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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Dear friends of the Penn West Conference,

Grace and peace to each of you as we prepare for Annual Gathering and Meeting. While I look forward to being with you via Zoom, I anticipate even more the day when we can once more gather face to face. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to shift the ways we can be together, but it also continues to underline the importance of *being together*. Across all the diversities of the church and all the challenges of this historic moment, we love one another—we need one another—we are one body.

Together is what the work of Christian Associates is all about. We convene diverse Christians to make visible our unity in Christ and seek the common good. Guided by our core values of collegiality, collaboration, communication, and connectedness, the 28 Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant church bodies of Christian Associates strive to be a unifying voice for the mission of the Gospel and the wholeness of our communities.

The Penn West Conference has been a faithful partner in this mission throughout our 51-year history. We are grateful for your generous financial contribution to our ministries and for Rev. Ackerman's personal engagement in our Council of Bishops & Judicatory Executives and Executive Committee. We also celebrate the many clergy and lay people of the Conference who have participated in our programs and events, or made personal gifts to sustain our ministries.

With your help, Christian Associates is working to heal divisions and spark collaboration among the diverse churches of Southwest Pennsylvania. Here are just a few of the projects that your support is making possible:

- In the wake of our 2020 voter education and post-election peacemaking projects, we continue to work with community and interfaith partners to address our region's deep partisan divides. Our workshops with Braver Angels teach communication and listening skills that build understanding across difference.

- Recognizing the lack of trust between communities and the police, and the need for honest dialogue, we are partnering with the City of Pittsburgh Bureau of

Police to establish police-clergy councils in each police zone: a model that can be replicated in police departments across our region.

- Sofa Spirituality, an interfaith dialogue initiative that began in the early days of the pandemic, continues to expand and flourish. Visit *sofaspirituality.org* to watch interviews with diverse spiritual leaders and sign up for small-group conversations to explore our fascinating differences and discover our shared values. In addition to these public dialogues, we also offer customized Sofa Spirituality experiences for congregations, ministeriums, or community groups; please reach out to bring this tool to your setting.

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 Penn West 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 giving opportunities, visit *www.casp.org/donate*.

So much has changed in this pandemic season, but the Good News endures, and our need for community and collaboration is as strong as ever. Thank you so much, Penn West, for your faithful ministry and your commitment to Christian unity. May God bless each of you—and may we reunite again in person sometime very soon!

Your sister in Christ,

The Rev. Liddy Barlow
Executive Minister