

Council Hosts First Ever Shalom Conference

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Thanks!

The Pennsylvania Council of Churches

is the statewide ecumenical presence in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Formed by 42 church bodies and agencies representing 20 Anabaptist, Anglican, Orthodox, Pentecostal, and Protestant communions (denominations), the Council works for Christian unity for the sake of the world. [John 17:23]

Peacemaking and advocacy work can be lonely work.

The Pennsylvania Council of Churches is hosting its first ever **"Shalom Conference"** on September 24-25 at the Hartman Center (a UCC camp, conference, and retreat facility) in Milroy, PA. The Council's goal is to launch a statewide network of peacemakers that will promote communication and sharing to make peacemaking less lonely.

Our theme, **"Creating a Culture of Peace,"** focuses on shalom—

a holistic sense of peace that seeks wholeness and wellness for all of creation. This broad understanding of peace suggests that a broad representation of organizations and individuals is necessary to ensure that our vision for peace is more than the absence of war. Organizations and peacemakers that focus on a range of issues, including, but not limited to, domestic violence,

systemic racism, drone warfare, environmental justice, torture, gun violence, and interfaith understanding, will all be invited to participate in this exciting conference. The conference will consist of panel discussions, large group gatherings, two engaging speakers and numerous opportunities for people to network with one another.

Please join us and hear from two prophetic voices in the peacemaking community:

Saturday evening: **Shane**

Claiborne is a Christian activist, author, speaker and a founding member of the Simple Way

Community in Philadelphia. Among his many books are *The Irresistible Revolution*, *Jesus for President*, and his most recent book (released in June 2016) *Executing Grace*. His message of peace is one that he spreads well to audiences all across the world. We are excited to have Shane joining us!

Sunday afternoon: Saadia Ahmad, is a



current McCormack Scholar and Master's student in Conflict Resolution at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. She is especially interested in addressing religious conflict and interfaith dialogue. Her writings have appeared in the Boston Globe, Huffington Post and other media outlets. Saadia's message of the need for community in interfaith peacemaking is timely and much needed.

As noted, it is our hope that this conference will launch a statewide network of peacemakers that serves as a resource and inspiration for all organizations and individuals who engage in peacemaking work in Pennsylvania and beyond. We are stronger when we work together!

Please join us at the Hartman Center on September 24-25. Register now

at www.pachurches.org!



Building a Healing Communities Network for Pennsylvania— Creating Stations of Hope for Returning Citizens and Their Families

Dr. Aurelie Hagstrom (Providence College, RI) describes hospitality as “fundamentally an expression of and witness to God’s grace, since all of us are guests of God’s hospitality and are called to embody that hospitality to others in word and deed.”

Hospitality forms the basis for the vision of **Healing Communities**: Building relationships of healing, redemption and reconciliation in families and communities impacted by crime and mass incarceration.

Healing Communities is a framework for a distinct form of ministry for men and women returning from or at risk of incarceration, their families and the larger community. Healing

Communities challenges congregations to become Stations of Hope for those persons affected by the criminal justice system.

What does Healing Communities do? It trains communities of faith (all traditions) to: (1) walk with returning citizens (connect returning citizens to resources that will help set attainable goals); (2) help them connect with their faith (provide spiritual support); (3) open their hearts to them (foster positive relationships); (4) embrace them (extend open and affirming fellowship); (5) provide under-



standing (collaboration with family and friends to rebuild relationships); and (6) advocate for political change on a local, state,

and federal level. Healing Communities also provides ongoing support and technical assistance to faith

communities to help them in this work.

The Pennsylvania Council of Churches is seeking to build a statewide network of congregations to serve as Stations of Hope. The Council plans to: document congregations that

are already engaged in this work; work with local organizations and congregations to build a Healing Communities presence in every corner of Pennsylvania by providing training and technical support; engage Healing Communities congregations in a network in order to share resources, information, and ideas; provide ongoing learning and growth opportunities; and build a database of welcoming congregations available to returning citizens and their families.

To learn more about Healing Communities, or if you are interested in becoming a Station of Hope, please contact Sandy Strauss at s.strauss@pachurches.org or at 717-545-4761.

Meet John-Michael Cotignola-Pickens--Intern/Volunteer

John-Michael began working with the Pennsylvania Council of Churches as a Field Education student from Lancaster Theological Seminary in January 2016. He graduated in May ('16) with a Master of Divinity degree, but has agreed to stay with the Council as a volunteer. John-Michael has been spending his time developing the first ever Shalom Conference, which is a conference for Pennsylvania individuals and peacemaking organizations. The conference is designed to help organizations develop relationships with each other with the goal of creating a statewide network of peacemakers. This network will act as a resource for the orga-

nizations that are involved. John-Michael has also been involved in developing interfaith “bridge-building” programs for Central PA Christians and Muslims.

John-Michael originally hails from Grayson, Kentucky, but now lives with his wife, Heather, and his two dogs, Rachel and Quinn, in Harrisburg. He graduated from Messiah College with a degree in Theology and Peace and Conflict Studies. His passion for peacemaking developed out of his time at Messiah, and that passion inspired him to do a year of voluntary service with Brethren Volunteer Service (B.V.S.). He served as the Peace

Retreat Coordinator for the Brethren non-profit, On Earth Peace. John-Michael organized and led retreats that emphasized themes that focused on peacemaking and social justice. He also worked in the human services field for about three years before serving in his current role as the Coordinator for Youth Ministry at Mechanicsburg Church of the Brethren. His three years in human services found him serving individuals who had dual diagnoses (mental illness and addiction),

intellectual disabilities, and developmental disabilities.

John-Michael’s Anabaptist roots have driven him to be passionate about peacemaking and peace education. He strives to be a voice for the oppressed and to advocate for vulnerable members of our society who often times dwell on the margins. He is a member of the Mechanicsburg Church of the Brethren. He is excited about his work on the Shalom Conference and hopes to learn more about the Council’s involvement in advocacy work.



Lord, Open Our Eyes: Breaking the Chains of Mass Incarceration Draws Clergy and Laypersons from Across Pennsylvania

Last October, over 100 persons came to Harrisburg to explore our system of mass incarceration together at **Lord, Open Our Eyes: Breaking the Chains of Mass Incarceration**. Presenters included criminal justice experts, advocates, returning citizens, and representatives of organizations that serve them, among others.

Keynote speaker Glenn Martin, Founder and President of JustLeadershipUSA, ignited the group on the first night as he spoke about his own experience of incarceration, and the path that led him to his founding an organization dedicated to reducing incarceration by half by 2030. Dr. Harold Dean Trulear, President of Healing Communities USA and professor at the Howard University School of Divinity, helped attendees

to understand the theological underpinnings for the faith community's interest in criminal justice and its call to advocate for reform. Five Muallim-ak, a human rights advocate, founder of the Incarcerated Nation Corporation, and someone who spent 17 years in solitary confinement, presented a powerful and emotional view into what it is like to spend great lengths of time in isolation.

Panel sessions helped participants to learn more about conditions in prisons for many different populations, the effects of mass incarceration on communities, what communities and congregations are doing to support returning citizens and their families, and legislative and policy approaches for addressing criminal justice reform. Breakout sessions looked at the death penalty,

congregations and sex offenders, solitary confinement, and volunteering in prisons. A number of participants took the opportunity to spend time in the solitary cell replica to get a taste of the experience of those who are placed in isolation.

Those who attended the conference were engaged and involved, and sessions sparked many questions and conversations.

A smaller group traveled to the Capitol on Monday, October 26, following the conference, to engage in meetings with their elected officials about legislation aimed at expunging the

records of non-violent offenders, whose efforts to work, find housing, and access benefits are often hampered by their past records. The group also met with Senator Stewart Greenleaf, chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, to discuss how the faith community can work with legislators for effective change.



Glenn Martin
JustLeadershipUSA

The Council is striving to stay engaged with those who attended, and hopes to build a network within the faith community that will advocate to address legislation and policies needed to fix a broken system. If you are interested in working to reform our criminal justice system, contact s.strauss@pachurches.org.

Council Forms Future Task Group to Look at Vision, Mission, Steer the Council Forward

The Pennsylvania Council of Churches has recently entered into a process to reevaluate its mission and vision for the Council as it moves into the future. The Future Task Group met for the first time in early June 2016 to identify the steps for moving forward, as well as the variety of resources needed to make it happen. In addition to looking at vision and mission, the group will

review and evaluate such things as membership, constitution and bylaws, and board and governance structure.

Members of this group include: Rev. Dr. D. Michael Bennethum, executive associate of the bishop and director for evangelical mission the Northeast Pennsylvania Synod of the ELCA; Pastor Yvette Davis, Council Secretary and currently working in the private

sector; Most Rev. Craig J. N. de Paulo, Archbishop of the United States, Old Catholic Confederation; Rev. Dr. Warren Eshbach, retired Church of the Brethren executive and chair of the Council's Commission on Unity and Relationships; Rev. Dr. Frank Frischkorn, Regional Executive Pastor of the American Baptist Churches of Pennsylvania and Delaware; and Rev. Dr. Thomas Johnston, retired Synod executive, Synod of

the Trinity, PC(USA). This team is joined by Rev. Liz Bidgood Enders, current President of the Council, and the Council's executive staff (Janet Gulick, Interim Executive Director and Director of Finance and Facilities, and Rev. Sandra Strauss, Director of Advocacy and Ecumenical Outreach).

This group will continue to meet until its work is completed.



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