

March 7, 2018 Witness Commission minutes

In attendance: Peg Over (chair). Members Michelle Clapper, Sam Epps, Paula Knudsen Burke. Pastoral liaison, Greg Laszakovits.

1. Peg welcomed Pastor Greg as the new pastoral liaison. Pastor Pam has cycled off. Peg said Peggy is absent because of the death of her brother-in-law.
2. Peg read devotions.
3. UCEA rep to serve with Beth DeGoede. Greg said Beth thinks the group may be too narrow in thinking as a Christian organization so she really wanted someone to bolster her voice in affirming openness to all. For instance, if a gay couple came in, would they receive the same level of service? Judith Gible, Ralph Detrick and Damon or Sue Wagner Fields were all possible choices and the group felt they all could speak for us. Greg said thinks Sue would have a passion for justice issues and she would be his first choice. Sam said they all sound like good choices. Peg will start with Sue.
4. Witness action alerts – Peg asks Greg if he will take over. He said that he will check out how frequently things were sent out in the past. Sam said weekly would be a good pace. Michelle said around the DACA issues a bunch seemed to come up at one time. Greg asked what topics should be focused on – DACA, racism, or should he go with other issues. Peg said try to stay with our regular issues. Greg asked if he should try to do something like the Pennsylvania Council of Churches weekly email. Paula responded that there is great stuff in those emails, but sometimes it is too much.
5. Gun violence- Greg said he has been asked by several church members about why we're not talking about gun violence. He said he would bring it to the commission about how we might respond. Some people have asked if we could rent a bus for the March for Our Lives. Others have said we've been really good about bringing together people for reasonable dialogue on differing issues. Have a place where people want to talk and understand. Peg says that's part of the big problem that people aren't talking. Paula and Sam add that people aren't listening either. Sam says the college has events planned in response to gun violence. One of the students wanted to know if we could ring the bell at 10 a.m. on March 14. Greg said there is no bell. Paula expressed surprise. Michelle said there is history about the lack of a bell.

Sam said there would be a three-pronged process over three days spread through March and April. There is a vigil and Sam will find out more details about that. Greg said there are some strong Church of the Brethren faith positions on guns, including why would you have an assault rifle. Greg said it is a really good discussion to have. Paula asked if people in the congregation have AR-15s. Greg said yes and we could have some open and honest dialogue. Some hunters are really worried and buy into the NRA propaganda that any gun restriction will take away their ability to hunt.

Paula wondered about if a forum or dialogue would take place with the college. Greg said it might require a subcommittee and a lot of planning and work within the community. It

would take work to get people from the community to come. Someone would have to moderate. Michelle said it almost feels like the Sanctuary group.

Paula asked if anyone in the denomination had done anything. Greg said in the past during Sunday School there was discussion between Don Kraybill and Dennis Wade, two people who have opposing views on guns. Greg said teachers and their students are afraid and the issue comes up during pastoral care. Michelle said she thought there was value in discussing gun violence because of our peace practices.

Paula shared her frustration about Spooky Nook sports facility's recent NRA event with guns.

6. Greg shared his Sanctuary team update. He will make sure we get the minutes in the future. Advocacy action day was effective. Groups went to Smucker's office and also Toomey's office. April 29 is a 5th Sunday event. They are also looking at putting together a financial conduit for people in need, such as a Dreamer this week who didn't have the money to reapply. Money would be used for people with connection to Etown to impact our neighbors. On Sunday Greg was at the Dreamers' rally in Lancaster, where he spoke for a few minutes. About 150 in attendance.
7. Peg asked Greg before he left for another meeting if he had any thoughts on upcoming events. He said it is important to consider who else is coming to any event. He is very in favor of the Church World Service kits, which he believes is a good way for younger people to contribute. Greg also reminded us that there no longer is a communications committee, so we should contact him if there is something we want to publicize. Michelle said it seemed like there was a lot more content on Facebook.

Before Greg left, Peg mentioned that maybe 5th Sunday Forum would be a good place to start the gun discussion. Greg said it would be Pat Williams and they are always looking for ideas. Peg asked if she should reach out. Everyone said yes. Michelle said it would fit in with congregational wellness, it is something impacting everyone right now.

8. Peg said there is no bus available for the National Council of Churches event, but asked if it should be placed in the bulletin anyway; the group assented. Sam said the college is focused on the March for our Lives. Peg said she can also put in the bulletin to route people to the March 24 March for our Lives in Lancaster. Sam said these items could also go out on the Witness action alert emails.
9. Church World Service kits. Peg said it's easy to do hygiene kits or school kits. With all the natural disasters maybe the hygiene kits would work better. Paula asked what was in the hygiene kits. Peg said hand towel, washcloth, wide-toothed comb and other specific items. Ask people to donate money and/or donate items for the kit during a collection Sunday. Paula asked if we would coordinate with Christian Ed. Peg said that we could, and work with the children in Sunday School. Peg will check with Pastor Jason.

10. Paula explained that the Pennsylvania Council of Churches had put out a call for housing for the Poor People's Campaign. She read the description. Peg said to ask for more details and report back to the group.
11. Peg asked if we could move the April meeting due to a grandchildren concert. The group discussed and said Wednesday, April 4 at 9 a.m. would work. Peg will advise Peggy of the revised meeting time.

The meeting adjourned.