

Justice and Advocacy Committee holds retreat

In the quiet beauty of the Camp Caraway Retreat and Conference Center in Sophia, NC, members of the synod's newly-revitalized Justice and Advocacy Committee came together on April 24-25.

The overnight retreat gave the group sacred time to study together, develop a meaningful mission statement, and outline plans to support ministries of social justice and advocacy at both the congregational and synod level. Committee members (confirmed or pending Council approval) include: the Rev. Cuttino Alexander, Ms. Beth Blackwood, Mr. Michael Dickson, Ms. Laura Foust, Ms. Ginny Hultquist, Diaconal Minister Deb Johnson, Diaconal Minister Candidate GeoRene Jones, Mr. Jim Killacky, the Rev. Nancy Kraft, Ms. Brenda Linales, the Rev. David Sloop, and Ms. Linda Warren. Pastor Sloop serves as convener and Sandra Cline as synod staff contact.



Bishop Timothy M. Smith recognized the need to revitalize efforts for social action ministries almost immediately after his election to office. When he brought to Synod Council the need to re-visit its former advocacy efforts, council agreed and approved creation of a standing Committee for Justice and Advocacy. Formation of the group began with a February meeting to which Bishop Smith invited a group of clergy and lay persons whom he knew to have specific concern for the work of the Church in society.

The April retreat began on Sunday evening with prayer and a time of devotion led by Bishop Smith. The group worked late into Sunday night defining the committee's scope and mission and discussing concepts from their pre-retreat common-reading, *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help, And How to Reverse It*, by Robert Lupton.

Refreshed by sleep and a nourishing breakfast, Monday morning was spent with Rabbi Judith Schindler, Senior Rabbi of the Congregation Temple Beth El (Charlotte). A well-respected member of the multi-faith social justice community in North Carolina, Rabbi Schindler serves as Executive Director of the Greenspon Center for Peace and Social Justice at Queens University, Charlotte, where she is also an associate professor. "Rabbi Judy" shared several models for congregation-based advocacy and offered practical advice for clergy desiring to inspire member participation in social action. "Remember," Schindler encouraged, "prophetic preaching must include both critique (of the issue) as well as hope, the word of consolation."

Members spent the rest of their time in review and discussion of the House Bill 2 (HB2) legislation recently signed into law in North Carolina. Comparing the actual text of the law to the Gospel witness, the life and ministry of Jesus, and to existing ELCA Social Statements, a formal resolution was crafted. The resolution has been placed on the synod assembly agenda by the Reference and Counsel Committee for consideration by the assembly, June 3-4.

If approved, Bishop Smith will make the resolution public as the official response from the NC Synod to HB2. The Justice and Advocacy Committee hopes the resolution will also provide guidance and encouragement to congregations and leaders as they deal with the issue in the context of their communities. [Full text of the proposed resolution](#) is available on the synod's [Assembly Resolutions & Memorials](#) webpage.

The committee's next meeting is set for August 4, at the synod office in Salisbury.

Reported by GeoRene Jones