Justice & Advocacy

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Justice & Advocacy Committee
The Lehigh Conference of Churches

An occasional newsletter for our Lehigh Valley church congregations

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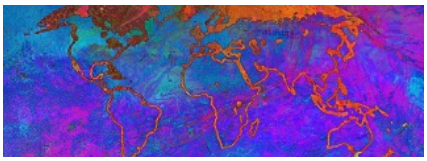

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What justice and/or advocacy issues has your church worked on lately? We'd love to feature your story!

Justice & Advocacy News
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http://ja.ppjr.org

Justice-Doing During COVID

Let Justice and Fairness flow like a river that never runs dry.
– Amos 5:24

Welcome to the Justice and Advocacy newsletter. During this time of COVID, J&A has stepped back from having workshops to discuss justice issues and brainstorming ideas on how to do advocacy. That doesn't mean that we should stop working together to make the world a more just place in which to live.

We bring this newsletter to you with items that the J&A Committee of the Lehigh Conference of Churches has been discussing since we stopped meeting in person in of March 2020. In addition, we hope to share what LCC congregations are doing for justice.

Celebrating God's Love at Pride Fest

by Sheila Clever, Peace & Justice Team
First Presbyterian Church of Allentown

Most recently, our Peace & Justice Team sponsored a table at the Lehigh Valley Pride Festival – August 15. The call to support our LGBTQ+ neighbors came a number of years ago, but it wasn't until 2017 that our church finally had a presence at the festival. I sent this note to my pastor, "*When I attended my first Presbyterian Peace Fellowship conference, my heart was so filled with joy that I could experience being a peacemaker AND being a Presbyterian at the same time that it was next to impossible to keep the tears from flowing. I'm feeling the same thing now - I've been at Pridefest in Allentown for many years, and to be there with my church is almost making my heart burst. Thank you so much!*"

Each year we've been at Pride Fest, we've offered peace-sign necklaces. Watching participants walk around the festival with pride and joy, wearing our necklaces, has been a highlight for me. Also knowing that LGBTQ+ pride has found a safe space to be expressed, even among churches, gives me great comfort that we are working toward the world that Jesus taught us we were capable of.

When I asked Adrian Shanker, coordinator of Pride Fest, what he thought our church could offer, he suggested "Mom hugs." Some men were at our booth, so they made a sign offering "Dad hugs," too. I thought this was such a little thing. But the tears in the huggees eyes! What is a church, unless it offers love?

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Celebrating God's Love ... (*continued from page 1*)

This year, we offered prayer squares – little knitted flags with a cross in the middle – for people to take and remind them that God is with them and they are loved. Some were the rainbow flag, some were the lesbian flag, some were the transgender flag, and others were the non-binary flag. I was worried that people who weren't Christian would leave the flags at the table and I'd be stuck with 100+ prayer squares. But they were all taken, with joy; that someone would take the time to make these little squares just for them brought peace to their souls.

This year, also, we partnered with another church at our booth – First Presbyterian Church of Bethlehem. Being able to work together on a project and not feel like one church needed to "own" the project is a direct result, I think, of the past year working on racial justice issues after the murder of George Floyd. We've been more cautious about "being in charge" and more open to listening to others and working together.

What justice and/or advocacy issues has your church worked on lately? We'd love to feature your story!

Climate Change is Here to Stay

We have been hearing about climate change for many years, and now we are beginning to see measureable effects of human activity during the industrial age. For us this means, for example, more frequent and intense hurricanes in the American South and eastern seaboard; while the American West is experiencing record drought and wildfires that are even threatening ancient Sequoia forests with trees that have stood for over 3,000 years.

There is still time for us to avoid the worst consequences of climate change and to adapt to the changes that are already inevitable, but the best time to act is now.

What changes are yet to come?†

- Global surface temperature will continue to increase until at least the mid-century under all emissions scenarios considered. Global warming of 1.5°C and 2°C will be exceeded during the 21st century unless deep reductions in carbon dioxide (CO_2) and other greenhouse gas emissions occur in the coming decades.
- Many changes in the climate system become larger in direct relation to increasing global warming. They include increases in the frequency and intensity of hot extremes, marine heatwaves, and heavy precipitation, agricultural and ecological droughts in some regions, and proportion of intense tropical cyclones, as well as reductions in Arctic sea ice, snow cover and permafrost.
- Continued global warming is projected to further intensify the global water cycle, including its variability, global monsoon precipitation and the severity of wet and dry events.
- Under scenarios with increasing CO_2 emissions, the ocean and land carbon sinks are projected to be less effective at slowing the accumulation of CO_2 in the atmosphere.
- Many changes due to past and future greenhouse gas emissions are irreversible for centuries to millennia, especially changes in the ocean, ice sheets and global sea level.

Faith-Based Resources for Responding to Climate Change

from Creation Justice Ministries
https://www.creationjustice.org/resilience.html

Webinar recordings (*about one hour each*)

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL66hQvP-gSzuK9cLJdusa84JCQjMki7pO

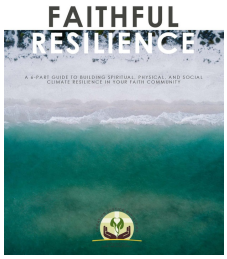
– Faith Communities & Climate Resilience Summit
– How to Become a Climate-Resilient Church
– Climate Resilience & Faithful Democracy
– Trauma, Spirituality, and Climate Resilience
– Policy Solutions for Climate Resilience
– ResiLENT Worship
– Climate Resilience on Sacred Ground
– Preparing Your Congregation for Climate Disasters
– Sacredness of Water

Resilience in Your Church

https://creationjustice.salsalabs.org/resilience

Download the Faithful Resilience series for a guide to integrating teaching and action on climate resilience into your congregation. This 6-part guide will equip you with theological reflections for sermons or bible study, questions for reflection or conversation, action steps for your church, and examples of churches who are building resilience in their community.

The series features six parts:
Part 1: The Land We Inhabit
Part 2: The Fierce Urgency of Now
Part 3: Resilience and Restoration
Part 4: Climate Migration
Part 5: Building Resilience
Part 6: Resilient Worship



† from the IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report, (Aug. 2021): *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis*
https://www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-working-group-i/

Central Moravian Church - has been hosting Sunday discussion sessions (many of them by Zoom) this year which are being posted on CMC's youtube channel, usually the day after each event, at https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCRrmFZ1kOx8VwDSbcw9aSyQ (Look for the Lectures playlist)

- **Healing the Earth: From Local to Global Initiatives** – 4-part series, co-sponsored with two other Bethlehem congregations: Unitarian Universalist Church of the Lehigh Valley and the (Episcopal) Cathedral Church of the Nativity.
  Part 1) The Food Arc: Organic Food Production and Work of the Monocacy Farm Project (Apr. 18)
  Part 2) The Food Arc: From Joyful Consumption to Reverent Disposal (Apr. 25)
  Part 3) The Infrastructure Revolution: Financial Support for Sustainability Projects (May 16)
  Part 4) Changing Hearts and Minds: Interfaith and International Advocacy for the Planet (May 23)

- **Integrating Mind, Body and Spirit: Pathways to Mental Health and Wellness**
  This is a five-part series, which began Sunday, Sept. 12, organized by CMC's Mental Health Planning Team
  Part 1: **Sept. 12** - Lehigh Valley of the **National Alliance on Mental Illness - Bridges of Hope**.
  To attend events live by Zoom (1:00-2:30pm), contact Judy Willliams <williamsjudy1930@gmail.com>,
  Part 2: **Oct. 10** - the Rev. Dr. Heather Vacek, the new Dean at Moravian Theological Seminary, will preach at both our 9 and 11 o'clock services about churches and mental health. You are welcome to attend these services in person, mask required, but if you are unable to attend, they can be viewed live or 24 hours after the service on the link above.

Legislative Advocacy - Child Tax Credit / Build Back Better

Bread for the World - 2021 Offering of Letters
https://www.bread.org/information-for-activists

Bread's 2021 "Offering of Letters" focus:

Urge Members of Congress to address growing hunger at home and abroad by making the one-year extension of the **Child Tax Credit** (CTC) permanent and also increase U.S. leadership and funding for global nutrition programs.

Globally, hundreds of millions of people are on the brink of starvation. And levels of U.S hunger are now higher than during the Great Depression.

Call (800-826-3688) or use this web-based form to email your members of Congress:
https://secure.bread.org/site/Advocacy?cmd=display&page=UserAction&id=401

For more information on this issue:
– The 2021 Offering of Letters
https://ol.bread.org/
– Fact Sheet: Expand the Child Tax Credit to Significantly Reduce Hunger
https://bread.org/library/fact-sheet-expand-child-tax-credit-significantly-reduce-child-hunger
For additional talking points, contact organizing@bread.org or call 800-822-7323.

Pennsylvania Budget and Policy Center (PBPC) and **Keystone Research Center**
Responding to hunger & poverty in Pennsylvania

PBPC is advocating for a permanent expansion of the federal **Child Tax Credit**, an increase in federal Housing Vouchers, and much more, paying for all of this by ensuring that the rich pay their fair share. Getting this agenda passed through the US Congress isn't enough, however.

We have seen on the state level with the American Rescue Plan funding that even when Pennsylvania receives money to help constituents, some state legislators hoard the money instead of helping people who need it the most. Moreover, they want to divide and distract us by pushing anti-voter scams, spreading lies, and spending our taxpayer money to challenge an election that our trusted officials conducted and verified.

There is currently $7 BILLION of unallocated and unspent federal aid sitting in the bank right now, while people are struggling to stay afloat. The PA state legislature should fulfill their oath of office - to serve and protect us. This means spending the American Rescue Plan money as it is intended - helping us, raising the minimum wage above $7.25

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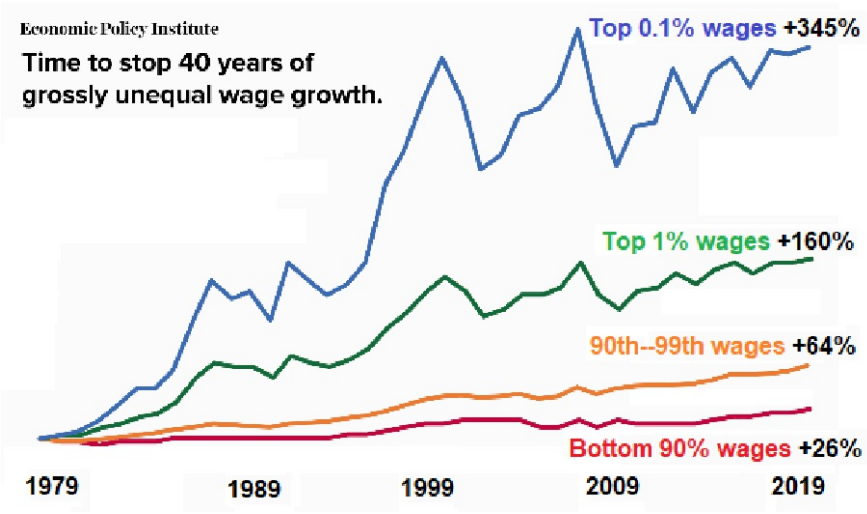
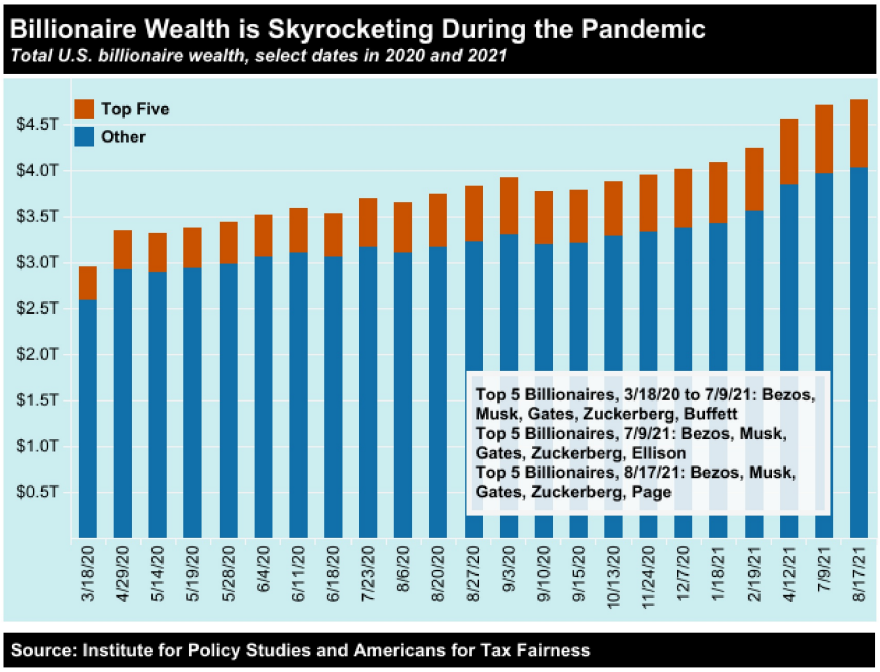
US Inequality by the Numbers





PA Budget ... (*continued from page 3*)

per hour, supporting paid family leave so that workers can keep their jobs and care for loved ones, protecting tenants at risk of losing their homes, and assisting small businesses so they can keep their doors open. We have the means to move forward together, but we need our legislators to do their jobs and invest in us.

Keystone Research Center /
PA Budget and Policy Center
https://krc-pbpc.org/know-the-issues/

Resources on Economic Inequality

Economic Policy Institute:
CEO pay is up 1,322% since 1978
In 2020, a CEO at one of the top 350 firms in the U.S. was paid $24.2 million on average – that's about 351 times as much as a typical worker received. Read the detailed report at www.epi.org/publication/ceo-pay-in-2020/

Inequality.Org
11 Charts on Taxing the Wealthy and Corporations
https://inequality.org/great-divide/11-charts-tax-wealthy-corporations-inequality/

Inequality.Org
10 Charts on the State of U.S. Workers on the 2nd Pandemic Labor Day
https://inequality.org/great-divide/10-charts-state-us-workers-2nd-pandemic-labor-day/

• **Pennsylvania Redistricting** – The Legislative Reapportionment Commission (LRC) voted 3 to 2 on August 24 in favor of a resolution to reallocate prison data to count incarcerated people in their home communities. According to the resolution, introduced by House Minority Leader Joanna McClinton, the LRC will count most individuals in state prisons as residents of their last known address. People in PA state prisons who did not live in Pennsylvania before incarceration will not be counted at all for redistricting purposes. Individuals with no known home address and those serving sentences that extend past April 1, 2030, will still be counted in their places of incarceration (according to a new LRC vote on Sept. 21st). The resolution does not affect the state's congressional map, which will be drawn by the Republican-controlled legislature and approved by Democratic Gov. Tom Wolf. It also does not impact federal or county prisons.
– **Redistricting Comments** – Read or/and submit comments on this website: https://www.redistricting.state.pa.us/comment/

What justice and/or advocacy issues has your church worked on lately? What resources do you need, and what resources do you have to share? We'd love to hear from you. *(See page 1).*