

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND OUTREACH COMMITTEE

Report to Diocesan Convention 2023

Members of the Social Justice and Outreach Committee include the following: Elizabeth Duckstein, St. Paul's, Mt Lebanon; Patricia Eagon Stafford, St. Paul's, Mt. Lebanon; Sam Salopek, St. Paul's, Mt. Lebanon, Julie Smith, Chaplain, Caring Hospice Services, Bill Farra, Community of Celebration, Aliquippa; Marilyn Mulvihill, St. Brendan's, Franklin Park; Marianne Novy, Redeemer, Squirrel Hill, Chair; Wesley Rohrer, St. Andrew's, Highland Park; Tom Slater, Calvary, East Liberty; and Linda Tardy Wilson, Retired Deacon.

We are committed to promoting service, education, and advocacy regarding social justice issues. We draw on the Episcopal Church's public policy positions and make interfaith and other intergroup alliances to achieve a positive impact in our region.

At last year's convention we successfully proposed a resolution advocating ways to reduce gun violence and held a workshop attended by about 40 people with speakers from the gun violence prevention organizations, CeasefirePA, and Heeding God's Call To End Gun Violence. Bishop Solak and other Episcopal bishops of PA led a large rally against gun violence in Harrisburg on March 6, attended by members of St Paul's, Calvary, St Brendan's, Redeemer and others.

On April 30 we held a zoom panel, "Gun Violence in Pittsburgh: Causes and Life-Saving Solutions," with Josh Fleitman of Ceasefire PA and Lavonnie Bickerstaff, Assistant Chief of Police. We promoted the Memorial to the Lost, a display of T-shirts at St. Brendan's, St. Paul's, St. Andrew's, Calvary, Holy Cross, and many other local churches, commemorating more than 100 gun violence victims killed in Allegheny County in the past year. These memorials inspired hundreds of letters sent to legislators supporting gun violence prevention bills. We also promoted St. Brendan's and Calvary's showings of "Through My Lens," an exhibit of photographs and writings by children from the Homewood Neighborhood, in which the threat of gun violence plays a part. There will be a rally "Saving Lives: Ending Gun Violence" in Harrisburg November 15 this year, again promoted by Heeding God's Call, and members of St. Brendan's, St. Paul's, and Calvary and other churches are planning to attend

On September 17 we held a zoom panel, "Inhumane Conditions at the Allegheny County Jail: Causes and Solutions," co-sponsored by Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network (PIIN). Our speakers were Brittany Hailer of the Pittsburgh Institute for Nonprofit Journalism, who has researched some of the deaths at the jail, John Kenstowicz, a social worker who surveyed both correctional officers and health workers at the jail and found profound dissatisfaction with jail policies in both groups, and Sister Barbara Finch, who worked as a nurse at the jail for ten years and identified problems such as racism and privatization as well as supervision of health care workers by administrators who demanded they violate good health care practice. The Rev. Julie Smith contributed questions and a closing prayer.

On February 19 we arranged a zoom panel, cosponsored by Pennsylvania Interfaith Power and Light, on how Pittsburgh can combat environmental racism. Our speakers were Allysa Lyon, Director, Black Environmental Collective, UrbanKind, Patrick Campbell, Executive Director, Group Against Smog and Pollution, and Michele Naccarati Chapkis, Executive Director, Women for a Healthy Environment. Deacon Linda T Wilson contributed questions.

For a long time, we have given grants of up to \$500 to help parishes grow healthy food. Grants from church organizations and individuals supplement our budget for this purpose. This year, we have contributed such funding to Holy Cross, All Saints, St Brendan's, St. David's, Calvary, and the Shepherd Wellness Community. We helped revitalize the walk-in food pantry at Trinity Cathedral. Activities were reduced because of Covid, but they are now drawing 20-25 people each of the four days it is open, and some people find the Cathedral a welcoming place to stay after they have received food.

Because we have heard that the LGBTQIA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer/questioning, intersex, and allies) community is concerned about growing hostility, we support and want to publicize the decision for St. Paul's, Mt. Lebanon, to host potluck dinners for this community.

Also, we want to publicize interfaith dialogues. Church of the Redeemer co-sponsored a series of dialogues on Biblical interpretation with Temple Beth Shalom, which may continue. Christian/Jewish dialogues regularly take place at Rodef Shalom, at noon on the first Thursday of the month. At Calvary, the rector and Rabbi Aaron Bisno usually give a class together Sunday at 10 am. In another kind of interfaith effort, Amen to Action, an ecumenical Christian group, organized parishioners of many churches to pack meals for the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary on Saturday, October 28.

The diocese has given us the responsibility of recommending the distribution of the Lambeth Fund, which is supposed to be divided equally among an international organization, a national or regional one, and a local one. In 2022 the Lambeth Fund totaled \$4,732. We decided to recommend World Central Kitchen for our international donation, the Equal Justice Institute, headed by Bryan Stevenson (which works against lynching and racism in sentencing for our national donation, and Off the Floor Pittsburgh for our local donation. Each received \$1577.33. We had \$850 left in our budget, which we contributed to the Neighborhood School.

From our own budget, we have this year contributed \$500 to PIIN, the Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network, which the diocese has helped for years, \$250 to the Pennsylvania Council of Churches, and \$150 each to Group Against Smoke and Pollution, Women for a Healthy Environment, and the Black Environmental Collective of Urbankind, organizations that have supplied speakers to our panel on environmental justice.

As a committee under the auspices of Diocesan Council, we are grateful, as always, to Council for support.

Respectfully submitted,
Marianne Novy, Chair