

Peace, Justice, and Inclusion Division Report for 2020

Formerly known as the Mission and Outreach Division, the Peace, Justice, and Inclusion (PJI) Division advocates for God's justice throughout the local, national, and worldwide community. The Division holds monthly meetings. It is organized as a confederation of committees/groups sharing areas of interest, including Benevolence, Green Team, Gun Violence Prevention, Habitat for Humanity, Hunger, Immigration/Sanctuary, Jail Ministry, LGBTQIAI+, PACEM, PROSAMI, and Racial Justice.

The PJI Divisional meetings include reports from its constituent groups as well as reports from members who participate in local activities advancing social justice. For instance, Billie Best attended the October 14, 2020 Zoom meeting of Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) on "Community Safety for All". Rev. Dorothy Piatt shared the Congregational Action Toolkit that was made available at the meeting with all PJI members.

PJI Divisional meetings also host local activists as speakers who discuss their groups activities. For example, the PJI's December meeting hosted Kimberly Fontaine, Director of Alliance for Interfaith Ministries (AIM), who discussed the AIM's work to address the eviction crisis in the Charlottesville/Albemarle area.

During this era of great social need, efforts to maximize the impact of funds made available to the groups of the PJI Division are also made through its Divisional meetings. PJI groups with surplus funds approved a PJI plan to pool their surpluses, which, if unspent, would return to the Church's general funds. They authorized the allocation of this surplus to PACEM.

Although the pandemic limited opportunities for personal interaction, PJI members continued to engage in efforts to address social problems. Below are highlights of the activities of the PJI's constituent groups in 2020. If you would like to become involved with any of these committees/groups, the report below includes contact information. In addition, please do not hesitate to contact me (John Echeverri-Gent, johnneg@virginia.edu, 434-806-2855), and I'll put you in touch with the right person(s)!

BENEVOLENCE

The Benevolence Committee allocates funds provided by the Church to community groups addressing social problems around the region.

Donations through the annual budget

In 2020, with thanks to the Westminster congregation, the Benevolence Committee, a part of PJI, distributed \$91,802 to 28 organizations. In so doing, the Committee considered how much an organization would benefit from a donation, whether one or more WPC members were active in the organization, and the application the organization submitted.

Given the uncertainties due to the pandemic last spring, the Committee did not fund new organizations,

and the Committee presented a revised budget with level funding for continuing to sustain organizations from 2019 with \$16,272 was held back as Undesignated funds for a community need. Letters were sent in the spring stating that we hoped to be able to fund and that we would distribute funds as Westminster was able to raise funds throughout the year. Benevolence funds were fully raised. Sustaining funds to these organizations were distributed half in June and half in November 2020. The Benevolence Committee decided to focus on our community's need of the ongoing eviction crisis for both the Undesignated Benevolence funding and for the Mission Endowment Fund.

Organizations receiving sustaining funding of \$5000 or more included the Alliance for Interfaith Ministries (AIM), PROSAMI, PACEM (headquarters), The Haven, and Westminster Child Care Center Scholarships.

Other organizations receiving donations include Blue Ridge Abortion Assistance Fund, Casa Alma, Charlottesville Center for Peace and Justice, Charlottesville Free Clinic, Child Health (previously Jefferson Area CHIP), CROP Walk, Emergency Food Network, Foothills, Good News Prison and Jail Ministry, IMPACT, International Rescue Committee, La Leche League, Literacy Volunteers, MACAA (Hope House), Mediation Center of Charlottesville, New City Arts, Piedmont Housing Alliance, Sexual Assault Resource Agency (SARA), Shelter for Help in Emergency (SHE), Virginia Organizing, and Virginians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty.

Funding under the income from the Mission Endowment Fund

The Benevolence Committee announced the 2020 Mission Endowment Fund focus on our community's need of the ongoing eviction crisis. Funding under the Mission Endowment Fund income supports one-time, transformative projects or startup activities within or outside the congregation that further the mission and outreach of Westminster Presbyterian Church. Preference is given to organizations in which WPC members were actively involved.

This year, organizations supporting families with programs addressing rental eviction were requested to complete applications to Westminster for donations to support their efforts in addressing rental stability and eviction avoidance. There were three applications received plus an additional request from PACEM to further aid in funding their housing of the homeless. After review of applications, one of the three was recommended for the Mission Endowment Fund funding for its expertise in addressing immediate eviction notice crises, support of Westminster's mission, and Westminster member direct involvement; that was the Alliance for Interfaith Ministries (AIM). The amount to AIM was increased to round up the amount with Benevolence Undesignated funds.

Two applications, Piedmont Housing Alliance and PACEM were favorably received, and found best to be placed under our Undesignated Benevolence support. Piedmont Housing Alliance addresses long-term housing stability with housing counseling, budgeting, utilizing available funding resources, and has been able to prevent evictions of families who stay in its program. And the balance of Undesignated Benevolence support available went to PACEM to aid in covering additional costs due to the COVID-19 pandemic in sheltering homeless individuals. Westminster continued our commitment to PACEM in different ways this year due to the reality that Westminster cannot safely share its space with PACEM to provide shelter in our facility during a pandemic due to our continued commitment to the functioning and success of the Westminster Child Care Center program.

In the winter of 2020, the income at our disposal totaled of \$14,177 of Mission Endowment Funds and as well the Undesignated Benevolence Funds. They were distributed as follows: Alliance for Interfaith Ministries (\$15,000), Piedmont Housing Alliance (\$12,500) and PACEM (\$2,852).

In 2021, with the continued impressive support of the Westminster congregation, the Committee hopes to continue to help our neighbors in need in our community through the organizations of our community in a manner similar to what we have achieved together this year.

Committee Chair: Kobby Hoffman kobbyhoffman@aol.com

Committee Members: Kobby Hoffman, Chair, Cyndy Martin, Forrest Kerns, Sally Christopher, Steve Wilson, Allyson Manson-Davies, Jana Campbell Goetz, Keri Hall, Nancy O'Brien

GREEN TEAM

The Green Team works to make the programs and facilities of the church more sustainable. The team joins the advocacy for green energy at the local, state, and national level.

Over the past year it successfully achieved recertification as an Earth Care Congregation and also participated in planning and advocacy efforts with the Charlottesville Climate Collaborative, Virginia Interfaith Power & Light, and the Virginia Conservation Network. It made arrangements, with the assistance of Ken Henry, for a group of congregation members to make a weekend trip to imperiled Tangier Island in early May; unfortunately, the trip had to be postponed because of the pandemic. A planned speaking engagement by Earl Swift, author of "Chesapeake Requiem: A Year with the Water Men of Vanishing Tangier Island," was converted into a Zoom meeting. The Green Team distributed several films from the DC Environmental Film Festival. It continued recycling and solar energy efforts at Westminster, supported the Local Food Hub in their mission of alleviating hunger while supporting local farmers, and celebrated Climate in the Pulpits with Dorothy Piatt coordinating an ecological justice-themed World Communion Sunday worship and adult education, along with other faith communities and Virginia Interfaith Power & Light.

The Green Team has initiated plans for a survey to gauge the interest of the congregation in various initiatives, such as a virtual book club on environmental issues, discussions of streaming of environmental films or talks, ways to engage with local, regional, and national environmental groups and political leaders, socially distanced field trips, and so on.

Contact: Peter Gates ptg3va@gmail.com

GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Contacts: Debby and David Garth david@oakshadefarm.com

HABITAT FOR HUMANITY

Westminster's involvement with Habitat in 2019 was on two primary fronts:

Building houses

Contact: Steve Wilson sgwilson22901@gmail.com

Building community

As Habitat began building neighborhoods, not just individual houses, it became clear that partner families come from very diverse backgrounds with equally diverse housing experiences. To prepare them to live together as good neighbors, Habitat developed a series of Community Conversations.

Contacts: Lucy Burnette and Carolyn Brown

HUNGER

In partnership with University Mission and PJI, Westminster participated in a food drive to benefit the UVA Community Food Pantry for students experiencing food insecurity. Our Associate Pastor for University and Social Justice Mission, Dorothy Piatt, regularly volunteered in the spring with hunger relief efforts at New Beginnings Christian Community.

Westminster hosted the 49th Annual Charlottesville/Albemarle CROP Hunger in October as a Virtual event because of the pandemic. Instead of our customary single-walk event, multiple small groups were formed. They selected their own date/time and walk route. The usual face-to-face solicitations were limited, so we emphasized communications through mailings, e-mails, and social media (Facebook). On-line contributions options were also important to our success. Westminster walkers and their supporters raised \$16,406.

Overall, our CROP Hunger WALK raised a total of \$33,801. Twenty-five percent of the total funds are being used to help feed families who are served through our local Emergency Food Network and Meals on Wheels of Charlottesville/Albemarle. Seventy-five percent is used by Church World Service to support their global hunger, self-help development, and disaster assistance activities.

I sincerely thank you participation and support,

Taylor Beard, CROP WALK Coordinator

Contact: Taylor Beard jtb@virginia.edu

IMMIGRATION/SANCTUARY

The church maintains an active involvement in the issues of immigration and sanctuary. The pandemic curtailed many of its activities. Some of the activities undertaken that the committee is normally involved in which were limited or postponed due to the pandemic include:

1. providing transportation to ICE appointments and court appearances,
2. recruiting and supporting volunteers assisting immigrant rights legal teams at the Farmville Detention Center (through the Capital Area Immigrant Rights coalition),
3. recruiting and supporting volunteers for the Rapid Response Hotline,
4. serving on the steering committee of the Central Virginia Sanctuary network,
5. supporting sanctuary for Maria at Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church,
6. supporting an immigrant bond fund for our local neighbors (Charlottesville Immigrant Freedom Fund, or CIFF),
7. providing education and advocacy to help protect our immigrant neighbors from discrimination, profiling, and arbitrary detention and deportation through participation in the Charlottesville Immigrant Resource and Advocacy Coalition,
8. advocating for financial support for Project Adelante, which supports Charlottesville volunteers providing legal assistance and humanitarian aid for refugees in Matamoros, Mexico, who are held there while awaiting their asylum hearing,
9. providing hospitality (clothing, snacks and water, medicine, assistance with tickets, contacting family members or sponsors) for refugees and asylum-seekers travelling through Charlottesville on the Greyhound bus, through Charlottesville Immigrant Transit Assistance (CHITA),
10. and introducing the “We Choose Welcome” campaign to describe Westminster’s advocacy for supporting and protecting our immigrant, refugee, and asylum-seeking neighbors.

Nonetheless, in 2020, WPC members continued financial support for sanctuary at Wesley Memorial, and the PJI committee contributed \$1000 to Sin Barreras to assist immigrant families with rental assistance needed due to the pandemic. Our Associate Pastor for University and Social Justice is working to reschedule a virtual “Border Is Here” workshop with CIFF. The committee initiated a motion to the PJI urging the Biden administration to quickly facilitate the resolution, without deportation, of the cases of those currently in sanctuary across the country. This petition was signed by religious and community organizations across the U.S. The PJI Division moved the motion before the Session which voted its approval.

Contact: Gene Locke lockegene@gmail.com

Prison Ministry

In March of 2020, all volunteer activities in our local jails were cancelled to decrease the risk of spreading the corona virus. At Albemarle-Charlottesville Regional Jail classes taught by 50 volunteers (Bible studies, writing, personal finance, etc.) were discontinued. Chaplain Varksa has been teaching classes himself by going from cell to cell and encouraging self-study and the use of the facility library. WPC made a contribution to the chaplaincy program, Good News Prison Ministry for religious material as well as a contribution to the general library for new books. Until we are able to work on programs inside the jail, we have begun discussion with the Chaplain on ways we might help someone newly released.

Contact: Kathy Redding redkva@me.com

LGBTQI+

As a joint effort with University Mission, PJI and our Associate Pastor worked with UKirk at UVA so that it could become a More Light campus ministry to increase visibility of our LGBTQIA+ open and promote an affirming presence on Grounds. The PJI also promoted an adult education session about LGBTQIA+ welcome and justice with Rev. Jess Cook (they/them) of More Light Presbyterians. Westminster served as a Community Faith Voice for Virginia TIES (Transgender Information and Empowerment Summit) October 14–17, 2020.

Contact: No chair currently. Please consider stepping up! Interested members may contact Pastor Dorothy Piatt dpiatt@westminsterva.org

PACEM (People and Congregations Engaged in Ministry) Homeless Shelter

Westminster has participated in PACEM for 15+ years. More than 100 volunteers participated in the shelter efforts last year.

In 2020, we fed and sheltered 45 men nightly for our planned dates from March 7 to 21, and extended our shelter nights through March 24, due to the start of social distancing measures. With the COVID-19 pandemic, the need to continue to shelter and feed our homeless neighbors didn't stop when the winter shelter season ended.

Our focus to support PACEM has shifted from providing congregate shelter in our own Fellowship Hall to preparing meals for up to 30 guests staying in larger church spaces. Meal volunteers are families and individuals who prepare parts of the dinner menu in their own homes and drop off meals at the local church site.

We've provided 10 nights of service since November and have committed to 6 more nights through February. Between 2 and 7 households are involved each night, and volunteers don't have personal contact with people outside their households or with PACEM staff or guests. The Westminster community continues to support the homeless community during the pandemic. At this time, PACEM has not asked our church to provide any on-site shelter in 2021.

Additionally, in 2020, the PJ&I committee provided a generous donation (\$ \$2149) to PACEM for their extra costs associated with the pandemic. I am humbled and grateful for the financial and community support that Westminster provides to PACEM.

Chair: Aurora Nichols aurora.nichols@gmail.com

PROSAMI

PROSAMI is dedicated to promoting the health of mothers and infants in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Contact: David Strider davidstrider9876@yahoo.com

RACIAL JUSTICE

Although there were a number of activities and events dealing with racial justice this year, our involvement has been dwindling. This trend has increased due to the pandemic.

As a joint effort of PJI and Christian Formation, our Associate Pastor for University and Social Justice Mission is leading a multi-week series on antiracism. PJI looks forward to continuing antiracism work and to resuming in-person volunteering and advocacy work when safely possible

An important initiative is the maintenance of an online “calendar” listing important events in the region concerning issues of racial justice. The calendar can be accessed at: bit.ly/WPCAntiracism

At this time when issues of racial justice have great urgency, it may be time for us as a congregation to reassess how we can best address racial justice issues in our community and beyond.

NOTE: Gail has faithfully led Westminster’s racial justice group for some time, but she is ready to turn the reins over to someone else! Please prayerfully consider becoming involved.

Report Submitted by: John Echeverri-Gent, Chair, Peace Justice and Inclusion Division, with thanks for contributions from Rev. Dorothy Piatt and the committee chairs/contact persons for the content under each group.