

Justice & Witness Mission Team 2015

The mission of the PSEC Justice and Witness Mission Team is to provide leadership and resources to support individual congregations in their justice ministries. The team is open to all volunteers – laity and clergy – who share a passion for social justice and peace issues.

In 2015 the committee consisted of the following members: Rev. Kathryn Aikins, Ms. Chanel Alexander, Rev. Dr. Bernice Baxter, Mr. Olav Danielson, Rev. Katherine Elinor Davidheiser, Rev. William E. Garrett, Mr. Daniel Theodore Harris, Rev. Cean James, Rev. Leslie Kearney, Rev. Kim Kendrick, Rev. Melanie J. Lawrence-Caldwell, Rev. Edward Lee Grant Livingston, Rev. Dwayne A. Mosier, Rev. Dr. Stephen Ohnsman, Rev. David T. Reppert, Ms. Sharell Shippen, Rev. Jennifer A. Smith, Mr. Marion Smith, Rev. John S. Steitz, Ms. Elizabeth F. Walker, Ms. Susan Wargo, Rev. Trent S. Williams, and Rev. Stephanie L. Wooten. The Justice & Witness Mission Team met on: 2/2, 3/2, 4/21, 7/14, 8/29, and 9/26/2015. It was decided that monthly conference calls would be more time effective, so conference calls were held 10/6, 11/3, 12/1/2015, and into 2016 on the first Tuesday of every month.

The 30th General Synod of the UCC was held in Cleveland, Ohio from June 26 - 30, 2015. At that national meeting the Penn Southeast Conference co-sponsored a resolution entitled: “Dismantling Discriminatory Systems of Mass Incarceration in the United States.” The PSEC Justice & Witness mission team was tasked with implementing this resolution through 2017. The primary resolution objectives are:

- 1.) Maintain current state and county prison data within their boundaries;
- 2.) Pressure local lawmakers to endorse public policies that promote government accountability for prison management and justice system reform, oppose the sale of prison beds, and implementation of restorative justice programs.
- 3.) Renew efforts to engage in Sacred Conversations on Race specifically addressing the crisis of mass incarceration due to racist and classist practices.
- 4.) Encourage local congregations to create safe and sacred spaces where formerly incarcerated persons can gather to identify and support their re-entry into the community;
- 5.) Encourage local congregations to institutionalize literacy centers and mentoring programs specifically to meet the needs of children, youth, and their parents.

In 2015 the Justice & Witness Mission Team began its Sacred Conversations on Race by reading Michelle Alexander’s book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. The mission team worked tirelessly to plan a workshop on May 14, 2016 with speaker Rev. John Dorhauer, entitled *Seeing the Unjust Structures of Racism*. Additionally, the mission team organized a 2016 PSEC Spring Meeting workshop on White Privilege with Rev. Robin Hynica. The Justice & Witness Mission Team began to investigate prison statistics in southeastern Pennsylvania, and plans on providing leadership to local congregations who wish to be safe spaces for returning citizens or literacy centers for youth.

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Leslie Kearney
Chair, PSEC Justice & Witness Mission Team