

Annual Report 2023 Justice and Witness Committee

The Penn West Conference Justice and Witness Committee met via Virtual Meetings for the past year every month, except for a long break over the summer. With Reverend David Ackerman's sabbatical, we had the pleasure of meeting with Acting Conference Minister Rich Pleva during his absence.

During 2022, we talked about how the Conference can help with Get Out The Vote (GOTV) efforts in a non-partisan way. We settled on using United Church of Christ's messaging and crafted a specific message to use in the conference's weekly Snippet message for the November 2022 primary election.

We continued to work on racial justice issues from 2021, where we discussed the broad issue of inclusivity, how congregations can be more welcoming, and obstacles remained. Committee member, Robin Stemple, who currently serves on the Conference Disability Awareness, was appointed to the National Disabilities Ministries Board of the United Church of Christ in 2022. He will serve a 3-year term. He also serves as the Chairman of the Disabilities Ministries Board's "Accessible to All" committee.

In an effort to reach a wider base of committee members on our Justice and Witness Committee, we sent out a Doodle Survey to determine a new date and time to accommodate members' schedules. After reviewing answers, it was concluded weekday mornings were still the best time to hold our meetings. We will periodically review our meeting times.

We also reviewed our committee assignments and made three inactive and renamed one to best serve our current membership. We are always evolving and will review committee assignments yearly.

National (and local) humanitarian issues are of interest to our committee, and last year (and now), the refugees from the war in Ukraine were a priority. We worked with the Conference to contribute where we could to help this worthy cause, and educated our local congregations in how they too could help refugees and asylum seekers.

As committees and as a team, we look forward to 2023 in focusing on the following goals:

- Our Disabilities Awareness Committee is working on a checklist that the Conference can use as a guide for congregations to become A2A certified.
- Continuation of what inclusion looks like—working with Racial Justice, Disability, and LGBTQ Committees to build community within the Conference.
- With the hiring of a Conference Youth Minister, we would like them to attend discussions with us on what their role looks like and how we can help.
- We are still interested in ministerial roles and open discussion groups, but it has admittedly taken a back seat to other priorities. This might be something we will take up again in 2023.

Submitted in good faith,

Roxanne Tuinstra
Chair, Justice and Witness Committee