

## **Ecumenical Relations Mission Team (ERMT) Report to PSEC Spring 2018 Meeting**

The ERMT continues to live into the results of recent years' commitment to draw committee membership from both the Pennsylvania Southeast and Penn Northeast Conferences.

Since last year's report from the ERMT, changes have taken place in the leadership of the team, but also the vision of the team's work. The ERMT is becoming a coordinating committee supporting the wonderful variety of ecumenical relationships within the boundaries of our Conferences, and beyond. The ERMT encourages congregations of our Conferences to participate in Ecumenical relationships in local settings, and also to in turn seek out ways to engage persons of faith beyond the local setting as well.

Because of the recent history of the work of the team, the following four ecumenical relationships continue their important work, with primary contacts:

- 1) Anhalt District Church (Germany) Partnership-Martha Kriebel, David Charles Smith
- 2) Cuban Partnership-Darryl Cruz
- 3) Amigos de Guatemala-Roger and Karen Heim
- 4) Shared Ministry Congregations between Eastern PA UCC and Lutheran Congregations-Jerel Gade

In addition to these aforementioned relationships, several other relationships are in development, including but not only, a relationship with the Church of South India.

### **Committee Members:**

Darryl	Cruz
Judith	Fryer
Jerel	Gade
Karen	Heim
Roger	Heim
Martha	Kriebel
Bob	Krug
Russ	Mitman
Cheryl	Moore
Frank	Schaffer
David Charles	Smith
John	Snyder-Samuelson
Bob	Stewart
Bill	Worley

New Chair: Homer Royer

- 1) Anhalt District Church (Germany) Partnership:

Significant portions of this report emanate from the report made to the UEK Forum Spring Meeting.

2017 was filled with highlights:

- Application forms and approvals have been completed for Solomon's UCC, Macungie to be in partnership with The Village Church, Rodleben, in Anhalt District Church.
- Anhalt Kirchentag - May 24-29, timed to celebrate Ascension Day in Dessau with the Anhalt District Church hosting days filled with seminars, festive displays and events, an Ascension Day ecumenical service staged in front of the Rathaus, followed with a Kilometer-long dinner table spread with food provided by each congregation in the district.
- The tour of the Wartburg Castle
- Sunday's worship service along the banks of the river overlooking Wittenberg – kickoff to the Reformation 500 Summer. 8 members of our ERMT attended as guests of the Anhalt District Church.
- The second event was made possible by our UCC/UEK working group that meant two from our ERMT (Martha Kriebel, PSE, and David Charles Smith, PNE) were privileged to spend July 25-August 1 in the "Ecumenical Tent" in Wittenberg, airfare paid by UEK/UCC and lodging provided by the German Church. THANK YOU! (see attached summary for highlights and impressions shared upon return home.)
- THE Reformation Celebration on Reformation Sunday, October 29<sup>th</sup>, was the Ecumenical Commemoration in Philadelphia's Episcopal Cathedral, held as a "Service of Baptismal Remembrance" with interdenominational and interracial participation.

2018 activities:

An August 12-17, 2018 Colloquy in Berlin will be an experience to use the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. as the time for "Reclaiming the Hope of Martin Luther King Today." The ERMT is honored to be invited and will send six:

In addition to the Penn SE and Penn Conference Minister, two pastors: Martha Kriebel and David Charles Smith and two laypeople. One from PSE is Laura-Jill Schwartz and another from PNE is to be named.

2) Cuban partnership:

Our partnership continues with The Fellowship of Baptist Churches of Cuba formed in 2007 when a group of Conference representatives, led by members of Old First Reformed United Church of Christ in Philadelphia, visited Cuba. Since then several groups have exchanged visits to make connections with Cuban Christians who share a passion for the gospel and a commitment to the church.

As of this writing a potential trip to Cuba is in the works for the Fall.

3) Amigos de Guatemala

February, 2018: Phase Three - near completion!



With the PNEC Board of Directors approval to be partnered with the PSEC Ecumenical Relations Mission the partnership enables both Conferences to share in PNEC's Amigos de Guatemalan Mission. The project will provide health care for the people of Monte Margarita.

2018 activities:

A trip was planned for May as of the preparation of this report. More teams will be traveling there in the coming months with a need for people to staff medical missions.

4) Shared Ministry Congregations between Eastern PA UCC and Lutheran Congregations

A new manual for pastors serving Lutheran/UCC congregations with guidelines for their ministry is being prepared by Jane Kropa.

Addendum to the ERMT Report from the Anhalt District Church Partnership

Summary of two events (Prepared by the Rev Martha Kriebel):

**Reformation 500: Past, Present, Future**

*A Partnership Celebrated and Carried Forward*

All across the United States Conferences of the United Church of Christ are partnered with a parish or district church (comparable to a UCC Conference). The UCC side relates to the UEK (Union Evangelischer Kirchen) with Evangelische/n meaning Protestant. Now the UEK relates to the EKD – the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland - the larger union of German Churches which associates with us as the UCC Working Group.

Our PSE and PNE Conferences comprise the Ecumenical Relations Mission Team and are in partnership with the Evangelische Kirche Anhalt. Over the years pastors and laypeople have visited back and forth, and the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation in 2017 became a time to be invited to two events:

The first came through our Anhalt partnership. May 23 through May 29 when 8 from our ERMT were guests of our Anhalt District Church for the Ecumenical Kirchentag that began on Ascension Day in Dessau and culminated on Sunday at the Ecumenical service attended by 135,000 in the field

along the Elbe river overlooking Wittenberg. It was the kickoff to Reformation Summer. At our Sunday night dinner with our hosts Rev. Worley presented a handcrafted holder with five candles, each candle representing 100 years. Each of those who served as hosts for the PSEC/PNEC visitors received a smaller holder with one candle.

The second event was a week at the Reformation Summer: Reform 500, in Wittenberg's Lutherstadt. The invitation was extended to our UCC/UEK working group to spend July 25 through August 1 in the "Ecumenical Tent." Three pastors were chosen (Pastor Dwight Hein of Penn Central, Pastor David Charles Smith of PNE, and Pastor Martha Kriebel of PSE) with airfare paid by the UCC and lodging by the German Church. Each week three different groups, representing the worldwide, ecumenical mission of the German Church, worshiped together each morning and evening and presented seminars to visitors and to one another. It was a lesson in history for the three UCC visitors to remember that, the Lutheran Church and the Reformed Church became the Evangelische (Protestant) Kirche (Church) in 1817 – making this year the 200th anniversary for two of the four branches of the UCC that merged in 1934 to form the Evangelical and Reformed Church.

The UCC was partnered with the Lutheran Church of Tanzania and German representatives involved in the World Council of Churches' "Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel" (EAPPI) where volunteers serve for three months, living in Palestinian homes and accompanying laborers and school children back and forth through the checkpoint in the Israeli wall. To be in the company of these two groups of Christians and to be welcomed as friends privileged to hear their faith stories became a lasting source of inspiration. And to think this was only ONE week in a summer of on ongoing threesomes coming together in the "Ecumenical Tent!" For the three of us our banners (one – the UCC/UEK partnerships and the other - "God is still speaking ") and the rainbow comma pins became the talking points with all ages and especially the youth.



Their impression of us is that we are a totally inclusive church, reaching out to welcome and serve everyone. A few said the UCC serves to inspire them to work to become a German church that is like the UCC. We received their praise with humility and fear – knowing we have much work to do to live up others' impressions of us!

One afternoon we ventured to lay the UCC "Extravagant Welcome" mat in front of the Castle Church door that displays Luther's 95 Theses, and asked a passerby to take our photo.

Both visits created lasting impressions, and the frustration of not being able to find the time or the setting or enough listening ears and open hearts to pass on the lasting, life-changing experiences! A sampling of the Ecumenical Kirchentag is:

- The kilometer-long dinner with food brought by each of the parishes on Ascension night and placed on tables set end-to-end that stretched from Dessau's town hall to St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church whose priest participated in the earlier service.
- The May 28 Ecumenical Service – with Protestants, Roman Catholics, Orthodox, and Independent churches worshipping together and hearing a moving sermon preached by the Archbishop of the Anglican Church of South Africa, Thabo Makgoba, successor to Desmond Tutu, youth everywhere servicing as hosts and ushers and enthusiastically singing; then Holy Communion served from tables set around the sprawling field with local pastors passing bread and cup to be shared to people forming a line or taken to those sitting on the ground.

A sampling from the week in Wittenberg serving in the “Ecumenical Tent” as representatives of the United Church of Christ:

- The number of youth from all over the world who responded to an invitation sent two years in advance to volunteer at the world exhibits, contribute art work for displays, attend seminars with a two-part focus; one to recover the spark struck 500 years ago and that keeps on reforming the church back to the life and mission of Christ.  
The second was to live out their commitment to Christ in ways that witness through social ministries, justice and peace, and care for the environment – that parallel our UCC 's “Three Loves. “
- The emphasis that the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary is NOT a celebration, a “carnival,” to relive the posting of the 95 Theses on Oct. 17, 1517 – the hammer blow heard ‘round the world,” but a call to carry the Reformation FORWARD, to be today's Reformers who witness to and live out being the servant church of the Servant Christ, a call read in the banners and headlines of our UCC, affirmed in Conference's 20/20 Vision, the UCC's Habakkuk Group and “Three Loves.”

Report prepared by Rev. Homer Royer, Chair of the ERMT Committee