

Annual Report 2024 Justice and Witness Committee

The Penn West Conference Justice and Witness Committee met via Virtual Meetings for the past year every month, except for a long break over the summer.

During 2023, Robin “Rob” Stemple had the biggest impact with his Disabilities Awareness subcommittee, urging our larger committee to help with a conference-wide Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance checklist that congregations can use to become compliant within their churches. Rob provided a 2-minute talk and had a table display on the A2A process provided by the UCC Disability Ministries Board of Directors at the 2023 annual meeting. Rob is now the chairperson of the UCC DM Board’s A2A Committee. His leadership has paved the way for 3 congregations towards becoming A2A compliant: Trinity UCC, in Berlin, PA, as well as St. Paul’s UCC in Imler, PA and St. John’s UCC in Evans City. Rob’s own congregation, First United Church of Christ, in Millvale, PA has removed the front pew of their sanctuary to make room so Rob could begin playing music in their worship services. First UCC has also begun meetings with the congregation to determine how to make the entire facility more accessible, in particular, the chancel area.

Accessibility is something our committee feels passionate about and we will continue to do more work to support Rob.

The Justice for Immigrants/Refugees subcommittee has also been working hard, discussing efforts on how the church can help refugees from Ukraine, Palestine, the US southern border and beyond. The committee reached out to representatives from a Pittsburgh initiative, Hello Neighbor, and hope to see if they have insights on our work. There are also some helpful national setting. The committee is working on local solutions on refugees that congregations can feel empowered to make a difference.

As committees and as a team, we look forward to 2024 in focusing on the following goals:

- We are looking to refocus our role as a committee, to more of an informational one, with guidance, leadership, resources, and speaker series. Over the past several months, we feel our collective knowledge, skills, and talent mainly lean towards becoming a body that can help with resource sharing with the conference. We will be working over the next several months to discover what that might look like.
- Our Disabilities Awareness Committee will continue work to sign up churches, and educate others about what A2A compliance looks like.
- Our Immigration/Refugee Committee will continue to reach out to see how they can better help disenfranchised and displaced humans on the local level, and make connections with non-profits that can help.

Submitted in good faith,

Roxanne Tuinstra
Chair, Justice and Witness Committee