

## Justice and Witness Committee Report

The Justice and Witness Committee of the Penn West Conference are a diverse group of Christians committed to seeking justice for all of God's children in our local churches, our associations, our conference, and denomination. Current members include The Rev. David Ackerman, Rachel Cole-Turner, Tom Croner, Julia DiFlore, Paul Fogel, Beckie Hickok, Julia Hines, Bonnie Kautz, Linda Lawson, Jim Neatrou, Ron Pedersen, Ellen Sautter, Alexa Smith, George Steffey, and Diane Wiley.

Rev. Alexa Smith spearheaded the Wendy's Boycott. There was a table with information at Annual Meeting 2018 with handouts and buttons to continue the boycott against unfair labor practices by Wendy's. Organized by the Immokalee Workers, most fast food restaurants have agreed to purchase their tomatoes from growers with fair salaries and protections from sexual harassment, but Wendy's has not. Several college campuses have turned down restaurants like Wendy's that refuse to endorse the fair labor practices. The committee urges churches to continue the pressure by not patronizing Wendy's restaurants at this time.

Ellen Sautter attended a two-day Crossroads workshop at Pittsburgh Seminary "Understanding and Analyzing Systemic Racism." There will be a workshop at Annual Conference on Racism and White Privilege. Many in our largely white congregations do not recognize their own implicit racial bias, so we hope to sensitize ourselves to the needs of other races in order to extend God's love to all people. In addition, there is an excellent educational resource "White Privilege" available as a download from ucc.org. Christ Church, Latrobe has used it.

Rev. Ron Pedersen is establishing a blog on economic justice entitled "Resist the Market." Addressing the wide disparities of incomes and greed should help us look at the ways the church and Christians deal with wealth and poverty. He suggested a website "Resist the Market" to enlighten us and help us empower our brothers and sisters.

Julia DiFlore is working with a team to establish Christ's Extravagant Love and Encouragement (CELAH). They are having healthy conversations with churches in the Pittsburgh Association about welcoming our LGBTQ brothers and sisters. They hope to expand to the other associations.

Sarah Lund, UCC Minister for Disabilities and Mental Health Justice joined the committee via Zoom. She addressed grants for Conference Inclusion Teams for responding to congregants with disabilities. She made us aware of not only physical barriers, but attitudinal responses may hinder true inclusion. She introduced Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive, and Engaged (WISE) and how we might become WISE congregations. There are 10 steps that churches can take toward this end. She encouraged us to promote Mental Health Sunday (sponsored by the UCC Mental Health Network) on May 19 as well as Access Sunday on October 13.

So there are quite a few areas in which we witness for justice in our conference. If you have a desire to work with us, we would be happy to have you.

Submitted by Ellen Sautter