

United Church of Christ Justice & Witness Ministries Report to Kansas Oklahoma Conference Council

April 29, 2011

Submitted by: Rev. Leslie Penrose, KO Representative

In response to the Executive Council's 2010 directive to the national boards to find ways to reduce the costs of national board meetings, the JWM Board did not convene a Spring Meeting of the Board. Our Executive Committee met in Cleveland March 11-12, to conduct essential board business, and all other work of the board was postponed until the Fall, 2011 meeting.

Consistently decreasing resources continue to make that work of the Justice & Witness staff increasingly difficult. This year budget cuts due to reduced and reducing OCWM funds, have forced the layoff of two administrative employees and the reduction in hours for two department ministers from full time to half time. In addition travel budgets have been slashed so that JWM staff are no longer able to offer the support and presence they have in the past to Conferences and local churches; and are also not able to fully engage in several important area of justice work. The predictions for 2011 and 2012 are even worse – more staff will have to be cut; fewer services offered local churches and Conferences, and less time and attention on the important justice issues of our day.

JWM's Board of Directors has responded to this growing financial crisis by forming a Development Team. This 5-member team has begun to address both short-term fundraising needs and possibilities, as well as longer-term resource development. In the meantime, the staff continue to do more than anyone believed possible... and more than is spiritually, physically, or emotionally healthy over the long term.

Regarding the ongoing Governance Conversation and Process, JWM's Board continues to be deeply troubled by the potential for reduced representation from our Historically Underrepresented Groups (HUGS) that the new model will bring. At the same time we are excited about the potential for far more effective, efficient, and financially responsible governance and management structures it will provide the denomination. We will continue to engage in careful, prayerful reflection as the process continues.

As a Board, we also have concerns about processes and patterns of life in our denomination that have resulted in the current situation where three white males have been nominated by the three separate and unique search committees of our national ministry boards to fill open Collegium positions in Wider Church Ministries, Local Church Ministries and the Office of General Ministries. Although one of those men is a gay man, and we are grateful and excited that the UCC will be electing our first openly gay man as an Officer of the Church, that does not lessen our concern for racial and gender diversity. Once these men are elected by Synod, as is fully expected, the five-member Collegium of the UCC will consist of one African American male, one Latina woman, and three Euro American males. In addition, for the last biennium (2009-2010), the Board Chairs of four of our five national boards, were white females (including me as the Chair of JWM), and the initial proposed slate of Chairs for the next biennium (2011-2012) was also four white females. (I was renominated to serve a second term as Chair). However,

given the racial and gender makeup of the proposed slate, I have since declined the nomination as Chair, and the nomination committee is working to fill JWM's Chair position with a male person of color.

Finally, regarding the real work of the Justice and Witness Ministries, we continue to be engaged in the work of justice in critically important areas in the life of our denomination, our nation, and our world. Our voice continues to be a critical element of policy formation and practice in the areas of Education, Health care, Immigration reform, Environmental and economic justice, and Human and civil rights. We are not only "imagining a different world," we are working to realize it!

The following is a glimpse at what has been happening at JWM comes from a first-quarter report offered to the Board by our Executive Minister, Rev. Linda Jaramillo.

- Announcement by Hawaii Governor Abercrombie indicating his desire to bring Hawaiians incarcerated in private prisons back home, which would be a step toward more humane treatment. Hundreds of Hawaiians are held in prisons on the mainland; UCC clergy from Oklahoma and Arizona have been actively involved in providing pastoral support and advocacy.
- Washington, DC Public policy advocacy activities were in high gear during November and December as the "lame duck session" of Congress followed the November mid-term elections.
- Barbara Baylor (Minister of Health) was invited to present on a conference call with First Lady Michelle Obama regarding the Let's Move Campaign. Of course, Barbara took the opportunity to invite the First Lady to General Synod!
- Our JWM staff continues to have a leading role in a national effort by religious communities to evaluate and re-design the failed "No Child Left Behind" program.
- Sacred Conversations on Race Continues – a revised guide will be introduced very soon.
- Justice LED. Board members are encouraged to go to our website for the Regional Training schedule and attend a training session. <http://www.ucc.org/justice/training>
- Through Centro Romero, we hosted an immersion experience January 3-8 along the border of Southern California/Arizona/Mexico in partnership with Sahuarita UCC and leaders from BorderLinks. We are also partnering with Pacific School of Religion to conduct a two-week course on border realities and immigration in mid-January. In February, UCC/DOC Global Ministries and JWM co-sponsored an immersion experience at Centro Romero, and in partnership with Long Beach UCC, the Romero Lectures are scheduled for April 30, featuring Leonardo Boff, world renowned Brazilian theologian.
- A new partnership with Pilgrim Firs has been established where JWM and the Pacific Northwest Conference are collaborating to create a center for environmental justice. The tentative date for opening of the Center is September 23-24. Monthly partnership calls have been scheduled.