

Annual Report 2022 Justice and Witness Committee

The Penn West Conference Justice and Witness Committee met via Virtual Meetings for the past year every month, except for the month of December, taking a break for the holiday. During this time, we continued to reflect on the racial divide in our country and how it impacts our relations in our congregations. We decided on bringing in a national UCC facilitator, Dr. Velda Love, minister of racial justice, and her team to lead us in sacred conversations. The conference, held via zoom link or in-person in Greensburg, was a two-day event on March 25-26th with roughly 60 people in attendance including 4 facilitators. Feedback on the event from participants was generally positive (see attachment). However, feedback from the facilitators was that there was more work that remains.

Moving forward, the committee recognizes that more work is left to be done in the conference. Working with Dr. Love and her team, we hope to reconfigure the workshop to adopt a more suitable and skilled conference that will grow attendees spiritually.

Additionally, we hope to work on voting rights as a committee and individually at our home churches across the conference, as voting rights are human rights.

As committees and as a team, we accomplished several goals and are working on future ones that we hope to see fulfilled in the coming year(s):

- We accomplished our goal of raising more than \$15,000.00 for our Abolishing Medical Debt campaign. We learned that we were not able to use the money to alleviate medical debt for people in our Conference's geographic area, as we had advertised. All donors to this project were contacted about this. Most churches and individual donors agreed that their gifts could be used to help alleviate medical debt for people outside of our Conference's geographic area. Those who did not agree to this received a refund of their gifts.
- Robin Stemple has applied to serve on the UCC Disabilities Network. We are waiting to hear about his appointment.
- We started a Bible Study at the beginning of our session.

Some other brief updates on our committees:

- While our Climate Change event scheduled for this spring was canceled, it remains an ongoing important justice issue for our team.

- We continue to monitor the ever-changing justice issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Our ONA Team/CELAH continues to work toward LGBTQIA+ inclusion. The Pastoral Ethics program this year is on Ministering with LGBTQ people.
- Immigrants' Justice/Refugees have taken on heightened significance with the war in Ukraine. Please pray for the refugees fleeing from the war as well as all of the victims of it. Support for Ukrainian refugees may be given through <https://www.ucc.org/global-h-o-p-e/ukraine-emergency-appeal/>
- Ron Pedersen continues to work on his blog on economic justice.

Submitted in good faith,

Roxanne Tuinstra
Chair, Justice and Witness Committee