



REPORT FROM NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

The New York State Council of Churches is very pleased to report on our activities in 2017 and 2018. In an era where resources are more limited, we believe strongly in the value of ecumenism and working together. We see ourselves, in many ways, as a networker and a “dot connector” to help our partners know what each other is doing while helping congregations offer the Gospel in our communities, state and nation. Our ecumenical witness is greatly enriched by the traditions and identities of our denominational partners. We are keenly interested in the process of encouraging people to grow as disciples for Jesus Christ. In this spirit, we want to offer tools and perspectives which invite people to humbly engage the struggles of this world, listen to people’s real struggles, and seek to point to the promised kingdom of God on earth by offering comfort and doing justice. For us, pastoral care is not just an individual matter. It is about creating laws and policies which do not discriminate and offer hope. We think this work is effectively done in an ecumenical way. Please visit our website www.nyscoc.org

Our purpose and work can be found in the following mission statement:

New York State Council of Churches, embracing a spirit of ecumenism and hospitality, seeks to live into God’s call to do justice and to love our neighbor. Pointing to the Kingdom of God on earth, we envision a world where the marginalized are freed from poverty, where prisoners can be restored to live happier and healthier lives, and where we help young people grow in their Christian discipleship.

To live into our purpose and vision, we have three emphases:

We promote faith formation for people of all ages.

February 20 to 22 we held our annual high school trip to the United Nations. 44 high school students from across the state participated in a seminar at The Church of the Covenant (Presbyterian) in New York City. A seminar led by theologian and hip-hop artist, Solomon Starr, who used some very creative group exercises, to help young people explore the complex dimensions of white privilege, racism, and power as it relates to the Christian faith. We also had a tour of the United Nations. Christy D’Ambrosio, Director of Youth Ministries at First Presbyterian Church in Albany, coordinated the trip. Our next trip is scheduled for February 19 to 21, 2019. We welcome high school applicants across the state.

In July, 2017 we held our first annual Bridging the Urban Rural Divide Conference in Johnstown. The Conference was geared towards helping us get beyond superficial political and geographical categories to meet concrete needs in our communities. The 2017 lectures can be found on our Facebook Page. The next conference will focus on congregations as catalysts for economic and communal renewal. It will be held July 10 to 12, 2018 at the First Presbyterian Church in Johnstown.

We certify and support chaplains in our state prison system and other state institutions.

We certify Protestant chaplains for the state. Certification is necessary before one can be interviewed by the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) and other state agencies. In the last year, our two certification committees certified chaplains from the Assemblies of God, Episcopal, Seventh Day Adventist, United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church denominations. As of March, 2018, 28 chaplains have been visited and Reverend Cook has preached in a variety of prisons. The Council also held its annual chaplain’s conference comprised of chaplains from many different settings. 64 were in attendance this year. The Department of Corrections is experiencing a chaplain shortage. We

welcome applications of highly and qualified fully ordained clergy, with ecclesiastical standing, parish ministry experience, a Bachelors degree and at least 96 hours of graduate theological work to apply for certification.

We help local churches and judicatories work ecumenically on a grassroots level to collaborate with other religious and secular partners to do justice

1. Working with the Collegiate churches, Enterprise Partners, Presbytery of New York City, Interfaith Assembly on Housing and Homelessness, Banana Kelly Community Improvement Association, Bronx Clergy Task Force, Kingdom Builders and many other partners, the Council formed the Interfaith Affordable Housing Collaborative which provides congregations in New York technical assistance to position them to use their property to build supportive and affordable housing. 50% of funds is allocated for projects in New York City and 50% in upstate.
2. We advocated for passage of the Home Stability Support Act to keep people in their homes who find they cannot keep up with rising rents. We also supported the Bring it Home Campaign to increase funding for woefully underfunded supportive housing communities which serve the psychiatrically disabled.
3. We are one of a variety of co-sponsors with the Labor-Religion Coalition which is coordinating the New Poor People's Campaign in New York. The Campaign is a national movement, led by The Reverend Dr. William Barber, which is now working in over 35 states.
4. We led 8 seminars on Doing Social justice in Politically Diverse Communities. The seminars, designed to help us work on justice issues with people in our congregations with different political perspectives, were held in Potsdam, Stony Brook, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Auburn, Little Falls, and Buffalo. More seminars will be scheduled in 2018 through out the state.
5. Moving towards a clean energy economy we have supported the Governor in efforts to divest of Fossil fuel stocks from state pension funds. We also support the Climate and Community Restoration Act and accompanying Polluter's Tax to pay for clean energy infrastructure, restoration of social justice communities which are disproportionately affected by environmental hazards and to provide a path for workers moving from fossil fuel based jobs to clean energy jobs.
6. We worked with many partners to prevent the repeal and replacement of the Affordable Care Act and to stop passage of the Federal Tax law which we believe will have a very adverse economic affect on the poor and middle class, property and small business owners across New York. The new law, in our view, will place an unacceptable strain of the state and Federal budgets and also cause significant increases in health insurance premiums. We are seeking now to support efforts to recapture some of the tax benefit which flowed to the extremely rich to restore cuts to the social safety net.
7. We support efforts of our denominational partners to address discrimination against immigrants, people of color, and those of other faiths.

The Council wishes to thank our denominational partners for their financial assistance, along with churches, individuals, labor unions and other organizations who have offered grants and contributions. We continue to need financial support to sustain our ministries.

In faith,

Peter Cook
Executive Director