

## 57th Annual Meeting Central Atlantic Conference

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

As I enter into my sixth year with the Central Atlantic Conference I could not imagine that we would be engaging in ministry the way we are today.

I appreciated serving and working with you in these areas of our collective ministry since we gathered last year for our first online Annual Meeting.

#### **Faith & Democracy 2020 Campaign**

At the close of last year's Annual Meeting, I continued to work closely with leaders from across the Conference on the **Justice & Witness Action Network (Network)** inaugural campaign, **Faith & Democracy 2020**, launched in March. The Campaign is non-partisan, unified, coordinated and strategic campaign to engage **Network** leaders, clergy and local churches in (1) Voter Registration, (2) Voter Education & Empowerment, (3) Get Out The Vote, (4) and Voting Rights Advancement.

Our focus leading up to the 2020 Elections included:

- Getting out the vote in low-voter turnout communities, in partnership with Center for Common Ground's Reclaim Our Vote Campaign, in AL, FL, GA, SC, TX and VA via postcarding, texting and phone-banking;
- Working with local church Pastors to educate voters through a [voter education initiative](#) of our emerging *Prophetic Voices for Justice* as part of our Faith & Democracy 2020;
- Pushing back against anti-democracy messages with pro-democracy messages after the Elections;
- Being in prayer, study and discernment about our collective response and next steps based on the outcome of the Elections;

After [a successful Faith & Democracy 2020 campaign](#), the **Network** partnered with the emerging Potomac Association branch in December to bring together **Network** leaders within the Association for a [retreat](#) to take stock, regroup, and imagine together how to organize in 2021. At the retreat we introduced the idea of state/regional organizing teams and offered time for each state/region to get to know one another, learn about state and local issues, and choose one issue of focus.

#### **Justice & Witness Action Network State-Based Networks**

In a January 2021 follow up [Strategy Retreat](#), state/regional teams began their issue-based legislative campaigns in earnest. For three months each regional team met regularly and engaged with local partnerships to move their work forward, before coming together once again on April 10th for our [Spring Gathering 2021](#).

Here are some highlights from our emerging state-based networks:

- **Network -- DC: Housing Justice**

- Organizing Team of 7 **Network** leaders from 5 congregations
- Goal: Make DC's Comprehensive Plan work for Low Income Residents by urging the Council to revise the Mayor's rewrite of the DC Comprehensive Plan Amendments Bill
- Developed Partnership with the [DC Grassroots Planning Coalition](#) led by [Empower DC](#)— ensured the PA endorsement of the "Housing Justice Priorities" document, wrote a letter of support to the Mayor and City Council, submitted a LTE to the Washington Post
- **Network -- Virginia: Ending the Death Penalty & Faith & Democracy 2021**
  - Organizing Team of 10 **Network** leaders from 7 congregations.
  - In partnership with the [Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy](#) developed the Abolish the Death Penalty Campaign (*legislation passed the 2021 General Assembly and was signed by the Governor*)
  - Sent action alerts through the Justice & Witness Action Network tool to send advocacy emails, encouraged churches to hold prayer vigils using the VICPP liturgy, prepared an LTE and a clergy letter, trained members on social media
  - Organized and conducting a state-wide **Faith & Democracy 2021 -- VA** campaign for the state-wide elections. They are partnering with Center for Common Ground in the state to encouraging voters via postcarding and phone-banking to vote early in the General Election. And, early in the spring they worked to re-register voters who were purged from the state's voting rolls.
  - They have been preparing for the 2022 General Assembly working on their priority issue of Restoring Voting Rights for formerly incarcerated citizens.
- **Network -- Maryland: Police Accountability**
  - Organizing Team of 10 **Network** leaders from 6 congregations
  - Joined the [Maryland Coalition for Justice & Police Accountability](#) (MCJPA), a coalition of 90+ organizations across Maryland fighting for 5 police accountability reforms in the 2021 Session.
  - Launched our [Campaign for Police Accountability & COVID-19 Relief](#) on February 4th with a Zoom meeting that included Chair of the [MD State Legislative Black Caucus, Delegate Darryl Barnes](#).
  - Participated in the Coalition's organized actions, including a rally in Annapolis (and online) to demand MD legislators not to water down the Coalition's bills. And, a Legislative Town Hall on the Coalition's 5 police reform legislative priorities in the 2021 Maryland General Assembly.
  - Engaged social media and organized 6 online actions around our priorities, including partnering with Center for Common Ground on one action
  - Secured victories and progress on all five police accountability and reform priorities. You can learn more about the coalition's work in the 2021 General Assembly [here](#). **Network -- MD** will continue to be active in MCJPA in reimagining police in MD.

In NJ, I worked with the leadership of the Association's Social Justice & Witness Task Force to organize **Faith & Democracy 2021 -- NJ** for the state-wide elections. Efforts have included developing a June 8th Primary Election voter education resource to support educating local churches and their communities how to participate. At the time you will read this, plans will be in place to hold a Get-Out-The-Vote effort to empower local churches to promote participation in the general election amongst their local communities.

In addition, the Task Force has structured their justice work moving forward into six areas with leading coordinators, including: (1) Housing Insecurity – Rev. Dr. Dolores Watson; (2) Food insecurity – Rev. Roberto Fois; (3) Racial Justice – Dr. Kirk Johnson; (4) LGBTQ Equality – Rev. Alice Batcher; (5) Gender Equity – Rev. Andrea Vassell; (6) Climate Change/Environment – Rev. Rusty Eidmann-Hicks. Moving forward the Task Force leadership will serve in a support role to provide guidance and direction with the issue-coordinators.

All of this work we hope will help to solidify our **Network -- NJ** branch.

Recognizing the urgency of the times, and the importance and opportunity of having a transformational impact and creating lasting change at the federal level, we surveyed **Network** members to help us decide one priority of our first, strategically united, federal issue campaign. The results are in, **Voting Rights Advancement & Voter Suppression**.

I will work with **Network** leaders this fall to organize this federal issue campaign.

In addition to this important work of the **Network**, I am working collaboratively with local church leaders in other areas of our Conference-wide justice commitments and providing support and leadership to the Potomac and Chesapeake Association Board of Director's/ Council and Committees on Ministry.

Here are other areas of my work over the past year:

- Redeveloping an Anti-Racist Local Church Audit with the Leadership Team of the Racial Justice Network (an issue based network of the **Network**). This tool is designed to support local churches committing themselves to the work of racial justice and being an anti-racist local church. We are currently providing leadership and support to two local churches as part of our test phase of the Audit, and conducting a focus group with a team of leaders from one local church.
- Advancing the Conference's goals on becoming an anti-racist Conference.
- Engaged in exploratory conversations about Reparations and what it would mean for local churches to study and engage in an initiative on the issue;
- Working with eight local churches in pastoral transition to discern the focus of their transitional period, searching for an Interim Minister and providing guidance to the new Interim Minister and interim ministry period;
- Continue to provide guidance and support to the Potomac Association Cohort of the the Nehemiah Pilot Project--an initiative designed to help local churches explore new ways of being church and meeting the needs of God's people;
- Providing guidance and support to local churches on COVID-19 related matters, including questions of returning to in-person worship and additional Conference support;
- Worked with the Potomac Association Racial Justice Advocates to plan and host ["Lifting The Veil: Black Voices Exploring Racial Trauma"](#);
- Working with the Lincoln Congregational Temple Legacy Team on reviewing and exploring the future of the church's grounds in relationship to its legacy vision;
- Mobilized DC clergy to participate in a [DC Statehood Action calling for passage of H.R. 51 in the U.S. House of Representatives](#).

There is so much more I can share about this year, especially my time being away on a three-month sabbatical. Thank you for the opportunity to serve in partnership with you to transform lives and communities. I look forward to the on-going journey.

Blessings,

*Rev. Marvin Silver*