



The Pennsylvania Council of Churches is church bodies and agencies representing Anabaptist, Episcopal, Orthodox, Pentecostal, and Protestant communions in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania working together for Christian unity for the sake of the world. [John 17:23]

IMPORTANT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Future Planning Work. The Council continued its work on planning for the Council's future. It has revamped its Basis/Mission Statement, and has added a "Unity in Diversity" statement that commits the Council to "embodying a culture of inclusivity, equality, and justice." It has expanded and revised its membership categories so that: (1) only one Pennsylvania congregation is required to qualify as a church body member of the Council, and church bodies must contribute financially to the Council in order to maintain membership; (2) organizations and congregations that support the Council's mission can join as Affiliate members; and (3) individuals may join as "Friends" of the Council. It has changed the term limits for officers from three two year terms to two three year terms. While it continues its work on Board structure, member bodies may designate a proxy to attend in place of the body's executive, and it now permits electronic participation in meetings or votes.

The group will continue meeting to review and determine changes needed to the Council's Constitution/Bylaws and structure in order to live into the Council's mission.

Conferences and Meetings. The Council did not hold a single statewide conference in 2017, but instead conducted workshops around the issues of education and criminal justice reform.

The Council held a series of "School-to-Prison Pipeline" sessions around the state, using a trauma-informed lens to help participants understand the role of funding to ensure that all students have the resources they need to overcome barriers to learning, including poverty, race, disabilities, and language, among other things. Many Pennsylvania districts have significant populations that are heavily affected by these trauma-inducing conditions, and lack the tax base to provide sufficient support alone to help students overcome these conditions. Given the high correlation between students facing these conditions without sufficient support and those who end up in prison, these sessions helped to make the case for a fair school funding formula and adequate funding in order to bridge the gap. These sessions were supported by funds from the William Penn Foundation through a collaborative grant from POWER in Philadelphia (a PICO organizing group).

The Council also held two events (with another scheduled for April 2018) called "Faithful Advocacy for Criminal Justice Reform: Principles and Practice." These sessions were designed to educate participants about the criminal justice system/mass incarceration at the federal and state levels, "Clean Slate" legislation (designed to remove a barrier for formerly incarcerated persons for qualified offenses at the state level), and how to advocate effectively for this legislation. Participants were asked/encouraged to participate in advocacy visits with their Pennsylvania representatives with support from the Council's Public Witness program. This effort was supported in part by funds from the Mennonite Central Committee.

The Council facilitated another visioning meeting involving a range of organizations involved in criminal justice reform—determining how the groups can work together to forward a reform agenda for PA.

The Council also supported a workshop on "sanctuary congregations" held in Lancaster to provide interested congregations with information and resources needed to offer sanctuary to undocumented persons threatened with deportation.

Support for Collaborative Efforts. The Council has received support from several different sources aimed at supporting collaborative efforts involving the Council and other denominations and coalitions.

- The Mennonite Central Committee's (MCC) East Coast Office reauthorized its \$10,000 grant to support advocacy in areas that are particularly important to Anabaptist traditions: criminal justice reform, immigration, gun violence, and education. They were joined by an additional \$5,000 grant from the MCC's Washington Office. The grant runs through March 2018. It is the Council's hope that this funding will be renewed. There has been a continuing focus on building a Healing Communities network in PA, and on calling for closure of the Berks County Family Detention Center that is holding refugee families far in excess of the time they should be held. Additional efforts in 2017 included the "Faithful Advocacy" events described above, building networks among stakeholders active in work around immigration/immigration reform, conversations with groups involved with reducing gun violence, including Heeding God's Call and CeaseFirePA.
- A grant of \$10,000 from the William Penn Foundation (through the Coalition for Fair Education Funding) continued to support the Council's efforts to reform school funding in PA. The funds have been used to do basic education on equity and adequacy of public school funding in PA, and to support the "school to prison pipeline" sessions described above.

- The National Religious Campaign Against Torture gave a grant of \$2,500 to support the Council's criminal justice work, good for the first six months of 2017. It was used to support the visioning work described above.

The funding has continued to support part-time efforts by an Advocacy Programs Coordinator, John-Michael Cotignola-Pickens. The Council will continue to seek additional funding from other sources to support its work.

Other Activities

- The Board of Directors adopted two resolutions—one on fair districting, and one on the minimum wage.
- The Council:
 - Issued several public statements: [A Statement of Action on the Berks County Residential Center](#) (January 20, 2017); [Pennsylvania Council of Churches Condemns Violence and Vandalism Against Jewish and Muslim Communities](#) (February 27, 2017); [A Statement on the Events on Charlottesville, VA and Addressing Ideologies of Hate](#) (August 16, 2017); [A Call for Solidarity with Our Neighbors Impacted by Hurricane Harvey and Flooding](#) (August 31, 2017); [Call for Solidarity with Our Neighbors Impacted by Hurricane Irma](#) (September 13, 2017);
 - Conducted three Healing Communities trainings (Pittsburgh, Chambersburg and Williamsport), one "train-the-trainer" Healing Communities training (Chambersburg), and one session to introduce the concept to congregations (Chambersburg). Another session is scheduled for Lebanon in March 2018; and
 - Offered greetings to five member bodies: (1) the Northeast Synod of the ELCA; (2) the Western PA Conference of the United Methodist Church; (3) the Schwenkfelder Church; (4) the Western PA District of the Church of the Brethren; and (5) the Episcopal Diocese of Central PA.
- Both of the Council's websites, www.pachurches.org and www.pachurchesadvocacy.org, have continued to evolve.
- The Director of Advocacy and Ecumenical Outreach attended a three-day Climate Reality Project Training in Pittsburgh and qualified as a Climate Leader to educate Pennsylvanians about the climate crisis we face.

COUNCIL MINISTRIES

Commission on Public Witness & Public Witness Ministry. The Council's advocacy efforts in 2017 focused on the following areas:

- Advocacy for a Pennsylvania budget with sufficient revenues that addresses the concerns of people of faith.
- Human needs/poverty-related work.
- Efforts to raise the minimum wage, primarily in coordination with the Raise the Wage PA Coalition.
- Public education funding, primarily in coordination with the Campaign for Fair Education Funding.
- Criminal justice reform.
- Immigration, particularly around calling for the closure of the Berks County Family Detention Center that is holding refugee women and children for long periods of time.
- Environment, primarily climate change and protecting water resources, in coordination with several organizations.

The Commission continues to work on efforts aimed at improving the lives of people on the margins, and addressing problems with our political system.

Commission on Unity & Relationships. The Council worked in coordination with Rabbi George Stern and Chris Satullo (former journalist/Keystone Civic Ventures) to launch an effort toward statewide congregationally-based civil dialogue aimed at bringing together individuals/congregations with wide differences in political and theological positions. An initial session took place in early December at the Germantown Jewish Centre, with a second session in the works with St. Martin-in-the-Fields Episcopal Church, then a joint meeting involving both congregations.

Commission on Common Ministries. The Council has continued to provide support to its Trucker/Traveler Ministry, Campground Ministries, and Farmworker Ministries. Work continues on building a Healing Communities network in Pennsylvania.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Council staff continue to discuss activities and areas where the Council might engage to be of service to our members, the wider faith community.