

Justice and Witness Ministry

Chicago Metropolitan Association of the Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ

Annual Report for September 2019 through April 2020 Submitted to the Virtual Spring Meeting - June 6, 2020

*Jesus unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:
'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'* (Luke 4:17b-19)

Our ministry has the responsibility “to sustain a collective voice of social witness. The Committee shall encourage the study, proclamation, and living of justice and peace in the Church and in the world.” (Constitution of the CMA) Our work has been marked by the toll of the novel Coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) on all aspects of life in 2020, including the church. In September we met as a group and through the process of a peace circle chose three main social issues to concentrate our efforts. Those areas are poverty, racism, and housing insecurity. In 2020, COVID-19 has made glaringly obvious the inequities in our country, tracing back to 1619 when the first Africans arrived in Virginia and were sold as property to be slaves.

Poverty

- We support the Fair Tax Amendment which will be on the Illinois ballot in November. Working with Community Renewal Society and other groups, we have encouraged clergy to sign a letter of support for the amendment. Individual church members have been asked to add their names to an email list for ongoing information, to like the amendment on Facebook, and to follow it on Twitter.
- In the late fall, churches were encouraged to contribute to RIPMedicalDebt.org to cancel old medical debt for people who have been unable to pay their hospital bills.
- We partnered with Trinity Nehemiah Rising, SEIU Healthcare, Cook County Commissioner Stanley Moore, and the American Academy of Pediatrics, Illinois Chapter to produce an informational video for YouTube explaining the process and importance of a complete count for Census 2020. Funding of major antipoverty programs will be affected by the Census results for the next ten years.

Call to action

1. Sign up for emails on the Fair Tax amendment: to <https://www.yesforfairtax.org/>
2. Like the Fair Tax on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/YesForFairTax>
3. Follow on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/YesForFairTax>
4. Encourage church members, neighbors, and friends to complete the Census. The deadline has been extended to October because of the pandemic.

Racism

- We support the campaign of the Chicago Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression to publicize and ask for pardons for the men held in Illinois prisons who were found to have been tortured before giving confessions to crimes, mostly in the 1990s during the infamous Jon Burge era. The campaign is launching May 16, 2020.
- The End Money Bond campaign continues with phone calls, letter writing, and educational efforts. It is morally wrong to keep someone in detention pretrial solely because they do not have the ability to pay bail. We support the Coalition to End Money Bond which contains many affiliated organizations. Of urgent importance right now is pressing for release of pretrial, nonviolent detainees from Cook County Jail, a place rife with Coronavirus infections. Having inadequate funds to pay for bail should not be a death sentence.
- Four South Side Hospitals are studying ways in which to merge operations and facilities. All four hospitals are losing money, and two cannot sustain ongoing operations long term. Health inequities on the South Side of Chicago have been highlighted by a thirty-year gap in average life expectancies compared to the Streeterville neighborhood. The Coronavirus pandemic has made health inequities tragically apparent, as we see who is most vulnerable to severe illness and death. We are extremely interested in seeing an excellent, financially stable hospital system form on the South Side. It is especially important that plans are made with ongoing
- community involvement. We have been part of public and private discussions. NOTE: The COVID-truncated state legislative sessions withdrew monetary support for this project. Other options are being considered.

Call to action

1. Watch for more information on the campaign to pardon victims of torture.
2. Commit to personally view some of the many anti-racism resources available.
3. Encourage your local church to have *Sacred Conversations On Race*:
https://www.ucc.org/sacred_conversations_to_end_racism.
4. Pray to **discern what God is calling you to do** for *such a time as this*.
5. Faith leaders are asked to sign a letter supporting an end to money bond:
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSf3Jrh6muJH7SaUge7Q1AJRK4z8u_EA67t38Qttwt6H6sjAdQ/viewform

Housing Instability

- Justice and Witness supports a halt to evictions, filing evictions and other measures that will make the homeless crisis worse. Unfortunately, with the catastrophic level of job losses and the loss of most of the 2020 Illinois legislative season due to the pandemic, we are now reliant on measures coming out of Congress to protect housing stability for vast numbers of people.

Call to action:

1. Share information on housing resources with people who need them:
<https://housingactionil.org/what-we-do/public-education-organizing/covid-19-information-resources/>
2. Consider supporting the following:
<https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/Emergency-Rental-Assistance.pdf>

In closing, the CMA Justice and Witness Ministry Team encourages you “to sustain a collective voice of social witness” through personal, group, and institutional “study, proclamation, and living of justice and peace in the Church and in the world.”

Respectfully submitted,

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