

# 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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3-part webinar - Sept. 6, 13, 20

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.ppj.org

## Why are so many people hungry in America?

The world's richest nation – the United States – currently has about 735 billionaires worth a collective \$4.7 trillion. Yet according to the USDA, more than 38 million people, including 12 million children, in the United States are food insecure. The pandemic has increased food insecurity among families with children and communities of color, who already faced hunger at much higher rates before the pandemic.

So, why do so many Americans live in poverty, in the shadow of personal wealth that would make King Solomon look like a pauper? Jesus' (and the prophets' before him) persistent confrontation of religious and political leaders and others who exploited the poor should give us some clues. Yes, we must continue to feed anyone who is hungry and to shelter anyone who is homeless; but we should be equally engaged in demanding justice for all people. The campaign to End Solitary Confinement in Lehigh County Jail (see page 4) is one example of local action for justice.

## Central Moravian Church Food Pantry and Clothing Ministry

by Lyn Trodahl Chynoweth

Matthew 25: 35-36a "... for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me...."

Such is the mission of our Central Moravian Church's food and clothing mission. Several days a month, we offer a shopping experience for those in need. Our clients become our friends. We know them. They know us. We greet them with joy. We miss them if they don't come. They ask about us if one of the 'regulars' isn't there. This is a mission of love, central to what makes our congregation known for its service to community, both locally and abroad.



Photo by Linda Wickmann

From its inception, our organization has had qualified customers (as set by the State)<sup>[1]</sup> enter the food pantry and make selections of what they would use for the coming weeks. Some limits are made, depending on family size and what we have available. But if there is plenty, plenty is given.

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## Food Pantry & Clothing ... (continued from page 1)

COVID made that direct connection impossible, but it also compelled us to invent new ways to serve more effectively and efficiently. During COVID, clients were given lists of what we had, and we filled the order as best we could. We also began an appointment schedule and expanded the number of days we were open, so that we could limit the number of people who arrived at one time on any given day. We have maintained that schedule, a beneficial practice now that the number of vulnerable people has increased dramatically due to inflation.

Our offerings have expanded, too, now that we have a commercial refrigerator and three freezers. We offer much more frozen meat, poultry and fish and refrigerated items like cheese, yogurt, butter, and milk, when we can get it.

It is important to note that we are only one of several dozen food pantries in the area we serve. All of us work with Second Harvest,<sup>[2]</sup> the organization that supports food pantries in the six-county area of which we are a part. We also work with local producers, such as the Monocacy Farm Project,<sup>[3]</sup> to provide fresh items seasonally. Eggs, potatoes, other fresh produce come from local farms and / or parishioner gardens. How fun it is to teach clients a new vegetable (how do you cook spaghetti squash?) or a new herb (I never heard of garlic scapes!). And what a joy to have a repeat client ask for more of something they had never had before and now enjoy.

Parishioners in one of the local Moravian churches that has a commercial kitchen make and freeze delicious heat and serve items: soups, mac cheese with burger, beef or turkey BBQ—labeled with all ingredients. Some of our clients ask first: “Is there any ham and black bean soup?” “Do you have that cream of broccoli soup?”

We have also learned, through the partnership with the clothing ministry, that there are more needs, many of a personal nature. Thus, we have expanded our offerings in personal care items, diapers, toilet paper, soap, etc. It is wonderful to work with Cynthia’s Boutique as clients shop for clothing and shoes of all sizes. All of our offerings are free, and our friends are filled with gratitude when they find items they need.

In addition to having shopping on certain days, we pack food bags for Meals on Wheels (all low sodium) and for two local institutions: Holy Family Manor and Moravian House. Everyone who requests it gets a bag of canned and dry goods. We also provide selections of frozen meat and, if we have it, fresh produce, eggs, cheese, butter for distribution. Additionally, we serve individual families in a partner church, Esperanza (a growth ministry for the Latino community in Bethlehem’s South Side). Families place orders which we fill; and they are delivered to the families in need.

All of these offerings have expanded over the years as needs have become greater, and we have had more to give. As the shelves empty, they are replenished partially by a monthly drive-by collection of needed food, personal care items, clothing and plastics to be recycled. Yes, plastics. We partner with other churches and TREX to provide plastics that can be converted to furniture and other building supplies.

One of our newest offerings is a health partnership. Thanks to a retired doctor who volunteers, we began an effort with St. Luke’s (a regional hospital) twice a month. Clients have nurses to whom they can speak, and appointments can be made for health providers in the area. This is a fledgling operation, but we anticipate it will grow as the need expands.

None of this vital mission would be possible without the outstanding leadership of The Rev. David Wickmann, a retired Moravian pastor, and the able help of a myriad of volunteers. They all have their individual skills and aptitudes (including bilingual capability). Some come several days a month, some one day a month. They all have assigned tasks, and somehow it all clicks. Our clients, our friends, our neighbors become part of our family. We feel blessed to be one small part of helping those in need in our locale.

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[1] Pennsylvania eligibility requirements for food assistance: [https://www.agriculture.pa.gov/Food/food\\_assistance/The%20Emergency%20Food%20Assistance%20Program/Pages/default.aspx](https://www.agriculture.pa.gov/Food/food_assistance/The%20Emergency%20Food%20Assistance%20Program/Pages/default.aspx)

[2] Second Harvest Food Bank of the Lehigh Valley ([www.communityactionlv.org/secondharvest](http://www.communityactionlv.org/secondharvest)) is a program of



Community Action Lehigh Valley.

Central Moravian’s food pantry is one of over 200 non-profit Second Harvest member agencies which include food pantries, soup kitchens, homeless shelters, child and senior care programs, and drug and alcohol treatment facilities. Last year this network distributed a total of nine million pounds of food to a collective average of 60,000 people each month.

The demand for food assistance has grown significantly since the COVID pandemic began, and Second Harvest works with regional and national partners such as *Feeding Pennsylvania*, *Feeding America*, *Hunger-Free Pennsylvania*, *Food Research Action Center*, and *MAZON* to advocate for public policies (like a living wage) that reduce hunger and food insecurity.

[3] Monocacy Farm Project ([www.monocacyfarmproject.org](http://www.monocacyfarmproject.org)) along the Monocacy Creek in Bethlehem, Pa. is owned and managed by the School Sisters of St. Francis, a community of Catholic women religious. In 2013, the Sisters converted their conventionally cultivated planting fields to an agro-ecological demonstration and production farm.

## At the Border in Douglas and Agua Prieta – Healing Our Borders Vigil

*Sheila Clever attended The Borderlands Learning Tour hosted by the Mennonite Central Committee May 23-29.*

*Here is a reflection from one of the educational opportunities she participated in.*

We walked along the border of U.S./Mexico carrying crosses with the names of those who had died in the desert as part of the “prevention through deterrence” policy begun in 1994. Just as an insane person keeps repeating the same action over and over and expecting a different result, every administration after Clinton’s has retained the same failed policy, hoping migrants will stop crossing the borders. The migrants continue coming. And dying.

The vigil occurs every Tuesday. Each Tuesday, since 2000, when 6 bodies were discovered in a culvert in Douglas, Arizona, people walk along the Pan American Avenue with crosses, say the names, and shout, “Presente!” Some of the bodies cannot be identified. “No identificado” I say. “Presente!” all the walkers – about 30 – reply. I lay the cross against the berm of the sidewalk and onto the roadway. The traffic is very



slow – it’s 5:15pm, rush hour – and we make eye contact with the drivers. Some of them seem grateful we are remembering the dead. Some have tears in their eyes. One says, “Kill the Mexicans!” and speeds away in the opposite direction.

Mark Adams is a Presbyterian Church (USA) mission co-worker at the border. He works with the bi-national mission Frontera de Cristo. Tonight, he represents Healing Our Borders/Sanando Nuestras Fronteras, an ecumenical group which organizes the vigil each week. The Sisters of the Notre Dame are also present. They put crosses in the desert where bodies are found and make copies of the crosses for the vigil. The copies we carry are marked with red dots. Other groups, also, are present – students from a theological seminary and one of their professors; brown-robed priests; Samaritans.



We gather right at the border crossing gate in a small pocket park. Three crosses were chosen to pay special honor to. As we encircled the crosses, we were all put on Zoom; the vigil is international now. The coroner had identified the body so there was a name on the first cross. The family had been contacted. We know how old the woman was, that she was married and had children. Her body was returned to Mexico for burial. We prayed for her family. One of the crosses was marked “No identificado.” We prayed for his family, too.



One member of the vigil comes every week. She doesn’t even get asked to present ID anymore when crossing the border. She appears to be homeless. But she comes to honor the dead. The vigil would’ve been much quieter..., and shorter..., and less Spirit-filled without her.

Read more in this 2019 commentary by Mark Adams: <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/story/healing-our-borders/> Also, you can participate in the Vigil via Zoom. For details, contact Mark Adams by email: [mark@fronteradecristo.org](mailto:mark@fronteradecristo.org).

### Hunger & Homelessness Awareness Week (November 12-20, 2022)

Every year the thousands of Lehigh Valley families face the threat of eviction, and now that COVID-related state and federal emergency assistance programs are ending, many more individuals and families are facing food insecurity, eviction, and homelessness.

The Lehigh Conference of Churches (LCC) is organizing a week of dialogue, discussion, and games, culminating in a sleep-out event, to raise awareness and understanding of what it’s like to live in extreme poverty.

The week’s events will also provide resources for public policy advocacy and include fundraising to assist people living in our community with food, housing, a sense of belonging, and hope for the future.

Look for more details at <https://ja.ppjr.org/event/> and sign up to participate in One Night Without a Home.



• **Christianity in America: Sacred or Supremacist?**

October 6, @ 11:30am-4:15pm in Harrisburg & virtually.

The Pennsylvania Council of Churches is beginning a dialogue on Christian Nationalism, a topic of rising interest in a critical election year where individual candidates describe themselves as members of this movement. The program will be held at Colonial Park United Church of Christ, 5000 Devonshire Road, in Harrisburg, PA, and also livestreamed via YouTube Live, inclusive of remote sites for groups to participate throughout the state.

The keynote speaker for the event is **Dr. Robert P. Jones**.

Dr. Jones is the President and founder of Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) and the author of *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity*, and *The End of White Christian America*.



Dr. Jones' presentation will be followed by a panel discussion which, in addition to him, includes:

- **Marilyn Mayo**, Center on Extremism, Anti-Defamation League, addressing anti-Semitism in the movement;
- **Rev. Dr. Gregory Edwards**, Resurrected Life Community Church (UCC), Allentown, and
- **Rev. Jennifer Butler**, Faith in Public Life.
- **Dr. Greg Carey** of Lancaster Theological Seminary will moderate.

For details and registration information, see [pachurchesadvocacy.org/event/christianity-in-america-oct-6/](http://pachurchesadvocacy.org/event/christianity-in-america-oct-6/)

• **Ending Solitary Confinement**

Although Quakers initiated the use of solitary confinement in Pennsylvania with good intentions, solitary is now recognized by the United Nations as a form of torture.

Solitary (“the hole”) is often used today by corrections officers as punishment for any arbitrary offense, without written policies or rules and hidden from public view. It’s time to end this abusive practice in our jails and prisons



Last year, a ballot measure to end solitary in Allegheny County, PA (Pittsburgh) was approved by voters, and this summer, *Pennsylvania Stands Up* and partner organizations are focused on Lehigh and Lackawanna Counties. Folks in Lackawanna County collected enough signatures to get the question on the November ballot. Lehigh County folks collected over 5,000 signatures – not enough to make the election ballot, but now they are meeting with Lehigh County Commissioners to End Solitary by county ordinance.

Learn more about solitary confinement at [https://justice.pprj.org/justice\\_tools.htm#solitary](https://justice.pprj.org/justice_tools.htm#solitary), and connect with Lehigh County Courts & Corrections meeting by Zoom on **Sept. 7, 2022** (Wed.) at 6:30pm. For details, see [www.lehighcounty.org/Departments/Commissioners](http://www.lehighcounty.org/Departments/Commissioners) .

• **Sacred Ground** - America's history of race & racism.

You are invited to Sacred Ground this fall, to walk through chapters of America’s history of race and racism, while weaving in threads of family story, economic class, and political and regional identity.

The 11-part series is built around a powerful online curriculum of documentary films and readings that focus on Indigenous, Black, Latino, and Asian/Pacific American histories as they intersect with European American histories. This series is open to all, and is especially designed to help white people talk with other white people. Participants are invited to peel away the layers that have contributed to the challenges and divides of the present day – all while grounded in our call to faith, hope and love.

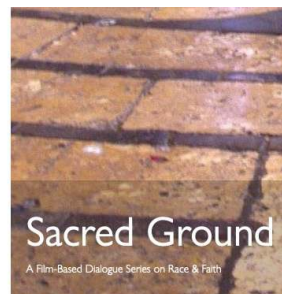
Lehigh Valley Moravians, Lutherans, and Episcopalians are joining together to host on Zoom, every other Monday, Sept. 12-Nov. 21, 2022, continuing Jan. 2-Feb. 20, 2023:

- two options: Afternoon Meeting: 1:30-3:00 p.m.,
- or Evening Meeting: 7:00-8:30 p.m.

Also, Preview Session, Monday, August 29, 7-8 p.m.

**> Registration is required by September 6, 2022 <**

There will be about 2 hours of film-watching and reading between sessions. In addition to the larger group each person will be a part of a small dialogue circle, and participants are strongly encouraged to attend each session, to build trust and depth in the circles.



Sacred Ground is free but it requires an investment of your time and heart that will challenge and reward you, as we work toward becoming Beloved Community. Please go to [www.episcopalchurch.org/sacredground](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/sacredground) to learn more.

To register for the preview session (Aug. 29) or the course, or if you have questions, contact the Rev. Maria Tjeltveit **by Sept. 6** at [sacredground.beth@gmail.com](mailto:sacredground.beth@gmail.com). Please indicate if you are interested in the evening or daytime group.

• **Understanding Restorative Justice** - webinar series: Sept. 6, 13, 20 (Tuesdays, 7:00pm):

Restorative justice is based on the philosophy that we are all interconnected, that we live in relationship with one another, and that our actions impact each other. This free 3-part series offered by American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) will develop an understanding of restorative justice and its practices—and how to strengthen our communities through accountability. For details and registration, see <https://www.afsc.org/action/csbp-restorative-justice-september-webinar-series-2022>