Winter 2017

Issues

A Newsletter of the Intercommunity Justice and Peace Center

Love of Justice, Love of Neighbor

IJPC is hosting a fundraiser on February 11th from 9:30 – 11:30 AM for IJPC's immigration program. The event will provide a space for newly trained YES (Youth Educating Society) members to share their story of immigration. The event will be held at St. Monica – St. George (328 W. McMillan).

Sharing personal narratives is a foundation of YES and these members will be able to practice the art of storytelling to a kind, supportive audience before sharing to an unknown group or elected official.

IJPC will provide a light breakfast and a chance to socialize and reenergize with friends and community members. Seating is limited so reserve your seat by emailing mel@IJPCcincinnati.org or call 513.579.8547.

For a profile on speakers, go to page 3 of this newsletter.

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A Time of Uncertainty: Death Penalty Updates

IJPC joined several other organizations for a January 12th press conference at the State Capitol voicing urging legislators regarding the death penalty, "Fix it or end it."

With the expiration of the moratorium on executions coinciding with the end of 2016, there has been a flurry of activity on both sides of the death penalty issue as the dates of the impending executions loom large.

The state of Ohio assigned dates for the executions of eight men in 2017, the first of which is for Ronald Phillips. He was set to be executed on January 12th, but on December 19th, Federal Magistrate Judge Merz issued a stay for him as well as for Raymond Tibetts and Gary Otte, whose execution dates were the 15th of February and March, respectively. The stay was put in place to allow the federal appeals court to hear testimony and announce a ruling on a challenge filed by Ronald Phillips and other death row inmates.

The challenge is two-fold addressing both the constitutionality of procuring lethal injection drugs from an anonymous source as well as a possible violation of the Eighth Amendment clause prohibiting cruel and unusual punishment. European companies will no longer sell lethal injection drugs to the United States based on objections to capital punishment, and the replacement "drug cocktail" has resulted in botched executions in which the inmates showed observable signs of pain and physical distress during the prolonged periods of time it took for them to die.

To date, the court has ruled that it is not unconstitutional to protect with anonymity the individuals and companies involved in developing, supplying or administering combinations of lethal drugs, but it has yet to reach a decision as to whether it constitutes cruel or unusual punishment. It very well may be that the new procedure is deemed the "new normal" and therefore not unusual, and would certainly be further challenged.

A plea for mercy and clemency

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A Letter from Allison Reynolds-Berry

Happy 2017! It's a new year and a new start. We began this New Year with a message of hope from Pope Francis on January first's annual World Day of Peace message calling for "Nonviolence-A Style of Politics for Peace." Pope Francis writes that we need to make "active nonviolence our way of life," in the Catholic Church's first ever statement on non-violence. I am holding on to that hope for nonviolence as the days since then have felt rather heavy.

Hate and violence have continued to appear in our community in very real ways. Students in Cincinnati schools have told their peers, "Go back to Mexico." IJPC had conversations with young people to explain the election results and reminded them that no one should be discriminated against because of their identity. "We've got your back," José told the students. Still, swastikas, racial slurs, intimidation, and vandalism are present. Hate has no place in our community and community members have made that clear in through protests, demonstrations, donations, and acts of love. People are looking for something to do. IJPC's Annual Gathering was held one week after Election Day. With 46 RSVP's on November 8th, we had an incredible 167 people in attendance the night of the event.

The day after the inauguration was marked with marches around the world in opposition to many of President Trump's stances, especially his disrespect and disregard of women's rights. What I witnessed was a new level of political action by people who have engaged for the first time or have been re-energized after many years. President Obama, in his farewell address, encouraged people to get involved, run for office, and said, "I am asking you to believe. Not in my ability to bring about change – but in yours."

We ask ourselves as we strategize for the future, what if "love trumping hate" isn't enough? What more can be done to address the many injustices present? We know that change doesn't occur just by digging into our pocketbooks, but also by digging in our heels and staying in the struggle when it gets hard. We know that oppressed peoples do not have an option to turn off the oppression. They're out on the front lines because their lives depend on it. And as we are interconnected, we all benefit or we all lose.

In these days when things feel heavy, the days are dark, and the political agenda is unknown, let us continue to gather together for the work ahead. We've been in the struggle for peace and justice for a long time (some of us for decades, others just getting started). Either way, we're ready. Ready with handmade signs in the struggle and in hope, putting our feet to the pavement. Ready to have the transformational conversations necessary to change our minds and hearts. Ready to learn. Ready to practice and promote the politics of nonviolence heeding Pope Francis' call. Ready to call elected officials now on speed dial. Ready to stand up for the oppressed. I'm in. I know each of you are with me. Join us.

Allie Reynolds-Berry

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was also entered on behalf of Ronald Phillips, requesting that his sentence be commuted to life without the possibility of parole - death in prison rather than by execution. The crime he committed was undeniably horrible. Ronald was nineteen at the time of the crime with a documented history of an abusive childhood himself, and the alternative sentence of life without the possibility of parole was not an option. He has been on death row since 1993. These reasons were not enough to persuade Governor Kasich to grant clemency stating that the abhorrent nature of the crime warranted following through with his sentence of death.

The previous congressional session ended with a disappointing failure to pass into law Senate Bill 162, known as the Serious Mental Illness Bill.

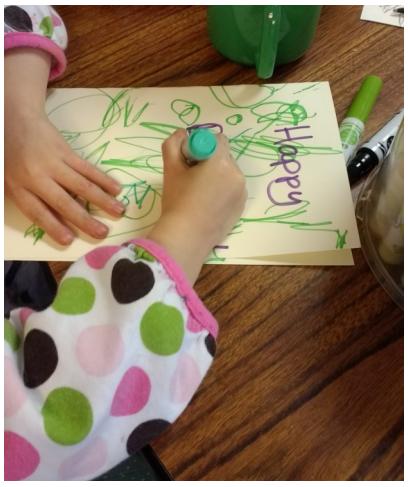
SB 162 was introduced by then Senator Bill Seitz and proposed to take the possibility of execution off the table for persons who had a diagnosed mental illness at the time of their crime. The five serious mental illnesses included have conditions that are characterized by psychotic episodes that render an individual incapable of distinguishing reality and acting reasonably and include schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder, bipolar disorder, major depressive disorder, and delusional disorder. The bill was passed with a 9 to 1 vote in the Criminal Justice Committee, and is confident to have passed on the general Senate floor as well. Senator Seitz is now Representative Seitz, and he is expected to introduce a new bill addressing this issue in the House promptly. This legislative session is also likely to have bills introduced to address wrongful convictions and cost effectiveness.

IJPC participated in a press conference organized by Ohioans To Stop Executions and held at the State House on January 12th, the date originally set for the execution of Ronald Phillips. Several members of the anti-death penalty coalition spoke urging the state not to resume executions without addressing the most grievous flaws that resulted in the appalling 93% failure rate for fair and equitable sentencing in Ohio's capital punishment system when studied by the American Bar Association in 2007. "Fix it or end it" was the cry of the day, and was carried into legislators' offices following the press conference.

On January 26, it was reported that Judge Merz granted a preliminary injunction, thus providing a temporary stay on upcoming executions. The state will likely appeal that stay as well as may look to using alternate forms of execution. For strategists, the belief is not "if" Ohio continues executions, but rather "when."

Abolitionists and reformers begin this new year and this new legislative session with much uncertainty and continued work to do. In the likely event that executions do resume, IJPC will hold prayer vigils for the victims of the crimes and their families as well as for the inmate being executed and his or her family. There will be a vigil the evening prior to an execution in Cincinnati and then on the day of at the Southern Ohio Correctional Facility in Lucasville where the executions are carried out. For information about how to attend either vigil, please email andrea@IJPCcincinnati.org.

Young Volunteers Color Their Compassion

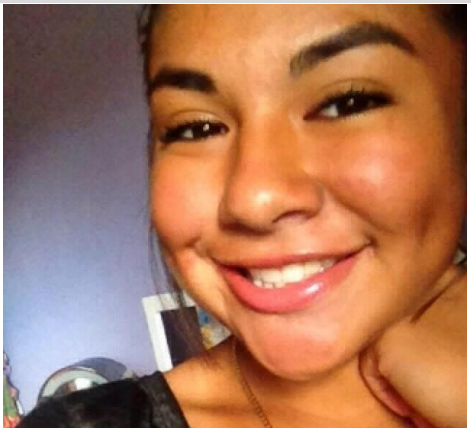


In mid-December, a group of volunteers came to help address Christmas cards and we had their youngest volunteers (aged 2 & 3) decorate birthday cards.

Communicating with death row inmates is one of the initiatives within our death penalty program. Contact Andrea (andrea@IJPCcincinnati.org) if you are interested in being a penpal or signing monthly birthday cards

Love of Justice, Love of Neighbor—Speaker Profiles

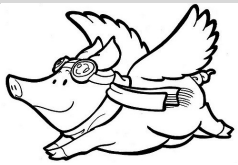
Esther Cabrera:
Esther Cabrera is the daughter of an undocumented single mother. Born in North Carolina, she is able to obtain many things that her mom and brother, José, cannot. While at the age of 15 José had to get a job at a mechanic shop that paid under the table, Esther was able to apply to her first job at T.J. Maxx without trouble. Esther is a junior at Roger Bacon High School and a YES Advisory Board member.



Mari Lopez:
Mari Lopez was born in San Luis Potosi, Mexico and is one of the roughly 750,000 DACAmented students. Today, she's a junior at Colerain High School and a YES member. As a young girl, Mari went to Cincinnati Interfaith Workers Center (CIWC) meetings with her parents who were members at the time. There, Mari learned the importance of organizing and standing up to what is justice for everyone, not a few.

Alex Nizigiyimana:
Alex Nizigiyimana was born in Tanzania but is from Burundi. Born in a refugee camp, Alex came to the U.S. at a young age. Today he attends the University of Cincinnati studying IT. His hard work and determination got him on the cover of his high school magazine to show other potential Cristo Rey High School students what they can achieve. Alex is a proud recent member of YES.

Team IJPC for Flying Pig



If your New Years' Resolution involved a little more self care in the form of exercise, consider joining Team IJPC for the Flying Pig. IJPC coordinates a team each year to run and raise money for our peace and justice work. Last year, Team IJPC raised $18,500!

If you would like to run with Team IJPC or would like to sponsor the team to cover the cost of shirts for team members, please contact mel@IJPCcincinnati.org.

IJPC Needs Your Help!

IJPC runs programming in four core issue areas with the work of four full time staff members, a part time Immigration Program Organizer and a team of interns each semester. While staff and volunteers are able to address overall projects and initiatives, we recognize there are areas where we could use additional skills. Video production and Salesforce help are a few of those areas. If you have other professional skills that you would like to contribute, email mel@IJPCcincinnati.org to talk more about how you can get involved.

Video Production: We are looking to create more videos in 2017. Whether it's archiving speakers at rallies or YES members' stories of immigration, we want to share our programming and our impact through video. We have a small camera, tripod & microphone but lack the skills to easily edit video and make a compelling professional video.

Salesforce: Our customer relationship management software is Salesforce and due to its complexity and individualization, we know we aren't using it to the best of its ability. Volunteer to act as a Salesforce mentor to help us clean up and make our development relations more efficient!

Civil Discourse — More Important Than Ever

On January 18th, 30 community members joined together to learn about the power and need for civil discourse in our society. IJPC ran a Dialogue Facilitator Training night featuring the dialogue process and providing an opportunity for people to practice what they learned.

The IJPC Dialogue Process is a structured form of addressing potentially difficult or emotional issues in a small group discussion with dialogue as the center of it – not conversation or debate. As Williams Isaacs states in his book, *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together*, "Dialogue, as I define it here, is about shared inquiry, a way of thinking and reflecting together." Dialogue emphasizes an intentionality of learning to understand another perspective through exchange of ideas rather than proving that one position is somehow better than another.

IJPC's Dialogue Program evolved from an experience former staff member, Kristen Barker, had in 2004 on Xavier University's campus following an exhibit on the human cost of war hosted by IJPC. Using inquiry and reflective listening, people with opposite views on war found that they were able to learn from each other through a facilitated process when previous attempts at discussion had disintegrated into arguments. In 2006, IJPC hosted their first dialogue to talk about the Iraq War with 150 people in attendance. Over the next 6 years, IJPC hosted small group dialogues in faith communities, civic groups, nonprofits, and college classes.

With the rhetoric of the 2016 election on everyone's minds as well as requests for partnerships growing more frequent, staff recognized the need to add more trained facilitators to our ranks to build capacity for this program. Over the course of 2.5 hours, volunteers learned about the process, practiced techniques, and learned from veteran facilitators. The feedback from the evaluations included that the process encouraged "instigating conversation rather than adversarial debate [and] is a novel and valuable exercise" and that "our world needs healing, and deep listening and dialogue will help that".

IJPC will be partnering with the YWCA and the Mercantile Library for a dialogue series to serve as a follow up from Ta-Nehisi Coates' recent presentation at Xavier University. Newly trained facilitators will use that night as a shadow opportunity.

If you are interested in bringing the dialogue process to your church, civic group, or classroom and would like to discuss with a staff member on how to do that, you can email Andrea (andrea@IJPCcincinnati.org) or call 513.579.8547.

We the People: united in diversity, pursuing peace and justice

On January 20, IJPC and other organizations organized an Inauguration Day event featuring a program where speakers addressed the question, "What is your vision for a just and peaceful America and how do we get there?" Over 50 community members came together in unity to watch the inauguration address and also had the chance to respond to the prompt with a collaborative art project. Prompted into motion by the remarks of lead organizer of Contact Center Lynn Williams, attendees also had the chance to advocate for the Affordable Care Act.

Attendees had a chance to also respond to the prompt of "What is your vision for a just and peaceful America and how do we get there" after hearing speakers and pre-screening of the inaugural address.

For a more in-depth article, visit our blog at **IJPCcincinnati.org/news**

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IJPC helps organize Coalition for Immigrant Dignity

In early December, IJPC, along with the Cincinnati Interfaith Workers Center, hosted a meeting with 40 organizations and groups in Greater Cincinnati to ask if there was a need for an immigration coalition. The overwhelming consensus was yes, there is a need. Organizers took the next step to hold a public meeting to hear/identify issues by immigrants and community members to set up its priorities for future work.

At a public meeting held on Sunday 1/8, five critical concerns were raised in many small groups:

1. Deportations, detention, and separation of families;
2. Risks for those currently covered under Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA);
3. School bullying;
4. Know your rights training for immigrants,
5. 5. Advocacy with elected officials.

Additionally, collaborating with the Coalition for Immigrant Dignity is the Sanctuary Coalition whose focus on creating sanctuary congregations as a safe place to go for immigrants if needed.

The Coalition for Immigrant Dignity organizers are still looking for immigrants to take the lead on our next steps as we solidify the structure and the request for commitments of member organizations. If interested in being involved with the Coalition for Immigrant Dignity, email allison@IJPCcincinnati.org

A photo from December's gathering of 40 organizations and groups.
Photo credit: Charleston C. K. Wang