

## **December 19 - Last Call for Clemency Appeal, Build Back Better Disappointment, Ecumenical Advocacy Day on February 16 and Much More**

Tis the season of abundant grace where we celebrate how God overwhelms the gathering clouds of gloom, greed, bad politics, and closed doors at the Inn and proclaims, through the angels proclamation, peace on earth and good will to all. If you really want to embrace the true spirit of Christmas, then feed the hungry, comfort the afflicted, love the outcast, forgive the wrongdoer, and inspire the homeless.

### **CLEMENCY LETTER**

I am pleased to announce that 170 people from across the state have heeded the promises of God and signed a clemency appeal to Governor Hochul to immediately commute Mr. Reginald Randolph's sentence of 2-4 years prison for shoplifting cough syrup from a drug store. His commutation will allow him to enter directly into supportive housing and community treatment that are available to him now, as opposed to parole, his entering the shelter system and what would amount to continued over-punishment. *There is still time to join the 170 and sign the letter to Governor Hochul. You can [click here](#) to read and sign it by no later than midnight tonight.*

We hasten to stress that this letter is about much more than offering mercy to Mr. Randolph but really urging the Governor to dramatically increase the number of clemencies a Governor grants in a given year. Governor Cuomo, for instance, only granted 41 clemencies last year as COVID ravaged our jails and prisons. Governor Hochul has granted no clemencies to date. In her short time in office, the Governor has shown she understands the need for more proactive criminal justice reform particularly her signing of the Less is More bill. We hope she will build the record and grant abundant clemencies.

### **RECORDING OF AWARDS AND FUNDRAISING GALA**

We had a wonderful awards and fundraising gala on December 8 which was all recorded. If you missed it or would like to see the gala again please [click here](#). We are so blessed by the words and witness of our awardees and the generosity of our donors and sponsors as we further the prophetic work of the Council. As we near the end of the year, we continue to welcome donations to the New York State Council of Churches. You can contribute by mailing a gift to 85 Chestnut Street, Albany, New York 12210 or [click here to donate](#) on our webpage at [WWW.NYSCOC.org](http://WWW.NYSCOC.org).

### **BUILD BACK BETTER STALLED**

If you look at our overview of the Council's work in the gala video, you will note our historic commitment since the late 19th Century to work with congregations to move beyond charity to call on the government to do their unique part to pass laws and make structural economic changes which encourage the afflicted. We supported the formation of labor unions from the beginning and were primary advocates for the New Deal and the Great Society. Today, we fiercely support the passage of Build Back Better which we view as the singularly most effective legislation in a generation (if it is passed) to address poverty and move our country to a clean energy future.

We are very concerned that Senator Joe Manchin appears to have killed or dramatically weakened this legislation with his announcement on Fox News that he would vote no on the BBB in its current form. Senator Manchin cited his worry about inflation and the budget deficit. As has been well documented, these are extremely misguided objections. Inflation is not likely

affected one way or another by Build Back Better and, if anything, will give families tools to fight inflation in the cost of food, childcare, and health care. In addition, the deficit as a percentage of GDP is really not a concern. Besides if the worry was really about the deficit, we would not have passed a bloated 785 annual defense budget which works out to nearly 8 trillion over 10 years as opposed to BBB being around 2 trillion for the same time period. No one seemed too worried about the deficit when it came to fighting COVID or giving large tax breaks to the wealthiest.

We will have more to report about Build Back Better in the days ahead but it's time to get on the phone to express our disappointment to our elected officials and get organized. **In this spirit, we ask that you please hold the date on your calendars for February 16 when we will hold our annual Ecumenical Advocacy Day.**

### **RECORDING OF STATE STREET FORUM ON HOUSING**

In other news, we invite you to [view the recording](#) of the State Street Forum focused on Housing Justice. Ted Houghton, President of Gateway Housing, and Bishop R.C. Hugh Nelson, Senior Pastor of the Church of God in East Flatbush offered powerful policy analysis and spiritual reflection to inspire us to house the homeless and precariously housed.

The Bethlehem Town Board approved a waiver to the town's building moratorium to allow a 77-unit affordable housing development—Selkirk Reserve—to be considered by the Planning Board; The 4 to 1 vote by the Town Board was a huge victory after years of resistance to building affordable housing in Bethlehem (no room in the inn). The Planning Board still needs to review and approve the final plans which will require continued advocacy on the part of the faith community, but the largest hurdle has been crossed. I am grateful to Maria Markovics with Housing for All for working with us to make this victory happen. For a little context about this victory, check out [check out the December 12 sermon](#) by The Reverend Karen Pollan, Pastor at Delmar Presbyterian Church.

New York State Council of Churches was pleased to work with Kairos Prison Ministry to donate presents for children and youth who are detained in institutions. They are some of the most forgotten people this season and yet are particularly deserving of God's grace. Holiday gifts are one living symbol of that grace.

In faith,

Peter

Remember to frequently [visit our website](#) which is updated daily with new information and events

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