

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*

Mailing Address: PO Box 5241 • Pittsburgh, PA 15206 • Phone: 412-688-9070
Fax: 412-688-9091 • Web: www.casp.org • E-mail: lbarlow@casp.org
E-newsletter: signup.casp.org • Facebook: www.facebook.com/christianassociatesswpa

Spring 2018

Dear friends of the Penn West Conference,

Grace and peace to each of you as we come together for our Annual Gathering and Meeting. In our worship and deliberations, our learning and our fellowship, may this time provide opportunities for new and renewed connections to one another, to all settings of the church, and to God.

Just as our Annual Gathering and Meeting serves as a yearly reminder of the breadth of the United Church of Christ in southwest Pennsylvania, so Christian Associates works to be a vibrant symbol of the unity of the whole church of Jesus Christ, in all its fascinating and complicated diversity. Guided by our core values of collegiality, collaboration, communication, and connectedness, Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania brings together 28 Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant church bodies to be a unifying voice for the mission of the Gospel and the wholeness of our communities.

Since our last Annual Gathering and Meeting, we have been working with energy and creativity to make the unity of Christ's church more visible in the ten counties of Southwest Pennsylvania. Here are just a few of the projects that your support has made possible this year:

- We launched our new series, *The Word in Our Voices*, which collects and publishes sermons and essays by our region's clergy. The first volume, *I Was a Stranger and You Welcomed Me*, focused on immigration; the second, *Blessed Art Thou Among Women*, focused on Mary, Mother of Jesus. A similar publishing effort, *Gifts of the Church for One Another*, compiled essays by our Theology & Education Committee. Each of these volumes may be downloaded at our website, www.casp.org. I hope you will consider submitting your sermons on race and racism for publication in the next volume, coming this September.
- We joined with Catholic, Lutheran, and other Protestant Christians to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. In addition to our participation in the public liturgies to mark that occasion, Christian Associates also collaborated with the Downtown Pittsburgh Ministerium and other cosponsors to produce *Always Made New*, a community art project featuring interviews and photographs of

Pittsburghers from all walks of life. You can see all the stories we collected at www.alwaysmadenew.org. We also participated in Reformation-inspired events that drew our brothers and sisters from independent churches, such as Amen to Action and the One Movement. How wonderful that the anniversary of division has become a catalyst for cooperation and mutual discovery!

- We developed a partnership with the Jewish Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh's new Center for Loving Kindness and Civic Engagement, cosponsoring three different forums bringing faith perspectives to public issues. All three events—responding to violent demonstrations in Charlottesville, the needs of immigrants and refugees, and the quest to end gun violence—included inspiring preaching, compelling first-person stories, and opportunities to move into action. Over 200 clergy from across our region signed our “Declaration of Religious Leaders,” pledging to resist hateful rhetoric and work for peace and understanding.

The Penn West Conference has been an essential partner to Christian Associates since our beginnings, nearly fifty years ago. Today you continue to support us financially, and you share your skills and energy with us as well. Rev. David Ackerman continues to serve with wisdom and dedication on the Executive Committee of our Council of Bishops and Judicatory Executive, and many other Penn West clergy and lay people have engaged in our projects, committees, and programs this year.

Although the gifts we receive from judicatories such as the Conference 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 the Society, or to make your own gift of any size to Christian Associates, visit www.casp.org/donate.

Encountering our Christian brothers and sisters deepens our own understanding and practice of faith, and helps us to recognize that despite all of our differences, we truly are one body. May the spirit of unity, friendship, and reconciliation be with you all at this year's Annual Gathering and Meeting and in the coming days. Thank you again for your support of Christian Associates.

Your sister in Christ,

The Rev. Liddy Barlow
Executive Minister