



REPORT ON THE COUNCIL'S WORK IN 2014

The Pennsylvania Council of Churches is the state-wide ecumenical presence in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Formed by 42 church bodies and agencies representing 20 Anabaptist, Anglican, Orthodox, Pentecostal, and Protestant communions (denominations), the Council works for Christian unity for the sake of the world. [John 17:23]

2014 was a year of transition for the Council with the retirement of Executive Director Rev. Gary Harke on March 1, the naming of Jan Gulick, the Council's Director of Finance and Facilities, to serve as interim director, the retirement of long-time Executive Assistant Darlene Schlegel in August, and the addition of responsibilities and title change for Rev. Sandy Strauss to Director of Advocacy and Ecumenical Outreach. The Council also initiated a process of discernment for the future.

IMPORTANT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Several of the Council's Commissions and Committees have been revamped and revitalized with the addition of new members and staff leadership.

The Council relaunched a quarterly newsletter, **Ecumenical News**, in the Fall of 2014.

The Council held a very successful event in November, "Witness in Common: An Exploration of Full Communion Agreements" in Camp Hill. The conference was well-attended (over 80 in attendance), and evaluations were glowing and indicated that all aspects of the event were well-received.

The Pennsylvania Religious Leaders' Gathering in December in State College provided a space for sharing ideas, concerns, prayer and worship for the attendees which included representatives from several Council member bodies, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Harrisburg, and Council staff.

COUNCIL MINISTRIES

Commission on Public Witness & Public Witness Ministry. The Council's advocacy efforts in 2014 focused on the following areas:

- Human needs/poverty-related work, primarily in coordination with the Coalition for Low Income Pennsylvanians (CLIP) (NOTE: The Director is a co-chair of this group.) Much of the effort focused on educating legislators working on a poverty initiative launched by Rep. Dave Reed. Other work focused on the "cliff effect" (how increases in wages affect public benefits) and launching a coalition called "Making Work Pay" that will address related issues.
- 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, focusing on developing a new formula for funding public schools in Pennsylvania.
- Criminal justice reform, primarily in coordination with the Pennsylvania Network Against Torture and the National Religious Campaign Against Torture, focusing on the misuse of solitary confinement

The Commission set the direction for the Council's advocacy efforts during the 2015-16 legislative session to focus on education on and boosting of civic engagement, addressing "upstream" issues (such as many of the issues named above) in order to improve the lives of people on the margins, and where possible, addressing the role of money in our political system

Commission on Unity & Relationships. As noted above, a team of planners, under the umbrella of the Commission, planned and carried out the extremely successful "Witness in Common: An Exploration of Full Communion Agreements." The Commission is interested in exploring future programs that will foster unity and relationships among Christians in Pennsylvania.

Commission on Common Ministries. The Council has continued to provide support to its Trucker/Traveler Ministry, Leisure Ministries, and Farmworker Ministries. The Commission also started discussion about other areas of ministry where the Council might engage in the future. On a sadder note, the I-80 Trucker/Traveler Ministry in Brookville lost long-time Chaplain Bob Bickerstaff on September 15. Bob served the ministry since March of 1993. Rick Youngdahl assisted Bob in his last days, and is now serving as the full-time chaplain in this ministry.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Council staff have begun meeting regularly to discuss activities and areas where the Council might engage to be of service to our members, the wider faith community, and the world, and how we might boost the Council's visibility so as to achieve maximum impact for our efforts. Some areas include:

- Rebuilding/redesigning the Council's website to make it feel more inviting and user-friendly, with appropriate elements to drive viewers to the site.
- Making more and better use of social media.
- Conversation with the Partnership for Sacred Places on how the United Church Center can become a better resource to the community.
- Exploring the revival of former events such as the Pastors' Conference and a Council advocacy day at the Capitol, as well as new statewide and regional events of interest to clergy and faith leaders in Pennsylvania.
- Continuing to focus on making the United Church Center a more energy-efficient facility.
- Exploring how the Service Department could expand and/or improve services.