ECUMENICAL OUTREACH

North American Partners
At General Synod in June, 2019, the NY Conference received the Avery D. Post Award for outstanding work in Ecumenism. We continue partnerships with the United Church of Canada, the Reformed Church in America, and the Christian Church / Disciples of Christ (CC/DoC), sharing programs, resources and information. Howard Cain and Gary VanKennen serve as liaisons with the United Church of Canada’s new Eastern Ontario Outaouais Region. UCC youth from the Buffalo Area attended the Niagara Youth Festival in October, 2019. Commission funds were added to the special offering received for hurricane relief in Puerto Rico, disbursed in summer of 2019. We continue our financial support of the New York State Council of Churches, where Rev. Peter Cook serves as Executive Director and Rev. Alan Dailey serves as UCCNY representative. In 2019, Peter hosted meetings around the state with Rev. Dr. J. Stephen George, Bishop of Madras (Church of South India) and a variety of ecumenical partners, to discuss justice issues during the current persecution of Christians and LGBTQ+ folks in India. Other advocacy work of the NYSCC included a series of “Who is My Neighbor” seminars, a conference for prison chaplains, support for the Poor People’s Campaign and fossil fuel divestment, and a seminar on racism for high school youth in Washington DC, in which two of our youth participated. The annual Ecumenical Advocacy Days switched to a webinar format this year. The theme was “Imagine! God’s Earth and People Restored!” The recorded webinar is on Facebook at Ecumenical Advocacy Days. As the COVID-19 pandemic lays bare the deeply-rooted systemic injustice and institutionalized racism that traps communities of color in cycles of poverty and poor health outcomes, we are called to unite as an ecumenical Christian community to demand justice in our nation’s response.

UEK Forum
Martha Koenig Stone and David Gaewski represent the NY Conference on this national steering committee for the UCC’s multi-faceted partnership with the Union of Evangelical Churches in Germany (UEK). Martha serves as Co-Chair of the Forum. In November, 2019, General Minister and President John Dorhauer spoke at UEK and EKD Synod meetings in Germany about political divisions in the US. A plan to bring a youth delegation from three different areas of Germany to the UCC National Youth Event, along with many other scheduled visits and events are cancelled or on hold due to Covid-19.

Kirchenkreis Berlin Stadtmitte (KKBS)
Now in a fourth year of partnership, we continue to encourage and learn with one another. The partnership has fostered the beginnings of an Open and Affirming conversation in the KKBS. In July, 2019, Rev. Ann Kansfield and Rev. Micah Bucey participated in Pride Day in Berlin, where Micah was a featured speaker. Delegates from the UCCNY attended Kirchentag in May, 2019, at the invitation of the KKBS. In April, 2020, KKBS hosted a Zoom call to see how we are faring during the Covid-19 crisis and to pray for us. A delegation from Berlin planned for June, 2020, may be postponed. Melva Victorino provides crucial planning and support for groups visiting the NYC area.

Evangelische Kirche in Hessen und Nassau (EKHN)
We are now in the 13th year of this partnership. The past year’s activities included:

Visits  Birgit Hamrich, Rosalind Gnatt, and Rainer Brunssen, attended the UCCNY Annual Meeting in May, 2019. Ryan Henderson coordinated visits by UCC youth to the Kirchentag in
Berlin in May, 2019, and to an international youth gathering in Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic in July, 2019.

**Internship** We now have a candidate from the EKHN for an internship to begin in December 2021, and are working on identifying a possible placement. This would be contingent on the relaxing of restrictions due to Covid-19 and the ever-changing requirements from Homeland Security on foreign workers. The local church provides housing and guidance, the Conference provides a car, and the EKHN provides salary. Churches interested in participating in this program in the future should be in touch with Sue Frost, sfrost@uccny.org.

**Choir Project** Rev. Ruby Wilson coordinates this project, and Rev. Carolyn Blair directs the New York Conference Inspirational Choir. With help from Safe Haven UCC, CEIR program funds, and a grant from the national setting of the UCC, we were able to send three musicians to Germany in June-July of 2020 on a concert tour with the Wisconsin Gospellers. Director Rev. Carolyn Blair, keyboardist Eric Ballard and soloist Jamani Blair represented the UCCNY, offering seven concerts in seven different cities, plus several additional unplanned performances. This intergenerational, intercultural event was a tremendous testimony of the power of sharing the gospel message through music to unite people across all kinds of barriers. Arrangements are now in the works for German choir members to visit NY and perform with the Conference Inspirational Choir. Freewill offerings and membership fees would help to defray the costs. There is interest in broadening the choir project to include a Korean Choir. And there is also hope of returning to Germany with folks from Wisconsin and New York.

**United Reformed Church, Northern Synod**

Sandy and Cath Ogilvie of the URC were our guests at the UCCNY Annual Meeting in May, 2019. In July, several UCCNY folks took part in a 6-day pilgrimage along St. Cuthbert’s Way in Scotland and England, learning about Celtic spirituality. Felicity Wright and Ken McIntosh are part of ongoing conversations about how to continue this friendship and cross-pollination of ministries. Tentative plans are in the works for a webinar on Native American spirituality. Topics of common interest include climate change human trafficking and other justice issues, and building intentional missional communities. Rev. Chris Lawrence, originally from the URC, is working actively on building one such community in NYC, with InnerChange.org.

**INTERFAITH RELATIONS**

Lori Keller Burns works with the Network of Religious Communities in the Buffalo area, sponsoring dialogs to counter fear, increase knowledge, and promote peace across faith communities. In 2019, they sponsored “Stories of our Neighbors,” an interfaith event for kids in grades 1-5, held at a public library, and an Experiential Immersion for youth in grades 6-12, with Buddhist, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh leaders each sharing a religious practice, held at Ebenezer UCC. The Commission looks for ways to support local efforts to promote interfaith conversations and programs. We are considering an interfaith track for the Continuing Education Institute at the UCCNY Annual Meeting.

**COMMISSION MEMBERSHIP**

We welcome others who are interested in this work to join the Commission! Current members are: Howard Cain, Peter Cook, Sue Frost (WCM Coordinator), David Gaewski (Conference Minister), Ryan Henderson, Lori Keller Burns, Martha Koenig Stone (Chair), Chris Lawrence, Jonathan Lawrence, Mark Lukens, Kenneth McIntosh, Dona Roll, Prabhu Sigamani, Melva Victorino, Maria Vives, Ruby Wilson, Felicity Wright.

Respectfully submitted, Rev. Martha Koenig Stone.