

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 you prepare for our Annual Gathering and Meeting. As we emerge from the pandemic, opportunities to be together feel all the more precious. This year's AGM offers the best of both worlds: a hybrid option for those still unable to travel, and an in-person option so that many of us can see one another face to face, reuniting with friends and building new connections. As Psalm 121 reminds us, *how very good and pleasant it is when kindred come together in unity!*

The joy of connection fuels the work of Christian Associates. 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 52-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. 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. As my summer sabbatical approaches, I am especially grateful to the Rev. Linda Miller-Pretz, who will be serving as our Sabbatical Supply Executive Minister from June 6 through September 19.

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:

- As nearly one-third of our member church bodies welcomed new bishops or executives, we have welcomed these new leaders into our community, helping connect them with their peers. Our strategic planning process draws on the gifts of new and returning leaders alike to chart a course for Christian Associates' next decade of ministry.

- When war broke out in Ukraine, we coordinated a city-wide prayer service for peace at St. Paul Cathedral, combining traditional Ukrainian liturgies with prayers offered by people from many religious traditions. At least 500 people filled the cathedral, as hundreds of others joined the service online.
- Knowing the power of travel to build trusting relationships, we organized an interfaith pilgrimage to Washington, DC, visiting sites sacred to six different religious traditions. The clergy and lay people in our group returned with a deepened understanding of their neighbors, equipped with strong relationships that can facilitate continued projects here at home.
- We continued to convene spiritual leaders and police officers in each police zone of the City of Pittsburgh, creating opportunities for honest dialogue and problem-solving. This work will continue in the coming months as part of Faith + Blue Pittsburgh.
- Sofa Spirituality, an online interfaith dialogue initiative, 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 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.

Across all our differences, the Spirit calls us to experience and to celebrate our true unity in Jesus Christ. Thank you so much, Penn West friends, for your faithful ministry and your commitment to this ecumenical journey.

Your sister in Christ,

The Rev. Liddy Barlow
Executive Minister