



The Pennsylvania Council of Churches is church bodies and agencies representing Anabaptist, Episcopal, Orthodox, Pentecostal, and Protestant communions in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania working together for Christian unity for the sake of the world. [John 17:23]

IMPORTANT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Looking Ahead. The search for a new Executive Director conducted in the latter half of 2020 resulted in the hiring of the Rev. Dr. Larry Pickens as of January 1, 2021. Now that he is on board, the Council will move forward with a visioning and planning process aimed at guiding the Council's efforts moving forward. This work will include improvements in the Council's communications, including the website and social media.

Conferences and Meetings. The year began with a "Solidarity Not Solitary" program in Harrisburg in early February, followed by a weeklong event at Pennsylvania's Capitol to display a solitary confinement cell replica and educate legislators and visitors about solitary and criminal justice reform. COVID-19 curtailed initial to do a statewide tour with the cell to do informational programs on solitary/criminal justice reform and training on advocacy, and moved all events for the remainder of 2020 to Zoom.

In lieu of solitary programming Episcopal Service Corps fellow Emily Schmid planned and carried out online book studies on the books *White Fragility* and *Just Mercy*. She also planned and conducted a virtual prayer gathering for those incarcerated during the pandemic.

We co-sponsored and helped to facilitate a program with the CeaseFire PA Leadership Institute to introduce participants to gun violence reduction legislation and advocacy. We also held a virtual gathering to pray for the reduction of gun violence.

Other prayer gatherings that we participated in involved: valuing Black and Brown lives/peace in our communities; prayers for a peaceful election; prayers for a peaceful transfer of power; and prayers for all people dealing with a pandemic over the holidays.

Working with Episcopal Service Corps fellow Kelsey Reyes, we planned and carried out two discussion events on the 2020 election and COVID-19. We continued supporting vigils for immigrant families detained at the Berks County Residential Center and held the 12th annual Commonwealth Interfaith Service: Prayers for Justice and Peace remotely for the first time (view at <https://www.facebook.com/PACHurchesAdvocacy/live>).

In an event co-sponsored by the Council with faith partners, Pennsylvania's Senior Senator Bob Casey joined clergy and faith leaders from across the Commonwealth on August 28 to answer questions reflecting concerns within the state's faith community around the pandemic. And on October 7, 2020 the Council hosted "An Evening with Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis," co-chair of the national Poor People's Campaign. She spoke of the Campaign's work to turn out poor and low-income voters and answered questions from the viewers (view at https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCunqnFIOcrIn_o715zhTIA).

Grant Funded Efforts. The Council has worked on the following issues based on grant funding received.

- An agreement was made with the Mennonite Central Committee to continue work on criminal justice reform, immigration, gun violence reduction, education, and climate change until remaining funds are spent.
- Work continued on education funding with funds from the William Penn Foundation.
- Criminal justice reform efforts, primarily around solitary confinement, continued under grant funds from the Van Ameringen Foundation. Some of the work underway has already been described above. Episcopal Service Corps Fellow Kelsey Reyes took over as point person in September after Fellow Emily Schmid completed her year in July.

Other Activities

- The Council offered official greetings to the PennWest Conference of the United Church of Christ.
- Both of the Council's websites, www.pachurches.org and www.pachurchesadvocacy.org, have continued to evolve.
- The Director of Advocacy and Ecumenical Outreach worked with the Governor's Census 2020 Complete Count Commission and with partners to provide education around the 2020 election. She also completed a sabbatical where she visited or held Zoom meetings with counterpart state councils across the country. During those meetings she gleaned several ideas that have worked for others and looks forward to working with a newly formed Commission on Unity and Relationships to determine what our own council will do moving forward.
- The Council prepared and distributed a series of statements, including: A Pastoral Statement at a Time of Global Pandemic (3/27/20); A Pastoral Call to Dismantle Racism and End Violence Against People of Color (6/2/20);

Report on the Council's Work in 2020

Pennsylvania Council of Churches' Statement on 6/18/20 Supreme Court DACA Decision (6/18/20); and A Statement Calling for a Peaceful 2020 Election (10/28/20). All are available at <https://www.pachurches.org/about-us/statements/>.

- The Council provided resources aimed at helping church bodies, congregations, and people of faith (and others) with important issues facing the state and country, building resource pages around COVID-19, the 2020 Census, and the election.
- The Council prepared a Lenten devotional guide, 40 Days of Solidarity, to address solitary confinement and other criminal justice reform issues.

COUNCIL MINISTRIES

Commission on Public Witness & Public Witness Ministry. The Council's advocacy efforts in 2020 focused on the following areas:

- Advocacy for a Pennsylvania budget with sufficient revenues that addresses the concerns of people of faith.
- Human needs/poverty-related work.
- Efforts to raise the minimum wage, primarily in coordination with the Raise the Wage PA Coalition.
- Criminal justice reform, primarily in coordination with the Abolitionist Law Center and other partners.
- Immigration, particularly around calling for the closure of the Berks County Family Detention Center that is holding refugee families for long periods of time, and for ending the separation of families at the border.
- Environment, primarily climate change and protecting water resources, in coordination with several organizations.
- More equitable public education funding.
- Advocacy around COVID-19 needs/relief, and sharing of information about COVID-19, including resources.
- Distribution of regular updates with actions, events, resources, opportunities, and news.

The Commission continues to work on efforts aimed at improving the lives of people on the margins, and addressing problems with our political system.

Commission on Unity & Relationships. The Council began an effort to rebuild the commission with ecumenical officers from our ecumenical partners by holding a Zoom meeting with those who had agreed to participate. Others will be added in 2021, and the group plans to convene to consider approaches for building relationships across the Council's membership, congregations, individuals, and interfaith partners. We also held an initial convening of local and regional ecumenical representatives and hope to consider how these partners and the Council can work together in the future.

Commission on Common Ministries. The Council has continued to provide support to its Trucker Traveler Ministry, Campground Ministries, and Farmworker Ministries. Jim Gould joined to become the new Campground Ministry coordinator in 2020, and has been working to update the program and this portion of the Council's website. Long time coordinator for the Fruitbelt Farmworker Christian Ministry Roddy Runyan retired in 2020, and a new coordinator, Christian Aguilar came on board.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Council staff continue to discuss activities and areas where the Council might engage to be of service to our members, the wider faith community.