

Representing PET's Peacemaking Committee and Serve Mission Team, I attended this year's 2015 Ecumenical Advocacy Days in Washington, April 18-20.

A record-breaking crowd of 1,000 Protestant, Roman Catholic, and members of other denominations overflowed the hotel, joining in vital non-sectarian worship and song, informative workshops, and presentations about the many challenges to God-willed, human peace, justice, and freedom in both the U.S. and the world.

This year's theme was "Breaking the Chains: Mass Incarceration and Systems of Exploitation." We gasped at the statistics--e.g., the U.S., with just over 4% of the world's population, imprisons nearly 25% of all earth's inmates, at an annual cost to our taxpayers of \$29,000 per prisoner!

We learned that the well-intentioned, popular but misguided "War on Drugs," with mandatory, long sentences for mere possession, especially for under-defended Black and Latino accused, has packed our prisons to 36% over capacity, creating dangers for both inmates and staff.

We were appalled that the U.S. has the largest detention infrastructure for undocumented immigrants in the world--with adults fleeing grave poverty and danger and seeking good jobs--and with even infants and children--being packed into a paid-beforehand, daily expected quota of 34,000 beds.

Best of all, moving sermons, scripture-reading, and speeches anchored firmly our Christian social witness in the proclamations of the Old Testament prophets and of Christ (e.g., "I was in prison and you visited me," Matt. 25:36).

On Monday, with clergy and lay representatives from Mid-South and Middle Tennessee presbyteries, and those of our instate, sister Evangelical Lutheran, United Methodist, Episcopal, and Cooperative Baptist delegates, we visited offices of our senators and representatives on Capitol Hill.

With special warmth, young staff of Sen. Lamar Alexander received us in his office adorned with East Tennessee icons (e.g., dulcimers, banjos, fiddles). As we advocated passage of the Smarter Sentencing Act, Justice Safety Valve Act, and comprehensive immigration reform, I reminded them of the senator's upbringing in New Providence Church, his present

membership in Nashville's Westminster, and his solemn vows, kneeling at his ordination as ruling elder.

At each office of a senator or congressperson we anchored our advocacy with biblical citations, closing with prayer.

Relaxing later in the Capitol Hill office of the PC(USA) Office of Public Witness, I was impressed at how Director J. Herbert Nelson also grounds solidly Christian social witness in prayer and specific biblical teachings. Raised in Low Country SC, descendant of slave Presbyterians, Nelson exemplifies how the liberating message of the gospel, even proclaimed by slaveholder evangelists themselves, still came through loudly. (I quoted to him my fellow Mississippian, the late Walker Percy, "You beat him with Jesus, but in the end he out-Jesused you!")

Nelson and I talked at length about the inadequacy of reform movements based on "political correctness" or "white guilt" alone. For they quickly run out of steam, unless so anchored in the good news of Christ. By no means is this the church "meddling in politics" but, instead, the biblical, classical Reformed approach dating back to Calvin.

In 1999 Nelson founded Liberation Presbyterian, the first African-American PC(USA) congregation in Memphis in 46 years.

Dwyn Mounger