

ECONOMIC JUSTICE Today's United Church of Christ members have experienced many generations of changing economic conditions. Our collective memories stretch back to the 1930s when many families struggled for survival and new federal policies, such as the Public Works Administration and Social Security, were necessary to bolster employment and provide for secure retirements.

During the Second World War a combination of military service and federally-funded defense industries expanded employment, while the post-war decades brought new economic opportunities in the forms of new businesses and job creation, increasing prosperity for millions of families although racial discrimination embedded in many programs and institutions continued to block economic progress for non-whites.

As the nation's wealth increased and the middle-class became socially dominate, programs were launched to reduce the effects of poverty in both urban and rural areas. However many of these safety net programs were short-lived and/or modified until just remnants remain.

Today, however, many more of us are familiar with how the economic crisis of 2007, the unsettled conditions of recent decades brought about by globalization and automation, political and corporate attacks on unions and regulations, and the influence of money on policy making have eroded America's industrial base and boosted inequality. Growing economic disparities increase the power of the super-rich while reducing the ranks of the middle-class.

During all of these eras, churches and religious organizations have been directly affected by overall economic changes. But in addition, the UCC has continually advocated for a more fair, just and inclusive economy. How must the United Church of Christ continue this advocacy during the years immediately before us?

Directions from the interchange of the PA Turnpike Irwin Exit and Route 30.

Follow Route 30 West for just over three miles. At the top of the hill, turn right onto Center Highway.

After just a tenth of a mile, turn left onto Brownstown Road.

Follow Brownstown Road just over a mile. St. John's is at the bottom of the hill on the left.

Spring All Association Meeting

What Does God Require of Us?



***Penn West Conference
United Church of Christ***

March 18, 2017

10:00 AM—3:00 PM

Registration begins at 9:30

St. John's UCC

1230 Brownstown Road

Larimer, PA 15647

Ph: 724-864-2207

WIDENING THE WELCOME – MENTAL ILLNESS At the Thirtieth General Synod in June 2015, delegates from the United Church of Christ entities overwhelmingly approved a WISE (Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive, and Engaged for Mental Health) resolution on Mental Illness. It encourages congregations to work to eradicate stigma around mental illnesses/brain disorders, and to offer support to persons with and those impacted by mental health challenges, including their family members, loved ones and others concerned. A copy of the resolution is included in your packet of pre-event information.

YOU'RE invited to partake in the Widening the Welcome Workshop at the All Association Meeting. Among the ministries which will be discussed are: Widening the Welcome; WISE Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive and Engaged Congregations for Mental Health; A2A- Accessible to All; as well as other pertinent correlated ministries.

THE MIDDLE EAST The problems of the Middle East continue to divide world opinion. Israel tops the list of concerns. This workshop and discussion will provide an update on the current state of the Israel-Palestine situation. We will also offer an introductory look at a problem-solving technique called the Circle Process. Circle Process is a tool being used to promote Restorative Justice in the Middle East. Plan to join us for this discussion and learning experience.

RACIAL JUSTICE / WHITE PRIVILEGE In the first hour, we will facilitate/ participate in an open dialogue about race. Everyone is encouraged to speak openly about their encounters and understanding about race. How your attitudes formed and if and how they may have changed over the years. Our goal is to be able to speak honestly to each other about who we are and the experiences that shaped us. We will try to bring from our experience some clarity about things you may have heard of and wondered about - White Privilege and Institutional Racism and to talk about "The Talk". And as facilitators/ participants in the dialogue we will present information that has been useful and important to us in this area. In the second hour, we will dialogue about our understanding of how God is speaking to us in this situation and about this topic. This will of necessity be open ended because this is situation where none of us have definitive answers. But our hope is that in faith we can come together with a surer grasp of what God's call is for all of us.

HUNGER AND HOMELESSNESS The three basic human necessities, food, clothing, and shelter need to be met in order for a person to develop physically, mentally, and socially. It is only after these three basic needs are in place that a person can look beyond oneself in order to participate in and for the good of the wider society. It is truly unconscionable that in America we have hungry and homeless adults and children living in the shadows right in the places we call home. Our time together will be spent uncovering the invisible in our midst, naming the reasons that contribute to hunger and homelessness, and to ask ourselves, "As Christians and concerned citizens, do we have a personal responsibility to the hungry and homeless in our neighborhoods?" And if so, "What might that be?"

OPEN AND AFFIRMING Whether we are straight, gay, bisexual, lesbian, transgendered, or questioning, each one of us is created by a loving and benevolent God. Therefore, regardless of our sexual orientation, each one of us is of immeasurable value and loved unconditionally by our Creator God. Affirming that sacred reality, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force has developed a template for congregations that wish to explore the possibility of declaring, in a formal way, that people of all sexual orientations are welcome. In the United Church of Christ we call this declaration "*Open and Affirming.*" Using "*Building an Inclusive Church: A Welcoming Toolkit,*" we will, as time allows, examine and have conversation around the various points in the toolkit.

CREATION CARE Walter Brueggeman has said, "Consumerism is not simply a marketing strategy. It has become a demonic spiritual force among us." So what do we do about that spiritual force among us? First, we have to make ourselves aware; aware of the things we buy and why we buy them. Second, we need to evaluate how we view the Earth. Do we read Genesis and see it through spiritual eyes? Do we see creation as our Creator does? Third, once we become more aware ourselves and change our habits, we can work to find ways to introduce change to the culture around us. In the meantime, we still have to promote environmental awareness, making it as simple and basic as possible. To that end, a very simple sentence would go a very long way in changing our environmental landscape: "Consume less, recycle more." Our workshop on Creation Care will explore more deeply how we might accomplish this.