

CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATES OF SOUTHWEST PENNSYLVANIA  
*A Unifying Voice in the name of Jesus Christ  
for the Mission of the Gospel and the Wholeness of Communities*

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Spring 2024

Dear friends of the Penn West Conference

Grace and peace be with you as we gather for this landmark Annual Gathering & Meeting with our new friends across Pennsylvania.

It is hard to believe that this is the eleventh annual report I have made to you from Christian Associates. In April, we celebrated my tenth anniversary as Executive Minister with a Taizé prayer service and dessert reception. I continue to be deeply grateful for my call to this ministry, and I'm thankful for all the ways that the Penn West Conference has supported me during my first decade in this role.

What a joy it is to serve the church through Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania: since 1970, a coalition of 28 regional church bodies in the 10 counties of greater Pittsburgh. Our members are Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox; Black and white; progressive and conservative; rural and urban. Guided by our core values of collegiality, collaboration, communication, and connectedness, our member churches come together as a unifying voice for the mission of the Gospel and the wholeness of our communities.

The Conference continues to be faithful to this mission. Your financial partnership helps to sustain our ministries. Rev. Ackerman is a leader in our Council of Bishops & Judicatory Executives and Executive Committee. I am also grateful for the many ministers and lay people of the Conference who have participated in our programs and events, or made personal gifts to sustain our ministries.

In 2023, Christian Associates approved a new strategic plan that will guide our ministries for the next five years. Building from our historic strengths, the plan responds to the needs of the present moment. The key goals of the plan are these:

1. **Collegiality:** We reaffirm that relationships are the building blocks of unity. Christian Associates will strengthen relationships among diverse Christians, within our own membership and across the wider Christian community of Southwest Pennsylvania:
  - A. We will enhance fellowship among judicatory leaders.
  - B. We will promote healing of the divisions between communities of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds.
  - C. We will strengthen connectivity among Christian institutions.

- D. We will establish transformative fellowship and witness with evangelical leaders.
- 2. Collaboration:** We recognize that the church is experiencing transition and change, including “the great resignation,” shrinking congregations, and the rise of the “nonverts.” Christian Associates will bring judicatories together to respond with hope to challenges facing the church.
- A. We will encourage our member judicatories to collaborate to address shared challenges such as the clergy shortage, small-town ministry, and empty buildings, using full communion partnerships and other creative solutions.
  - B. We will welcome clergy new to their congregations by connecting them to Christian Associates, the region, and local ecumenical opportunities.
  - C. We will pursue shared evangelism.
- 3. Connectedness:** We understand that our broken church reflects a broken world: racism, xenophobia, antisemitism and other religious bigotry, fractious partisanship, and violence are other manifestations of division plaguing our communities. As an organization with a mission of unity, Christian Associates will work with civic, community, and interfaith partners to address these divisions.
- A. We will facilitate dialogue between spiritual leaders and police.
  - B. We will address political polarization and extremism.
  - C. We will foster interfaith understanding and seek to end antisemitism.
  - D. We will continue work addressing community violence.

We are determined that this plan be more than a set of good intentions. Already we are moving these goals into action by engaging partners, developing programs, and planning events. All these projects—and many, many more!—are made possible by the generous support of our member church bodies and our community supporters. Although the gifts we receive from judicatories such as the Synod are vitally important to our work, we also look to individual, congregational, corporate, and foundation donors to support our mission. We are especially grateful to the members of the John 17 Society, who support our work with gifts of \$250 or more each year. For more information about giving opportunities, visit [www.casp.org/donate](http://www.casp.org/donate).

To stay up to date on all of Christian Associates’ activities, please be sure to subscribe to our e-newsletter, Unity n’At, by visiting [casp.org/signup](http://casp.org/signup). You can also follow us on Facebook at [facebook.com/christianassociatesswpa](https://facebook.com/christianassociatesswpa).

Thank you so much, Penn West friends, for your faithful ministry and your commitment to this ecumenical journey, in the past ten years, the past 54 years, and into the future!

Your sister in Christ,

The Rev. Liddy Barlow  
Executive Minister