



Issues

A Newsletter of the Intercommunity Justice and Peace Center

Virtual Reality is Rough Enough

IJPC’s mission is founded upon a belief that education is the key to systemic change. Once people are awakened to the reality of a situation or an issue, they are equipped with the knowledge they need to make informed decisions, rendering them capable of challenging injustice. When masses of people join forces in advocacy efforts, real and systemic change is possible.

This principle is the motivation behind the Critical Issues in the Criminal Justice System project

funded by the SC Ministry Foundation and in collaboration with Catholic Mobilizing Network (CMN), a national organization with the objective of abolishing the death penalty in the US. This project reflected months of collaboration between CMN and IJPC and the final result was a “college/university tour”.

The exhibit includes a nine minute virtual reality experience of being in a solitary confinement cell, a gallery of personal experiences of individuals who either

were or still are in solitary confinement, information about solitary confinement, the state of the death penalty in Ohio, and principals of restorative justice

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Students use the virtual reality equipment to learn about solitary confinement.

Rally Across the River

On September 18, community members joined together at Holy Trinity Junior High School parking lot in Newport, Kentucky. Activists marched for specific reasons – for comprehensive immigration reform, to support immigrants’ rights, to hear the stories of immigrants, to protest the separation of families and the detention of mothers and children, and to welcome immigrants. These reasons

provided the reason of the rally as organizers planned for months.

The rally began with a welcoming by Sr. Dorothy Schuette and Sr. Juana Mendez, songs by Cristo Rey Parish choir, and readings. Then, Ana Lopez told her story of coming to the U.S. from Guatemala. Anel Garcia also shared her immigration story from Mexico to the US at age 13.

The 100 attendees then walked to the Peace Bell chanting “¡E!

Pueblo Unido Jamás Será Vencido! The People United Will Never Be Defeated!” Once at the Peace Bell, attendees continued singing together and Heyra Avila’s, YES Advisory Board member shared her immigration story.

The theme of the march: “Journeying together for Comprehensive and Compassionate Immigration Reform” rang true as community members journeyed together. Thanks to IJPC’s Northern Kentucky Justice and Peace Committee for coordinating this event.

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Approximately 100 people participated in the immigration rally in Northern KY in September

A Letter from Board Chair Sister Louise Lears, SC



“What gives you hope?” A friend posed this question to me recently and I have been pondering my response ever since. To be hopeful in a time of climate change, racism and militarization can feel naïve. To be hopeful during the chaotic and disillusioning political campaign in our country can feel downright foolish. Yet we can afford to be despairing. Dorothy Day captures this succinctly, “No one has a right to sit down and feel hopeless. There is too much work to do.”

The work of IJPC gives me hope. The truth is this: we don’t know if we can abolish human trafficking, end the death penalty, reform immigration and make nonviolence a way of life. Our goals are lofty because the problems are significant. A hope-filled stance helps us to be faithful to the IJPC vision of a just society and to do more than we thought possible. As historian and activist Howard Zinn said of hope, “If we remember those times and places where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction.”*

Collaboration with our sponsors and community partners gives me hope. By combining our efforts, we maximize the work for justice and produce exponentially more ripples than we could alone. Together, we can change unjust local, national and global systems.

Finally, the potential for our Annual Gathering on Tuesday, Nov. 15 gives me hope. During that evening, just one week after the election, we will address the implications of the election results for the social justice agenda. We hope you will join us in mapping the agenda!

*Howard Zinn, *A Power Governments Cannot Suppress*, p. 270.

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Phoneathon Update

Thanks to the more than 100 donors who have supported us in our annual Phoneathon Campaign. At the time of publication, we are at 56% of our \$18,000 goal. Funds brought in during this annual campaign allow us to continue our important advocacy and education work.

If you have not sent in your gift, you can do so online at <http://ijpcincinnati.org/phoneathon/> or by mailing a check to the address listed below.

Events

- 11.10— Free Human Trafficking Training in Columbus (for more info, contact andrea@IJPCcincinnati.org)
- 11.10 – YES Member Meeting
- 11.15 – Annual Gathering
- 11.17— Rethinking Racism
- 12.1 – YES Member Meeting

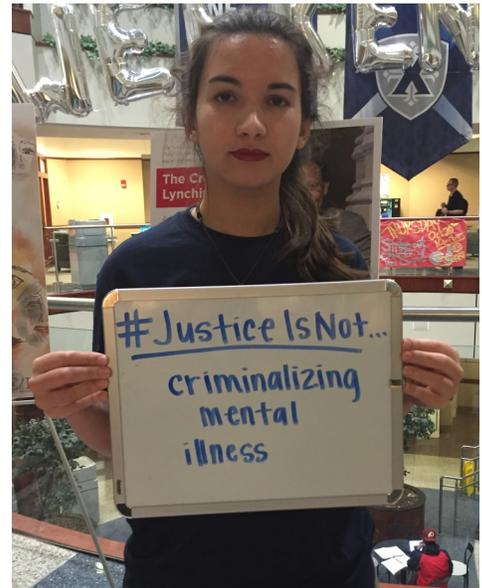
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as an alternative to our current system. Particular focus is aimed at the lack of response to the Task Force Recommendations made after the American Bar Association's finding in 2007 that Ohio failed to meet basic standards of fairness and equity in 93% of the capital cases they reviewed. Participants were educated about a current piece of legislation (HB 162). HB162 proposes that individuals who commit a murder while carrying a diagnosis of a limited number of serious and delusional mental illnesses not be eligible for execution, while remaining accountable for their actions with a prison sentence.

After debriefing and processing the experience with participants, students were asked to act. Postcards advocating for change provided by Ohioans to Stop Executions (OTSE) and will be sent to the governor, state senators and representatives.

The tour began at Mount Saint

Joseph University on October 18 and 19, then proceeded to Xavier University on October 20 and 21. As word spread about the virtual reality experience, more students came by. By lunchtime on October 19, the Seton Center lobby was packed while people waited for their turn. The high quality technology and novelty drew the students in, but the subject matter was new and often disturbing information for them. Many were teary-eyed when they removed the headgear and made comments to the effect that they had no idea what prison was really like, or how torturous it is to be denied human contact or sensory stimulation. The connection was made through conversation about these conditions for death row inmates, often for decades before their execution. Through an experience that may have lasted 15 minutes during a lunch break or between classes, students gained a new understanding of the reality of our broken criminal justice system.



Fall 2016 Intern Hayley Huge shares her takeaway from Critical Issues in the Criminal Justice System

Over 220 students participated in the virtual reality experience over the week and 107 students took an action step.

For more information about the project, or to inquire about bringing the exhibit to your location, contact Andrea Koverman, SC at andrea@IJPCcincinnati.org.

IJPC Annual Gathering seeks to answer “What Now” regarding 2016 Elections

After a year and a half long “election cycle”, it will all be over soon. There is work to be done regardless of who wins on November 8, but each choice of who is elected has implications on the issues that IJPC focuses on. With the future in mind, IJPC is hosting the Annual Gathering on November 15th from 6:30–8 at St. John’s Unitarian Universalist Church (320 Resor) on this topic.

IJPC has convened a panel to address the big question “What Now? The Implications of the 2016 Election on a Social Justice Agenda.” Our speakers include Professor Howard Tolley, Commu-

nity Outreach and Engagement Coordinator, Christina Brown, and founder of Centro de Amistad, an office of the Diocese of Covington, Sister Juana Mendez, SC. The panel will be facilitated by Louise Lawarre. Audience members will be asked to listen and be engaged during a discussion as panelists reflect about what comes next.

“This election reflects an important time in our country—strong and often opposing viewpoints have been elevated by candidates and entered in the echo chamber of social media. We are interested in coming together and moving forward past the election

in order to elevate a social justice agenda regardless of who is holding office,” operations manager Mary Ellen (Mel) Huss, shares about the committee’s reasoning for the panel topic.

IJPC will also use this time to provide a brief update about the programming of the past year and invite the audience to attend upcoming events and meetings. Heavy appetizers will be provided so please RSVP to mel@IJPCcincinnati.org. For more information or to RSVP online, visit our website; <http://ijppcincinnati.org/annualgathering/>



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Contact: info@IJPCcincinnati.org to join our e-mail list to receive this newsletter online instead.

3rd Annual World Peace Festival is a Success!

A little rain couldn't ruin the fun. Despite weather forecasts, this year's World Peace Festival was a fun time for all thanks to a last minute venue change to Newport on the Levee.

This year's theme was *Peace is a Human Right*. Over 40 organizations staffed informational and activity booths in support of their commitment to a more peaceful world. Children also enjoyed face painting and other fun activities. The programming was especially crafted—bringing local artists to share music, dance, poetry, and art with a concerted effort to reflect countries who currently are not experience peace abroad.

It is estimated that between 350–400 people passed through

the festival throughout the day—a significant increase from last year likely due to Newport on the Levee's location and people attending other businesses and events on the Levee. Even though the peace festival did not end with the ringing of the Peace Bell, the planning committee rang a gong provided by the Cincinnati Symphony at the end of our day of celebration. The festival also opened and closed in a peacemaking circle to strengthen our bond as a community.

IJPC and Citizens for Global Solutions would like to thank everyone who came to this year's festival and to the many people who worked so hard to make this possible including our sponsors: Bel-

larmine Chapel, Buddhist Dharma Center of Cincinnati, Cincinnati Human Relationships Commission, Citizens for Global Solutions, Community Friends Meeting (Quakers), Congregation of Divine Providence, First Unitarian Church, Franciscans Network, Hindu Temple of Greater Cincinnati, Islamic Center of West Chester, Japanese American Citizens League, The Jewish Community Relations Council, Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, The Local Spiritual Assembly of Bahá'ís Cincinnati, Northern Kentucky Justice and Peace Committee, School of Metaphysics, Scioto Peace and Justice Fellowship of Reconciliation, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, St. John's Unitarian Universalist Church, and Veterans for Peace - Louisville Chapter