by people and institutions that gave me eyes to see God's vision of a new heaven and new earth – my dad's work as a pastor and community leader and the commitment to education and non-profit leadership that my mom and sister have always championed; the campus ministers who encouraged my questions and encouraged my leadership; the professors who pushed me to think more deeply about issues in our world; the colleagues who challenge me daily by their own efforts to make that vision of God's justice incarnate; and my husband, who works tirelessly as a public servant and with deep theological insight. It is these people and these places who continue to give me hope that God is not done with the church, for the world still needs the good news of Jesus Christ – words of grace, reconciliation, justice and abundant life.

Celebrating Public Witness Victories

Victory on Establishing Diplomatic Relations with Cuba

In December 2014, the U.S. made a historic step forward in its Cuba policy when the Obama Administration announced that the U.S. will have full diplomatic relations with Cuba, ease travel restrictions, and review the additional policies that hinder the free relationship between the two countries. This was a huge victory for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the many Presbyterians who have worked together with our partners in Cuba for over fifty years. The Office of Public Witness has worked to advocate and to help Presbyterians advocate for this change of policy. Through action alerts, meetings with Congress and the Administration, and hosting delegations of our Cuban church partners, we have continually pressed for a full and free relationship between the two countries. We are looking forward to making sure these changes are fully implemented in the coming year.

Standing with Low-Wage Workers

In July 2014, the Reverend J. Herbert Nelson stood with striking low-wage federal contract workers to call on the President to set a new standard in the U.S. labor market. As the largest creator of low-wage jobs in the country, the U.S. government, through its contracts, has tremendous power to lead the labor market and improve jobs for millions of workers. When President Obama signed an executive order last summer requiring federal contractors to pay their workers at least \$10.10 per hour, he set a standard for American workers, and many corporations, cities, and municipalities followed his lead. Days after Reverend Nelson stood with striking workers at Union Station, the President signed the "Fair Pay and Safe Workplaces Executive Order" that will ensure that federal contracts are scrutinized for their compliance with federal labor law, such as wage theft protections and safe workplace regulations. This effort to raise the floor of the U.S. labor market continues in 2015 as the Office of Public Witness stands with workers who are demanding more livable wages and contract preferences for good employers who undercut the poverty jobs market by using taxpayer dollars to create good jobs.



J. Herbert Nelson stands with low-wage workers in July 2014

Nuclear Non-Proliferation in Iran

A central concern for the PC(USA) has been Nuclear Proliferation and adherence to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Last year, the Office of Public Witness worked in coalition with our interfaith and ecumenical partners in support of negotiated solution to the Iran nuclear issue and in opposition to harmful sanctions proposed in Congress. Because of your response to our alerts and the coalition of faith partners working in DC, we stopped the additional sanctions that would have derailed an agreement. Early in spring 2015, a historic agreement with Iran was announced — the key parameters of a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) regarding the Islamic Republic of Iran's nuclear program. The details remain to be worked out, but this is a tremendous step forward. We will continue to make the final agreement a key priority in public witness work this year.

A Step in Addressing Global Climate Change



OPW Staff J. Herbert Nelson and Leslie Woods join religious leaders to meet with EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy

In 2014, the Environmental Protection Agency finalized new regulations under the Clean Air Act to reduce carbon pollution from power plants. Power plants are the largest carbon emitter in the U.S. economy, contributing 30 percent of U.S. carbon pollution. Absent more comprehensive action from Congress, this regulation by the EPA is the largest step the U.S. has taken toward reducing its carbon emissions and beginning to address global climate change and disruption. The faith community was active in calling for these regulations. The Office of Public Witness provided official comments and testimony during the rule-making process, provided resources for hundreds of Presbyterians to weigh in on the rules, and joined with the inter-religious community to raise a voice for Creation Care in the EPA's efforts to reduce carbon pollution.

Homelessness and Mass Incarceration

The Office of Public Witness is currently hosting an art exhibition titled “Homeless” by Presbyterian member Lucy Janjigian. These 18 paintings represent the trials and sorrows of people living with homelessness. They deal eloquently with real-life tragedies.

In this exhibition, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) member and artist Lucy Janjigian depicts the tragic plight of our homeless fellow men, women and children. Janjigian worked on these paintings for three years.

The statistics on homelessness in the U.S. are staggering. According to the National Coalition on Homelessness:

1. In January 2014, there were nearly 600,000 homeless people on any given night
2. Of that number, about one-third were in families and the remainder were individuals
3. Nine percent were veterans
4. Only fifteen percent were chronically homeless

This last statistic shows that, contrary to a general misconception, most homelessness is temporary and caused by traumatic life circumstances that, with help, are reversible or can be addressed.

This year Ecumenical Advocacy Days and PC(USA) Compassion, Peace and Justice Training Day are focusing on the issue of mass incarceration, one cause of which is homelessness. Janjigian has commented on the connection between imprisonment and homelessness, noting that homelessness aggravates unemployability, despair, desperation, and social alienation, driving people closer to illegal drug use and/or criminal conduct.

According to the Urban Institute, 10 percent of those entering U.S. prisons for the first time have already experienced homelessness, and 10% of those released from prison will find themselves homeless, usually early after re-entry. Accordingly, pre- and post-incarceration homelessness is one of the many factors causing the high rate of both incarceration and recidivism. Bureau of Justice Statistics shows a recidivism rate of 68 percent within three years after release and 78 percent within five years.

It is only when the nation musters the political will to end homelessness and its many causal social blights - poverty, childhood neglect, poor education with high dropout rates, unemployment, drug culture exposure, poor health care including neglected mental illness and substance abuse - that homelessness and mass incarceration in the U.S. can be eliminated.

You are invited! We hope you will come and be moved by the exhibit.



Poverty

Artist's Statement

"Everyone is touched by the plight of those who are without shelter and the dignity of a place to be, a place that can be called home. These works represent the way an artist responds. I try to create images that reveal human beings keeping their hopes alive by their togetherness, however fragile.

"The small, cramped efforts of individuals huddled together calls for our help and yet their power, despite having little choice, can reinforce our own inner strength.

"The paintings speak for themselves but you will notice the shopping cart as a 'mobile home.' The attempt to keep personal belongings close enhances self identity. The birthday 'celebration,' the phone call, the park as a touch of nature, the benefits of 'soup,' fire, boxes, even an old car as shelter all keep hope alive. The suffering, especially of children, has to be shown and contrasted with those that have. The card game indicates the spirit of play still breathes within. The players of any game act upon a chance to win."

—Lucy Janjigian on the “Homeless” Series, April 16, 1997

Spring 2015 Service Learning

The Office of Public Witness believes that the formation of servant leaders and advocates is vital to the public policy ministry and witness of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)



2015 Spring Service Learners: AmyBeth Willis, Nora Leccese, Jenny Hyde, and Salome Boyd

Salome Boyd (Spring 2015) joined the OPW staff in January 2015 as an intern after completing studies in Regional Development and Innovation from Van Hall Larenstein University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands. She came to D.C. with "the hope of learning more about how civil society can influence U.S. policies, and the approach the PC (USA) takes to achieve such social change. After only a week, [she] caught [her]self wishing [her] internship were longer than four months!" During her time in the OPW, Salome is focusing on issues



of economic justice and is currently working with *Publish What You Pay*, as they research and push for the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to implement a strong regulation for transparency within extractive industries. Next year, Salome will start a Master's program in Public Administration in the Netherlands, after which she hopes to support grassroots movements to promote economic justice and increase corporate responsibility around the globe.

Our fundraising efforts for service learning are ongoing. YAV Placements contribute a portion of Volunteers' living expenses to the Presbytery. In addition, each Summer Fellow receives a modest stipend to help defray the cost of living expenses, which are considerable in DC. We need your help to continue offering these opportunities! Your gift could make the difference between a vocational dream and a lived reality. Please give generously to support our YAVs, Interns, and Summer Fellows.

Give online at

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[OPWgiveinterns](http://bit.ly/OPWgiveinterns)



Nora Leccese (Spring/Summer 2015) is serving the policy placement portion of a Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellowship* through the Congressional Hunger Center. Originally from Boulder, CO, Nora graduated from the University of Colorado in 2014 with a degree in economics and a minor in ethnic studies with a focus on community leadership. Nora helped found Boulder Food Rescue, a national organization that uses bicycle power to redistribute produce that would otherwise go to waste from grocery stores to homeless, food insecure, and low income individuals. She has conducted research on worker-owned cooperatives in Argentina and was a lead organizer in a campaign to divest

Colorado University from the fossil fuel industry.

In her capacity as an Emerson Hunger Fellow, she served the first part of her Fellowship in a field placement at the Center for an Agricultural Economy in Hardwick, VT, where she assessed how local food infrastructure, such as cold storage and processing facilities,



**The Emerson National Hunger Fellows Program is a social justice program that trains, inspires, and sustains leaders. Fellows gain field experience fighting hunger and poverty through placements in community-based organizations across the country, and policy experience through placements in Washington, D.C. The program bridges community-based efforts and national public policy, and fellows develop as effective leaders in the movement to end hunger and poverty.*

A Celebration of Service Learning

might better serve the needs of emergency food organizations (e.g. food banks, pantries, and congregate meal sites), with the goal of increasing access to fresh food for low-income Vermonters. In the OPW she is working to increase awareness of the root causes of poverty and to provide resources to congregations who want to deepen their knowledge about access to education, mass incarceration, and economic inequality.



Jenny Hyde continues to serve as a PC(USA) Young Adult Volunteer (YAV) through the National Capital Presbytery's DC YAV site (2014-2015). Jenny hails from Massachusetts and is a recent graduate of Gordon College with a degree in International Affairs with a concentration in International Development. She is a member of Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church in Easton, MA, and was a Young Adult Advisory Delegate to the 2010 General Assembly. At college, she was very involved in Gordon's Residence Life program and the college's Model United Nation's team. In the OPW, she works on international issues, primarily focused on trade policy. When asked what led her to serve at the Office of Public Witness, she responded that she was "intentional in seeking a ministry in a new context, to see how the church wrestles with public policy issues and advocacy. I feel very blessed to be here."

AmyBeth Willis also continues to serve as a PC(USA) Young Adult Volunteer (YAV) through the National Capital Presbytery's DC YAV site (2014-2015). She grew up in Murfreesboro, TN, and graduated May 2013 from Emory University in Atlanta, GA, where she studied Sociology, Religion, and Spanish. She spent the 2013-14 year as a YAV in the desert of Tucson, AZ, working at Southside Presbyterian Church. Of her choice to pursue a second YAV year at the DC site, she said, "After a year of providing 'direct services' to people in immediate need, I wanted an opportunity to engage in policy work and understand how policy impacts the day-to-day lives of people. How do we move from mercy to justice ministries? Here, I have learned about the amazing justice-driven and prophetic work of this office and our ecumenical partners. Our power is in our faith, the mobilization of people, and our commitment to do justice. The voice for justice and righteousness on the Hill would be so much smaller without people of faith. I have learned that this work is an uphill battle, but is worth the climb. It was hard for me to leave Tucson, but I knew this was an important next step for me. I have felt affirmed that God is calling me to this work as I discern where God is calling me next. I don't know how this will manifest itself, although I could see myself doing more community organizing."



For more information on Service Learning Opportunities at the Office of Public Witness, or to learn how to apply, please visit www.pcusa.org/washington/internship or email opw.intern.info@pcusa.org



Young Adult Engagement Report, 2012-2015

I will set up my covenant with you and your descendants after you in every generation as an enduring covenant. I will be your God and your descendants' God after you.

—Genesis 17:13 (CEB)

A Commitment to Young Adult Engagement

At the beginning of 2012, the Reverend Dr. J. Herbert Nelson, Jr., PCUSA's Director for Public Witness identified two significant challenges for the PC(USA) Office of Public Witness (OPW). The first aimed to show what the ministry does. That is, the OPW seeks to serve the whole church, not just a well-served priority group. The second was how to balance the mission of the past with the promise of our future. Nelson wrote, "It is time to see that outreach, not service with young adults is essential to meeting both challenges."

At the same time, the Presbyterian Mission Agency identified Young Adults as one of the divestment goals in the Mission Work Plan, and asked to "reimagine, reinvigorate, and connect the church to engage and join young adults reimagining the church for the future."

Indeed, the Office of Public Witness believes that the formation of servant leaders and advocates is vital to the public witness of the PC(USA). Through a variety of programs, from Service Learning Opportunities, Internships, and Fellowship, to specialized programming and centers for youth and sibling college groups, to national networks to build leadership for young adults in attendance events like O'Connell Day and Ecumenical Advisory Days, the OPW has made service to and with young adults a central focus of Public Witness ministry.

When Reverend Nelson stated in 2011 the Office of Public Witness' new commitment to ministry to and with young adults, just before the OPW with the blessing of all the men and young adults who joined us last year, we give thanks to God for this ministry path, in accordance with the Mission Work Plan of the Presbyterian Mission Agency, reinvigorate this essential ministry to and with young adults. It is crucial to our ministry.

The Office of Public Witness is the public policy, information and advocacy office of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. Our mission is to represent the moral and justice quality of the General Assembly in Washington and its equity priorities.

Young Adult Engagement Report, 2012-2015

The PC(USA) Office of Public Witness (OPW) in April 2015 is releasing a new "Young Adult Engagement Report, 2012-2015," in which we review the fruits of the last three years of ministry to and with youth and young adults. Through three projects, the OPW reports having engaged with over 5,000 youth and young adults in the 3-year period. These programs are:

1. A Justice Model for Service Learning
2. Seminars to Build Advocates for Justice
3. Conferences and Outreach

The overwhelming conclusion is that this ministry is a blessing to the work of the OPW, which will renew its commitment to providing educational and experiential learning opportunities for youth and young adults. To download the complete report, please visit <http://bit.ly/YAReport>.



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