

Report by the Social Justice Commission Diocesan Convention, October 2018

When [Jesus] came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,

to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’

--Luke 4:16-21

Since our last Diocesan Convention, the Social Justice Commission has been discerning our particular call to proclaim and enact the Good News of Jesus in the world. We have been focusing on three areas: Creation care; gun violence; and immigration. Members of our Commission participated in the two anti-gun violence rallies that were held at the headquarters of Smith and Wesson in Springfield. Our members joined the March for Our Lives through the streets of Northampton. We also supported South Church in Springfield when its non-profit status was threatened after it offered sanctuary to an undocumented woman from Peru; Commission members went in person to South Church to stand in solidarity when inspectors came at the request of the Mayor. Some Commission members also took part in a class to prepare us to accompany people to court. One of our members also joined other clergy in assembling at Cooley Dickinson Hospital to help protect undocumented immigrant Lucio Perez during his trip from hospital back to First Church, Amherst. We also met with counterparts from the Eastern Massachusetts Diocese and hope to collaborate more especially with Episcopal Church Mission.

The Commission continues to be active in advocacy efforts, especially around Creation care. During the past year, the Commission signed a letter urging the passage of strong environmental justice legislation in Massachusetts; wrote and sent a letter to Springfield’s Mayor Sarno, urging him to hire a full-time Sustainability Coordinator; signed a letter from Environment Massachusetts, addressed to leadership of the State House in Massachusetts, urging passage of a strong clean energy bill to put Massachusetts on a path to 100% clean energy; co-sponsored a forum in Northampton, organized by Columbia Gas Resistance Campaign (CGRC), to stop expansion of local pipelines, and signed a letter from CGRC regarding the pipeline explosions in Andover, North Andover, and Lawrence.

We have devoted much prayer and thought to the question of how to engage our top-tier issues in a sustainable way that invites as much participation as possible from people throughout the Diocese. We are now in the process of recruiting people from each of the diocese’s three corridors who are passionate about one of our three priority issues. These volunteer leaders – whom we’re calling Bishop’s Connectors – will help to gather and organize other supporters, spread the word when there are time-sensitive actions to take, and otherwise network with partners (both faith-based and otherwise). A first group of Connectors will receive a blessing from the Presiding Bishop at the Worcester Revival; Bishop Doug Fisher will bless the next group of Connectors at our diocesan convention.

If you feel God nudging you to become active in one of these areas, please feel free to contact a member of the Commission or any of the Connectors, whose names will be listed on the diocesan Website.

Acknowledging that all our efforts must be grounded and centered in Christ, we are also in the beginning stages of planning a retreat that will offer the spiritual tools for our work together.

We ask your continuing prayers for our discernment and for all those who suffer injustice.

2018 Members:

The Rev. Marissa Egerstrom (Co-Chair) '20

Ms. Leah Gregg (Co-chair) '18

The Rev. Dr. Margaret Bullitt-Jonas ex-officio

The Rev. Julie Butcher '20

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Douglas J. Fisher ex-officio

The Rev. Lauren Holm ex-officio

The Rev. Victoria Ix ex-officio

The Rev. Erik Karas '20

Ms. Alexizendria Link '18

The Rev. Linda Taupier '20

The Rev. Jane Tillman '19