

# AFSC Midwest Digest

Some Highlights of Work from Around the Region — November 22, 2016

## Palestinian journalist on the crisis in Gaza

Palestinian journalist and author Mohammed Omer has been documenting the realities faced by people in Gaza for over a decade. Jennifer Bing of AFSC's Chicago Office is traveling with Mohammed on a speaking tour to raise awareness about the crisis in Gaza and challenge how US media portray the Middle East. Here's the [schedule](#) for upcoming dates in Indy, St. Louis and Chicago. Check out this [Facebook Live](#) interview from San Diego and [part 1](#) and [part 2](#) of Beth Hallowell's interview with Mohammed. Please join AFSC Chicago and partners for a [fundraiser](#) on December 1.



From left, Mohammed Omer joins AFSC staffers Jennifer Bing, Irit Reinheimer and Pedro Rios at the murals in San Diego.

## Cops, Coins and Communities Toolkit available

AFSC interns in Chicago, ably assisted by Debbie Southorn, have compiled this new [toolkit](#), which contains activities and supplemental materials for exploring the costs of policing in Chicago and what community safety can look like beyond the police. Also included are videos in which people talk about how they envision community and safety, along with their knowledge of Chicago's budget. For more about AFSC Chicago's coalition work against a recent meeting of the Illinois Tactical Officers Association, check out Debbie's [post](#) and these articles in [Truthout](#), [Medill](#) and the [Chicago Monitor](#).



## Dayton program lifts up voices of African immigrants

"Our community members have been living in Dayton for over ten years, and we also pay taxes and vote as a democratic right, but we have no voice!" said Joseph Ngoga, the vice chair of the Greater Dayton Coalition, at a recent [forum](#). Migwe Kimemia of AFSC also writes about his [presentation](#) on AFSC's Ohio Global Village Initiative to a recent [Changemakers](#) conference in Dayton. The Initiative aims to raise global awareness with a view to changing the "immigrant threat narrative" in U.S. public discourse.



Joseph Ngoga, Vice Chair of the Greater Dayton African Coalition, is seated at the center in the front row. (Photo: AFSC Southwest Ohio Office)

## Prisoner advocate lovingly remembered in Michigan

TJ Spytma, who served nearly 40 years in Michigan prisons and helped shape the advocacy work of AFSC's Criminal Justice Program there, died of cancer recently on his 58th birthday. Shortly after his release in 2014, he [addressed](#) the Midwest Regional Executive Committee in Ann Arbor and became an AFSC intern for a year. "He did a lot of good from behind bars, helping men work their cases as well as any lawyer out here," said Natalie Holbrook, who directs the program. "He was a tireless advocate, always working for racial and social justice. He will be deeply missed in our work and hearts here in Michigan." In other Michigan news, check out Demetrius Titus' blog [post](#) about AFSC's Good Neighbor Project.



TJ Spytma addresses the AFSC Midwest Executive Committee shortly after his release from prison.

### **Peer mediation work showing results in St. Louis**

Suspensions at one high school in St. Louis have been cut by two-thirds thanks to AFSC's support of a peer mediation program. In this [blog](#), Joshua Saleem of AFSC writes about the progress of halting the school-to-prison pipeline at Northwest Academy of Law. Says Northwest's principal, Valerie Carter-Thomas, "It is rare that you have an organization whose sole purpose is to teach people how to love each other. I think that's paramount in what you do." Joshua adds that AFSC staff and volunteers are working on a documentary on the school-to-prison pipeline. They'll also do presentations about how the pipeline works in St. Louis while building a base of people to push for legislation regarding the Missouri Safe Schools Act.



*High school students in St. Louis conduct peer mediation to resolve conflicts among classmates. (Photo: Joshua Saleem)*

### **Reflections on AFSC's Freedom School in the Twin Cities**

"You feel like you've been experiencing things by yourself, but really others share the same or similar problems you go through every day," writes Paris Oldham II in this [blog](#) about his experiences with the AFSC Freedom School in the Twin Cities. "Just knowing that adds strength to your soul; just knowing you have a support system out there feels amazing." [Register today](#) for the next AFSC Freedom School in St. Paul on December 28-30. For more information, contact [Dominique Diadiggo-Cash](#) of AFSC at 202-820-0810.



*Young people in the Twin Cities break down the systems that perpetuate racism—from education to the criminal justice system during AFSC's Freedom School.*

### **AFSC supports students' free speech in Des Moines**

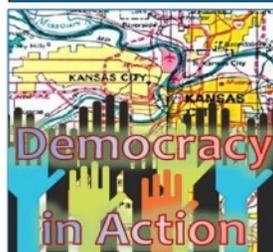
Nearly 50 years after the US Supreme Court agreed that students don't shed their Constitutional rights at the schoolhouse gate, advocates of free speech gathered again at a Des Moines School Board meeting in support of students who walked out of school following the presidential election. Sandra Sanchez of AFSC writes about that experience [here](#). Prior to the election, Sandra conducted a Civics 101 workshop for first-time voters (see page 11 of this [magazine](#) for her article in Spanish and click [here](#) for photos.) Former AFSC Iowa staffer Kenia Calderon is featured in this [video](#) talking about her life and work for immigrant rights.



*Sandra Sanchez explains the voting process at an AFSC Civics 101 workshop in Des Moines. More photos from that event are available [here](#).*

### **Candidates respond to AFSC questionnaire**

AFSC in Kansas City recently [asked](#) candidates for Missouri and Kansas State House and Senate seats to respond to questions that would help voters understand the values and narratives candidates would bring to their positions as elected officials. The questions asked were based on community concerns that arose in AFSC's [Move the Money Listening Project](#).



### **“Houses of Abraham” discussion in Indianapolis**

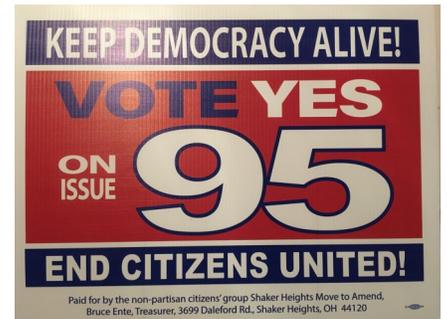
The night before Election Day, a group of over 80 people from all walks of life gathered at the Indianapolis Interchurch Center to learn about the *Houses of Abraham*, a panel discussion highlighting the spiritual landmarks of the three Abrahamic faith systems. The discussion was part of this year’s [Spirit & Place Festival](#), a community project catalyzing civic engagement through the arts, humanities, and religion. Elle Roberts of AFSC explains [more](#).



*The Houses of Abraham panel, from left: Father Nabil Hanna, Dr. Mary Ann Fadae and Rabbi Brant Rosen of AFSC.*

### **Successful ballot measures in Ohio promote real democracy**

The NE Ohio AFSC provided educational and organizing support to democracy activists in two communities that passed ballot initiatives in November by wide margins. The initiatives call on Congress to pass a constitutional amendment declaring that only human beings, not corporate entities, possess inalienable human rights and that money is not equal to speech and, therefore, can be regulated in elections. The two ballot measures in South Euclid and Shaker Heights, Ohio passed by 77% and 82%, respectively.



*Ohio communities support democracy.*

A provision of each citizen initiative calls for a city-sponsored “Democracy Day” public hearing on the impact of corporate “personhood” and money as speech on the community, neighborhoods and residents. The two cities join 10 other communities in Ohio that have enacted similar ballot initiatives over the past few years and 12 communities where municipal councils have passed resolutions — most of which with AFSC assistance. AFSC will assist residents in all the communities which passed citizen initiatives to organize their “Democracy Day” public hearings in 2017 and will also work with Ohio state legislators to re-introduce similar resolutions in both chambers next year. AFSC drafted language that served as a basis for both resolutions.



### **Bits and peaces**

Here are links to AFSC’s [post-election blog](#) and a blog on the shameful [proposal for a Muslim registry](#)....Here is a [report](#) from Margaret Jackson of AFSC Chicago and other AFSC staff who traveled to North Dakota in support of the water protectors at Standing Rock....Darlene Gramigna of AFSC joined other staff at the SOA [Watch Convergence](#) at the border in Nogales.... Here’s Brant Rosen’s [blog](#) in support of the [Movement for Black Lives](#).

### **Thankful for your support**

Your support is the reason AFSC has been working for peace and justice for nearly a century. Please join me in supporting efforts such as Mohammed Omer’s speaking tour around the country. If you would like to make a gift to support the AFSC Midwest Region or a specific program, please click [here](#).



*From left: Emily Verdugo of AFSC Arizona, State Rep. Martin Quezada, Jennifer Bing of AFSC and Palestinian journalist Mohammed Omer in a cotton field near immigrant detention centers in Arizona.*