

Ecumenical Relations Mission Team Report – Spring 2022

“All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, Lord; they will bring glory to your name.” Psalm 86:9 NIV

The Ecumenical Relations Mission Team (ERMT) is delighted to share in the joyful labors of both the Penn Northeast (PNEC) and Pennsylvania Southeast Conferences (PSEC). We benefit from the active support and participation of both Conferences. At the same time, we recognize the work in which we are involved is on behalf of those who believe in and share the ministry of the congregations of both Conferences.

Our work revolves around maintaining and expanding upon the connections between people from our conference churches with Christian persons around the world. This involves strengthening relations with members of churches in nations and regions with historic connections to the United Church of Christ and our predecessor bodies. In recent years, we also have made new partnerships with churches that have cultural and theological ties to UCC churches within our Conference boundaries. We are working to embody the motto of the United Church of Christ “That they all may be one” (John 17:21) by strengthening our connection to Christians in other countries and other denominations. We invite all of the members of our Conferences to pray for our partner churches and their members. We also invite all of the members of the PNEC and PSEC to consider ways you would like to personally support and become part of the ERMT’s work and mission.

In the past, members of our team have had the opportunity to travel to the places our partner churches are located. Unfortunately, Covid-19 has put a hold on travel. Over the past two years, we have spent time learning from and with our partners through ZOOM meetings, emails and phone calls.

We have Kirchengemeinschaft (a special church fellowship) with German partners, specifically the Anhalt District Church of the Union of Evangelical Churches (UEK) of Germany. This region is in part of the area that was formerly East Germany. We participate in the larger UCC (USA) and UEK (Germany) events and gatherings. In the past few years, the German churches have invited UCC members to join them in an examination of problems created by White Privilege. Like the United States, Germany is a diverse nation

that continues to struggle with the legacy of racism and ongoing problems with discrimination against people who don't identify as White.

We support the work of the Amigos de Guatemala. There is a report from the work of the Amigos elsewhere in these documents.

We work to support the Shared Ministry Congregations between the Eastern Pennsylvania UCC and Lutheran congregations. This groups meets and encourages the work of Shared Ministry Churches and Pastors.

We have a formal partnership between the Church of South India, Medak Diocese. In 2021, we began planning for a visit of a delegation of pastors and leaders from the Church of South India to Eastern Pennsylvania. We have postponed the visit to the spring of 2023 because of continuing issues related to the pandemic, including obstacles obtaining tourist visas for our guests. In spring of 2023, we will hosts guests from Southern India for two weeks in our conferences.

We have a Japan Mission Partnership with UCC Missionaries Jeffrey Mensendiek cooperating with the PNEC and Martha Mensendiek with the PSEC. Every year, members of our churches participate in a yearly Christmas Card Exchange with UCC Churches in Japan.

Our Team meets quarterly, and works to facilitate the work of constituent working groups which engage their work between Team meetings. Our meetings over the past two years have been held over ZOOM, and this will continue to be our meeting method until we are no longer concerned about the pandemic. For more information on the work of the various subcommittee please contact the chair, or members of the Team as listed at the end of this report.

On 2022, we hope to strengthen our connections with our partner churches in Germany, India, Guatemala, and Japan, as well and our Lutheran Ecumenical partners.

Our committee members are Bonnie Bates, Bill Worley, Darryl Cruz, Judith Fryer, Jerel Gade, Karen Heim, Roger Heim, Martha Kriebel, Charles Kuthuru, Russ Mittman, Frank Schaffer, David Charles Smith, Chandra Soans, Linda Lenhart, Ashley Snyder, Amelie Sell, Chair.