



THE PENNSYLVANIA COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

The Pennsylvania Council of Churches is excited to continue and expand its relationship with the Penn West Conference of the United Church of Christ. Furthermore, we look forward to being a part of ushering in the exciting initiative of the Keystone Conference of the United Church of Christ.

In partnership with colleagues who lead other State Councils of Churches the Pennsylvania Council of Churches has begun a cooperative effort addressing the scourge and danger of White Christian Nationalism. Colleagues from West Virginia, North Carolina, Seattle Washington, Louisiana, Virginia, New York, South Carolina, and Colorado met to discuss the framework for a joint grant proposal that enabled us to address the subject matter. The executive director generated a portion of the grant proposal designed to enable monthly reading groups in local congregations. The plan is for groups to read Jim Wallis' book, The False White Gospel: Rejecting Christian Nationalism, Reclaiming True Faith, and Refounding Democracy and The Psychology of Christian Nationalism by Pamela Cooper-White. At the end of the study, we plan to have Jim Wallis come to Pennsylvania to speak on Religious Nationalism. There will be discussion groups in various faith communities.

The executive director traveled to the Legacy Museum, Montgomery Alabama, The King Center, in Atlanta, GA and the Edmund Pettis Bridge in Selma, Alabama. The goal was to visit significant settings of the Civil rights movement and connect with heritage related to his family in Georgia and Alabama. The journey included visits to the King Center, the Equal Justice Initiative, Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, and other significant civil rights sites in the area.

Testimony was given to the Board of View which managed our claim for additional damage compensation related to the taking of land involving the I-83 Project. The determination made by the board was that we were indeed entitled to additional compensation.

In addition to this development the Board of Directors affirmed that the United Church Center would undergo the complete tear-off and replacement of the roof of the building. The cost of the tear off is \$204,000. Last year the Board of Directors decided to continue our ownership of the United Church Center. That decision meant that it is incumbent upon us to begin addressing areas of deferred maintenance in the building. This is an opportunity to begin that process. We will also ask our partners, as we work with our Finance and Facilities Committee, to support a capital improvement fund drive for this and other efforts.

The Council on World Mission invited the executive director to make a presentation on A Theology of Reparations in a gathering of scholars in Harare, Zimbabwe. The presentation addressed “Multigenerational Trauma and Reparations.” This produced a paper that will also be part of a book publication that will be published in 2025 by the Council on World Mission which sponsored the consultation. The executive director also drafted articles for the “Faith and Values” section of the “Morning Call” and the “United Methodist News” describing the experience.

The executive director attended the World Methodist Conference in Göteborg, Sweden, also visiting Malmo, Sweden, where he toured Lutheran congregations and preached.

The executive director spent time engaging in the advocacy work of the Council of Churches. He joined “Choices and Voices for Peace” at the State Capitol; this included ecumenical and interfaith partners advocating for peace during the November electoral process. In this process the Council assisted Bishop Kusserow and Lutheran synods across the Commonwealth in coordinating ecumenical support for this event. We also promoted a time a prayer for peace across the Commonwealth on the Sunday preceding the election on November 5th.

We continue to support the justice work of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, Pittsburgh, PA, as it celebrated Juneteenth Celebration, participating in worship. I also joined the anniversary celebration event of Vine Memorial Baptist Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. I celebrated with the Eastern Pennsylvania Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church as they welcomed their new bishop and our current board member, Bishop Cynthia Moore Koikoi.

We have been asked to work with the McElhatten Foundation and the Coalition to Transform Advanced Care to collaborate with Black Congregations in the Pittsburgh area on issues of health care. The aim of the effort is to engage Black congregants in the process of developing advanced directives and address issues of health care.

We also initiated a partnership with the Thriving Earth Exchange to implement community gardens on the site of the United Church Center, as we address and identify focus areas in food insecurity. This is a project around which we will recruit congregations and community members to participate. This will start in spring of 2025.

As people of faith, it is important that we dialogue, even in the face of theological differences and perspectives. This is how we build the Body of Christ and the Beloved Community. The Pennsylvania Council of Churches is creating models for engaging conversations that will build relationships and create peace. This is the role that we play.

We participated in the Clergy Convocation that is scheduled inclusive of clergy from the Penn Northeast, Penn Central, Penn Southeast and Penn West Conferences of the United Church of Christ. We also joined the joint meeting of these conferences as they voted affirmatively to merging with a single Pennsylvania Conference that will be called the Keystone Conference. This action is slated for ratification at the General Synod of the United Church of Christ which meets in Kansas City Missouri July 2025.

The Pennsylvania Council of Churches continues to provide significant advocacy that creates important connective and collaborative efforts within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. We look forward to continuing our work with your congregations and people as we engage our ongoing work in these challenging days. We remain committed to your work and are your faithful partners in the struggles for justice, liberation, and hope.

Larry D. Pickens
Executive Director