

TITLE: Juvenile Justice Month of Faith and Healing

RESOLVED: That the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania at its 231st Convention on November 15th of 2014 call upon its member congregations to recognize and observe the “Juvenile Justice Month of Faith and Healing” in March effective 2015.

EXPLANATION: Pennsylvania has more people incarcerated with the sentence of ‘life without parole’ since their youth than any other state or any country in the world. There is clear evidence that the treatment of youth in Pennsylvania’s Criminal Justice System is especially harsh against youth of color and/or low income.

Juvenile Justice Month of Faith and Healing is an annual event that unites people of all faiths across the country to raise awareness of individual, community, and social needs arising from the current juvenile justice system. The goal of Juvenile Justice Month of Faith and Healing is to offer young offenders hope and alternatives to a lifetime as a hardened criminal, while society implements more fully the principles of restorative justice.

The Supreme Court of the United States of America has recently decided that the mandatory sentencing of youth to ‘life without parole’ is unconstitutional (*Miller v. Alabama, Opinion by Judge Elena Kagan*). Pennsylvania has responded to this decision by making legal changes that have not been applied retroactively, thereby leaving nearly 500 people sentenced to die in prison though their sentencing is described by the Supreme Court as unconstitutional. **Suggestions for activities and resource materials will be provided in cooperation with the “Pennsylvania Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth” (PACFSY) and the Healing Justice Coalition.**

“I chose you to bring Justice, and I am here at your side to bring light and my promise of hope to the nation. You will give sight to the blind; you will set prisoners free from dark dungeons.” (Isaiah 42.6-7)

REFERENCES:

The Pennsylvania Coalition for the Fair Sentencing of Youth (PACFSY) is a group of individuals and organizations dedicated to ensuring a fair chance for all of Pennsylvania’s

children. The PA Coalition for the Fair Sentencing of Youth was formed in the fall of 2009 to organize individuals and organizations from across the state to work toward the abolition of life without parole sentences for juvenile offenders (JLWOP). JLWOP occurs when a child commits a crime below the age of eighteen and is sentenced to life in prison with no possibility of parole. Our coalition believes that this practice is ineffective, costly, and inhumane.

Healing Justice Coalition is a multi-racial, multi-ethnic, economically diverse coalition of faith based organizations that provide support for and advocate on behalf of children and families involved in child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

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