

**55th Annual Meeting
Central Atlantic Conference**

**Rev. Marvin M. Silver
Associate Conference Minister Report**

As we gather for the 55th Annual Meeting of the Central Atlantic Conference, I remain humble, hopeful, and steadfast in what God is calling me to do in partnership with you as your Associate Conference Minister.

Since last year's meeting I have been focused on, among other priorities, advancing the vision and goals of two new initiatives of the Conference:

- **Justice & Witness Action Network (Network)**
- **Nehemiah Pilot Project (Project)**

Over the past two years I have been in conversation and working side-by-side with leaders across the Conference to build a new justice movement of the Central Atlantic Conference.

The **Network** serves as the primary arm for the Conference to carry out its vision, mission and agenda for justice and witness ministries.

- **Vision** -- *A justice movement (of the leaders and local churches of the Central Atlantic Conference of the United Church of Christ) building and organizing power to secure a just and compassionate world for all.*
- **Mission** -- *A powerful, faithful and effective Central Atlantic Conference Justice & Witness organizing network of leaders, clergy and local churches.*

The **Network** is a grassroots advocacy network composed of individual members, clergy and churches across the Conference.

The **Network** educates and engages members in community organizing, grassroots advocacy, prophetic witness and action, and shaping public policy that advances our vision of securing a just and compassionate world for all. Our work is grounded in Central Atlantic Conference and General Synod resolutions, consonant with historic UCC witness, informed by a biblical understanding of justice, prophetic ministry and action, and a set of guiding principles to define our witness. **Have you joined yet?**

Join now at <http://bit.ly/CAC-JWAN>.

We have made significant progress. And, the Potomac Association Justice & Witness Action Committee has played a major role in building this new justice movement. Our focus is building relationships with individual justice leaders and local churches through listening sessions, trainings, and engagement in justice actions supported by our leaders, pastors and local churches.

Within the **Network**, we have several issue-specific networks that are emerging and taking leadership to organize and mobilize our collective action and witness. Those issue-specific networks includes:

- CAC Palestine-Israel Network
- CAC LGBTQ+ Network
- CAC Racial Justice Network

We have many churches engaged in the sanctuary movement/immigration reform, climate change/environmental justice efforts in the region, gun violence and gun reform. And, there are many other issues in which we are engaged. Although we view all of this good work as part of the **Network**, the challenge we face is there is very little coordination, collaboration, or connection amongst our leaders and local churches in doing this work as the United Church of Christ and the Central Atlantic Conference.

Our impact is minimal and slow in most instances. And we have no effective way to identify, organize, and mobilize more UCC leaders, pastors and local churches to take action. We are often not viewed or engaged as equal partners in coalitions or partnerships with advocacy groups. The justice work that happens in our name (when it is) is not centered-around living into a UCC identity or way of doing justice.

New challenges and realities call for a new approach, a new way forward. The work of justice in the Central Atlantic Conference must adapt to the current realities and needs, better respond to the current challenges and possibilities, and lead in new and bold ways.

Our work must be focused on maximizing the gifts present within local churches and equipping leaders with the capacity, skills, and tools to be effective leaders and advocates for justice; and to have an impact. We can't just rely upon our current framework of doing justice, and we must not settle for the convenient and easy tactic of marching without being empowered, being strategic, being bold and taking risks. And there is no doubt that more resources would help us accomplish more in a shorter timeframe.

As we move further into the election season, I hope engaging our leaders, pastors and local churches in the electoral process will be another way to unite our collective justice efforts and continue to build our power. Don't hesitate to contact me to learn how you and your local church can join this new justice movement of the Conference.

And don't forget **join the Network now at <http://bit.ly/CAC-JWAN>**.

Back in January we invite several local churches to an introductory Zoom meeting on the **Project**. The **Project** was birth out of the need to expand our strategies and explore a different approach to how we work with local churches facing questions of legacy (closing) and local churches seeking to adapt to the changing realities of ministry. The common challenge and opportunity before local churches wrestling with these questions is: ***what do we do with our aging and crumbling building?***

I have been working with the Church Building & Loan Fund and the Cornerstone Fund as our partners to develop the **Project**. A first of its kind pilot project in the UCC, our focus is to reimagine and rebuild the local church working with a co-hort of churches to discern, to explore, be trained, support each other, and journey together toward a new future.

Moral leadership, a place of hope and affirmation, and expressions of God's love through Jesus Christ is what the **Project** seeks to help local churches to become. We are engaging one co-hort of six local churches in the Potomac Association in a process of becoming something new, something more than they can imagine or have ever been or seen. It is our hope and goal that they will become the church that is needed in our time and for tomorrow.

As we continue to progress on the **Project**, we anticipate sharing lessons learned and engaging more local churches.

God's Word in Galatians 6:9, "***let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up***", the opportunity and challenge to do something new in ministry, and helping to transform this Conference during this season of transition, keeps me motivated to press-on.

The Marathon Continues . . .

Rev. Marvin Silver