



Charleston Area Justice Ministry (CAJM)

March 2014 News

Get involved, get informed, act together!

Calendar of Events:

- **Rally** to prepare for Nehemiah Action Meeting (for all Clergy, Team Leaders and Network Members)
- Monday, April 7th 7 PM.
- St. Matthews Baptist Church (2005 Reynolds Ave), North Charleston
- **Nehemiah Action Assembly**
- **Tuesday, April 29th, 7 PM.**
- **McAlister Field House, The Citadel**
- **Everyone brings 3 people!**

Who are we? Since 2012, CAJM has been people of faith working together for justice in the Charleston Area.

We are a network of 20 faith-based congregations who have come together with one goal: to make Charleston a more just community for all. We are diverse religiously, economically, geographically and culturally and we powerfully come together to address community problems.

What has CAJM accomplished? April 29, 2013 at St. Matthews Missionary Baptist Church over 1,500 of CAJM's diverse members attended our first annual public action meeting. We

gained commitments from public officials to help establish proven practices that will ensure non-violent youth are kept out of jail and that all 4 year old children from Title I schools are ready to read.

To help us build power, please welcome our new Assistant Organizer, Kayla Gilchrist! Kayla is from Minnesota by way of California. She will support our work and help us grow our member congregations.

Last Year

We gained agreement from CCSD Superintendent Dr. McGinley, and subsequently the school board, to fund and implement 225 more preschool slots for Title I zoned children in 2013, and an additional 150 in 2014. We also gained agreements to implement a research-based curriculum in all preschool classes in the district, and to track the progress of these children through 3rd grade. From our local law enforcement, we gained the commitment to participate in a task force to reduce juvenile detention by 65%. The Crime and Violence Committee and The Education Committee continue to monitor that those commitments are fulfilled. We can report that because of our work, 280 slots have opened for four year olds and a scoring tool has been implemented by law enforcement to reduce the number of kids in jail.

This Year

This year, our members voted to work on education and how it pertained to unemployment. Through our research, we have learned some very sobering facts about the problem: 1) Our young adults (16-24 yrs) face an alarming unemployment rate of 25%. 2) African Americans in that age group face an even greater rate at almost 40%. 3) Over 7500 young adults want to work but are unable to secure employment. 4) Jobs are going unfilled because of a lack of skilled workers. 5) South Carolina loses over \$3 Million a year in taxes because of unemployment of young adults. Two consistent problems have surfaced for this age group.

Many do not have the basic skills needed for employment (Math, English, social behaviors and work norms.) and many do not have the skills needed for the jobs that are available.

Our young adults in Charleston County deserve the opportunity to secure employment and gain control of their futures.

This year we are focusing on school discipline. We have learned from our research that a very high percentage of youth arrests and incarcerations originate in schools. We are concerned that excessive use of school referrals, zero tolerance policies, the presence of SRO's and the complex Juvenile Justice System are producing double punishment for children that feeds the pipeline from school to prison. We are now conducting research among Educators with responsibilities for in school discipline

that are showing both very good results and very poor results, locally and nationally.

What's Next? We need YOU and three of your friends to attend our next Nehemiah Action Assembly at the Citadel's McAlister Field House on April 29th at 7 pm.

Please join us! Over 2250 CAJM members will be a strong voice for justice. Our numbers are our most powerful tool. We need your voice to persuade local public officials to enact the specific actions we will present. Each one of us makes a difference.

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