



New York State COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

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REPORT FOR NYYM 2016

After serving the Council with care and distinction, The Reverend Dr. Paula Gravelle retired as Executive Director in August 2015 and moved to Tennessee. In January, Rev. Peter Cook began duties as the full time Executive Director. Peter previously served as a local church pastor in the United Church of Christ for 25 years.

Since 1889 the New York State Council of Churches (NYSCC) has enabled Protestant denominations across the state to offer a distinct voice in the public square and in some of the most forgotten places of our society. The eight founding bodies of the NYSCC (American Baptist Churches, The Episcopal Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, The Presbyterian Church (USA), New York Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, The Reformed Church in America, The United Church of Christ, and the United Methodist) as well as The Empire Baptist Missionary Convention (a member denomination), work together in areas of public policy, state institutional chaplaincy, education, worship, and witness.

The work of the NYS Council of Churches over the past years has covered the following areas:

ADVOCACY

- Participated in Moral Mondays at the State Capital to support a just and moral budget for the people of New York State.
- Participated in Ecumenical Advocacy Days in Washington, DC with a focus on calling on Congress to pass the Voting Rights Restoration Act and to oppose the Transpacific Partnership.
- In partnership with Faith for a Fair New York, sponsored a two-day teach-in in which participants looked at economic and social justice issues and had the opportunity to network with others from across the state as we prepared to advocate for just laws for the 2016 legislative session. The next teach in will be held September 25 to 27 at the United Methodist Church in Liverpool, NY.
- We have worked with our partners to systematically advocate for a living wage of \$15 for all New Yorkers. The Council felt this was an unprecedented opportunity for us to work together to lift over 2 million workers out of poverty.
- Adopted a statement in support of campaign finance reform including the repeal of Citizens United. We have participated in the Demand for Democracy coalition to advocate for ethics reform.
- Actively opposed legislation to legalize Fantasy Sports and I-Poker in New York in conjunction with the Coalition Against Gambling in New York.
- Advocated for changes in our prison system including raising the age for criminal responsibility to 18. New York is one of only two states which still prosecutes 16 and 17 year olds as adults.

CHAPLAINCY

- Continued certifying chaplains for ministry in our state institutions.
- In partnership with our chaplains, the Council organized a 3-day retreat for chaplains doing ministry in state and county prisons. A goal is to expand this retreat to include chaplains in any institutional ministry throughout the state.
- Visited chaplains in 14 facilities to date and preached at services in several prisons including the Good Friday service at Albion Correctional Facility.

EDUCATION AND WORSHIP

- Coordinated a Youth Leadership Forum at the United Nations for 25 Senior High Youth from across the state. They studied Christianity and race relations.
- Increased effective communication through improved use of social media. We are in the process of revamping our website: www.nyscoc.org and made it possible for people to donate online. We invite you to “like” us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter.

ECUMENICISM

- On May 12, we held our first annual awards luncheon and fundraiser at First Lutheran Church in Albany.
- Met with leaders of State Councils of Churches from across the United States to share best practices and better understand the obstacles and opportunities for people of faith desiring to have a voice in public policy – who yearn to do justice as part of their Christian Calling.
- We seek to be a resource for denominations and councils of churches to help them work ecumenically.

We give thanks for the financial support we receive from NYYM and encourage all to give generously. We will continue to reach out to invite Christians throughout the state to join us in the work we are called to do as the body of Christ in this time and this place. If you would like to be in touch with the Council and how we can be supportive, please contact Peter Cook at 508-380-8289 or Pcook@nyscoc.org.