

1 The Centenary Fund and Preachers' Aid Society

2 **Report**

3 **Conference Board of Church and Society**

5 The Board continues to look at three major issues: Immigration, Prison Reform and Poverty Reduction. In the next
6 phase of our work, we will see beyond mercy ministries and work toward including justice ministries. We also look
7 at issues related to Affordable Housing, Peace and the Environment as well as other issues that are presented to
8 us.

9 As we look to the future, we will continue to support sending two young clergy to the Young Clergy Forum
10 sponsored by GBCS each year.

11 At the 2015 Annual Conference, we had a Dessert Time. This was co-sponsored by Religion and Race, Christian
12 Unity and Interfaith Relationships and Church and Society. This is a way to share how conference agencies work
13 together on issues. This type of collaboration will continue with these and other entities.

14 **Immigration** Began to look at ways to work with Justice for your Neighbors (JFoN) to get our churches to work
15 with immigrants that need legal assistance.

16 **Prison Reform** As we move toward justice ministries, we look at supporting legislation such as the Redeem Act.

17 **Poverty** The Board became members of the New Jersey Anti-Poverty Network. Through this entity, we are able
18 to inform our churches about resources and training opportunities.

19 With the approval of the Poverty Reduction Resolution, the Board is beginning to organize District Reduction
20 Poverty Committees.

21 **Peace with Justice** We were able to give one grant to Tansboro Trinity UMC to work with children.

22 **Affordable Housing** One of the new issues we are going to work on is affordable housing. This would relate to
23 working with the homeless to those that are of need of affordable housing.

24 Cynthia Ann Kent, Chair
25 Conference Board of Church and Society

28 **Report**

29 **Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns**

31 *In John 17:20-21, Jesus prays, not only for his disciples, but also for those, who are (literally) "trusting **into** me,
32 through their word". His petition is inclusive of both, "so that they **all** may be one" and also reveals that this
33 desired unity of faith is based on and reflective of Jesus and God's own oneness: "You are in me and I am in you; I
34 pray that they may also be one in us." Moreover, this unity is said to validate Jesus and his mission before the
35 world, "so that the world may trust that You sent me."*

36 At least, since the Edinburgh Missionary Conference in 1910, Jesus' prayer for unity has been central to that great
37 "Movement" of the Holy Spirit, called "Ecumenical" (meaning "world-wide"). It has opened the eyes of Christians
38 everywhere, to see Christ present and at work in each other, in the various churches, and in the many peoples
39 and persons with whom they minister. As most of our commission completes their second quadrennium of
40 service, we rejoice to bear witness to the ongoing power of this prayer, which speaks of a unity that for us as
41 United Methodists "is not an option", but "a gift to be received and expressed" (Discipline, 2012, #105, p. 88).

1 Of course, this movement toward Jesus' vision of unity has struggled with the same challenges that all of the
2 churches are facing in these times of transition. Yet those of us engaged in this work of unity are not dismayed;
3 rather, we would celebrate with you just a few of the signs of God's Spirit at work ecumenically, which we have
4 been privileged to see:

- 5 • "The Episcopal/Methodist Theology Day", sponsored with the Episcopal Diocese of Newark, was held at
6 Drew Seminary on September 17, 2015 (having been delayed earlier by snow). In Holy Communion and
7 through mutual dialogue, we joyfully explored with clergy and students the "Interim Agreement on Full
8 Communion" approved by both denominations.
- 9 • "The National Workshop on Christian Unity" – begun by Roman Catholics after Vatican 2 – has for over
10 50 years been a forum for ecumenical dialogue and leadership development. Several of our
11 commissioners have shared in its discussions of emerging ecumenical issues like mission in ethically and
12 religiously diverse cultures, interaction with newer "evangelical" churches, ongoing interreligious
13 dialogue, and intergenerational engagement. The next workshop meets on April 18-21 in Louisville,
14 Kentucky, with the hopeful theme, "Christian Unity: It May Be Closer than You Think". United Methodist
15 leadership has long played a significant role in the NWCU and, in the past decade, a workshop-affiliate
16 known as UMET (United Methodist Ecumenical & Interfaith Training) has emerged under the aegis of
17 the United Methodist Episcopacy's Office of Christian Unity and Interreligious Relationships.
- 18 • United Methodists are also serving the New Jersey Council of Churches, both on its Board of Directors
19 and in its working groups. The "Public Policy" group engages in legislative advocacy for impoverished
20 children, prison reform, and other justice concerns. Such topics are often addressed at the NJCC's annual
21 "Issues and Actions" event. Its "Theology" group has in recent years held discussions at Hightstown
22 U.M.C. on Dr. Miroslav Volf's *Allah: A Christian Response* and Dr. Karen Armstrong's *Twelve Steps to A
Compassionate Life*. It has also sponsored seminars on "Environment Theology" led by Dr. Laurel Kerns
23 of Drew Theological School, both at Drew University and in our Pinelands Center. On June 11, 2015, the
24 next environmentally focused seminar will examine Pope Francis' recent encyclical *Laudato Si' – On Our
Common Home* at St. George's Roman Catholic Church, Titusville, New Jersey, under the leadership of
25 Father Vincent Gartland.
- 26 • One of our members has also served on the "Intergenerational Think Tank" of the National Council of
27 Churches and, through Cynthia Kent, has been involved with the World Council of Churches, to which we
28 also have sent delegates.
- 29 • The commission has also sought at the behest of the U. M. Council of Bishops to lift up ecumenical
30 interaction and service with other Methodist denominations, like the African Methodist Episcopal,
31 Christian Methodist Episcopal, and African Methodist Episcopal Zion churches. We have also sent
32 delegates to the World Methodist Council.
- 33 • Likewise, we have sought to highlight the potential of our "Full Communion Agreement with the
34 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America", which is as yet unfulfilled.
- 35 • Also, over the years, we have raised up the importance of interfaith dialogue as an intrinsic part of Jesus'
36 unity agenda. We have done so through demonstration-dialogues at our "District Days of Learning" and
37 at "Abraham's Table" luncheons, sponsored by the Islamic based "Interfaith Dialogue Center" (now
38 known as "Peace Islands").
- 39 • Finally, every year, we have honored at least two worthy recipients of the Bishop's "Award for Christian
40 Unity and Interfaith Relations", often with many other candidates having to be passed over. This testifies
41 to the extensive grassroots involvement of our congregations and pastors in local ecumenical work
42 throughout the Greater NJ Conference.
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All of this activity and more are for us signs of the Holy Spirit at work, answering Jesus' prayer. As many of us complete our commission-terms, we look forward to seeing what wonders of grace lie ahead on the road to Jesus' all-inclusive unity. For, the words of Jesus' prayer go on with repetitive force, now as then: "The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." (John 17:22-23)

Submitted by the Rev. John Wesley Morrison, with the Rev. Jessica Campbell, Chair, on behalf of the Commission on Christian Unity & Interreligious Concerns

Report

CUMAC/ECHO

CUMAC Continues Mission to Feed People and Change Lives

The Center of United Methodist Aid to the Community, known to most simply as CUMAC, is deeply grateful to the churches of the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference for the consistent support that allows our ministry to grow in service. This year CUMAC proudly became the administering body of the Community Food Coalition (CFC). The CFC is a collaborative effort amongst 28 member food pantries committed to serving those in need in Passaic County and surrounding areas. It addresses hunger-related issues and manages shared food resources for Passaic County, while connecting New Jersey residents with feeding programs that best fit their needs.

The CFC was created with the understanding that hunger is a deep and pervasion issue in our community and beyond. To truly make a difference, synergistic collaboration is key. Many hands make light work, but many minds, voices and advocates make lasting change.

The addition of our newest program advances CUMAC's longstanding tradition of forward thinking and growth. That same ethos has led us on a 40 year journey from a small pantry in a borrowed United Methodist Church closet to the multi-programmatic response to hunger and poverty that CUMAC operates today. In 2015, our programs were able to reach many people needing to feel God's love through the action of his disciples.

- **CUMAC's food pantry helped around 38,000 people** put food on the table where otherwise they may have gone hungry. Around 2 million pounds of food were distributed.
- **Two mobile pantries ensured that same help and love was extended** to people living in underserved communities where barriers to food access are uniquely complex.
- **Our food depot was utilized by a network of feeding programs.** It provided the storage space, refrigeration, trucking and resources necessary to bolster smaller agencies and allow them to address hunger in their own communities.
- **Pathways to Work offered job training and experience to dozens of people** on the path to gainful employment.
- **The Community Closet gave disaster relief to lessen the burden of recovery for over 120 individuals** who had experienced fires, flooding and even a roof caving in, as well as quieter disasters like owning only flip flops in the middle of winter. Our thrift shop sold high quality goods at extremely affordable prices to low-income households as a means to boost self-sufficiency.
- **Place of Promise provided permanent, supportive housing** to around a dozen residents, assisting each individual with setting and meeting personal goals and helping them connect to critical resources on the path to meeting self-sufficiency.
- **Seasonal collections provided over 3,000 children** with Christmas gifts, Easter baskets and school supplies.