

April 30, 2009

Peace and Justice Support Network Reference Committee letter to Mennonite Church USA congregations

The mandate for the Peace and Justice Support Network is to strengthen Mennonite Church USA's commitment to peace and justice by equipping persons across the church called to this ministry and by encouraging the church to embody and communicate Christ's reconciling way.

The leadership team of PJSN gathered for our spring meeting in New Orleans from March 26-29, 2009. We were given a reality tour of the city, which highlighted the intensity of the destruction as well as the racism and classism inherent in the rebuilding efforts. We met and ate in local businesses that have social ministries rooted in the community, and identified the following concerns, observations and hopes in our world and in the life of our church.

We lament:

- The loss of lives and homes in New Orleans and the continual struggle against the powers that continue to internally displace families through systematic gentrification.
- That three and a half years after Hurricane Katrina, homelessness had doubled and recovery attempts are slowed by privatization and unbalanced priorities, creating a terrible gap between the rich and the poor that is justified and masked by redevelopment efforts.
- The greed and irresponsibility embedded in the national economic crisis that puts the greatest burden on those that have the least.

We look forward:

- To providing congregations with a reflection and discussion guide concerning the current economic crisis.
- To being a source of information, networking, and reflection at the national assembly in Columbus, OH, June 30-July 5, 2009.
- To supporting *And You Welcomed Me: A Consultation of the People of God on Immigration* conference in September 18-20, 2009 in Waxahachie, Texas.

We affirm:

- Pam Nath, *Listening and Discernment Worker*, MCC as she continues to educate, advocate, and work with the people of New Orleans.
- *Willie Mae's Scotch House*, *Café Reconcile* and *Fair Grinds* coffee shop in New Orleans, LA that have opened their doors to community groups and created business models that reflect an important part of the healing process for their neighborhoods.
- The ongoing work of Christian Peacemaker Teams as they continue their presence in Palestine, Colombia, and Iraq and discern ways to encourage sustainability and be supportive of the communities in which they work.
- The work of *Churches Supporting Churches* in New Orleans and the leaders of those congregations as they hold to their mission of "restarting, reopening, repairing, and rebuilding the churches and becoming agents of community change."
- Mennonite Disaster Service as their presence and work in New Orleans has made a positive impact.

challenge

We challenge:

- MC USA to, regardless of our diversity of conviction, engage in honest conversations regarding the inclusion of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender Mennonites in our communities of faith.
- MC USA to pay attention to racial and economic injustice in congregations' local neighborhoods related to the impact of housing policies that fail to provide for the most vulnerable populations including low wage workers, elderly, disabled, and immigrant populations.
- MC USA to partner with local congregations and grassroots organizations in New Orleans who advocate for those marginalized by the continuing unjust realities of life since hurricane Katrina.
- MC USA to support and appreciate the various practical and theological perspectives of womanists, white feminists, mujeristas, and Racial/Ethnic women as they reflect on faith, worship, and church ministry.

The Valley of Dry Bones

Ezekiel 37: 3-6

He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord God, you know." Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord."

As our group toured the ninth ward, the area most devastated by the levee breaks and flooding, we came to a church that had Ezekiel 37:3-6 handwritten on a sign that was posted on its door.