

President's Report 2015-2016
April 16, 2016

“LET JUSTICE ROLL...” is the theme of this year's Annual Meeting of the New York Conference of the United Church of Christ which will convene in Rochester in June. As the electrifying challenge of the prophet Amos strikes deep into our imagination, it is fascinating that justice issues have emerged in the life of the Association. As I complete this first year as President, I count it a privilege to be a servant of the servants of God.

On a national level calls for justice roll into our spirits and call us to action:

Black Lives Matter is a justice issue.

Resisting voter suppression is a justice issue.

Sanctuary for undocumented migrants is a justice issue.

Women's reproductive choice and right to equal pay are justice issues.

The rights of LGBT folk to fully participate in our society and our churches, free from discrimination and free from threats to their physical safety, is a justice issue.

Supporting the calls for freedom for political prisoners, within the United States, is a justice issue.

After speaking at a special program on May 17, 2015, at our member church, the Bronx Spanish Evangelical Church, I was requested to be the major drafter of a letter that was handed to Pope Francis upon his dramatic and moving visit to New York City in September. The letter asked the Pope to lend his voice to those calling for the immediate release of Oscar Lopez Rivera, a political prisoner of the United States government.

How will **we** answer the call for justice?

Of urgent importance to us, in our life as an Association, is justice that makes us accountable to the demands of love.¹ Among **many** other things, that means:

Maintaining a transparent nominating process is a justice issue. This year, for the first time ever, a questionnaire to be used by those willing to serve the Association in a volunteer capacity, was initially distributed (without Board approval) that would have required one group of saved sinners to judge a subset of saved sinners (those with criminal convictions). Requiring those who might answer affirmatively to then, “tell us your story” would have set up the equivalent of an Inquisition. There will be no such inquisition as long as I serve you as President. Inquisitions are not based on love or justice but on punishment. To the extent that there are issues involving people with criminal convictions in our local churches, we will help

¹ Emilie M. Townes, *In a Blaze of Glory: Womanist Spirituality As Social Witness* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 143.

our local churches address them at that level. I pledge to marshal the resources of the Association, with assistance from the State Conference, to help our churches address such issues.

Food Ministry is a justice issue. It is remarkable the number of stories that surface about church folk who push back against doing food ministry because such ministry may attract the “wrong” kind of people. People are hungry and those of us with resources (time, talent and yes, treasure) can be doing so much more. Let each person examine himself/herself and determine what the Lord’s will is for us individually and as gathered communities of believers in covenant to serve God and God’s people. Our brothers and sisters at the Bronx Spanish Evangelical Church are a living, breathing example of a remarkable ministry which feeds tens of thousands of people each month. Their work is so remarkable that it drew a visit from our new national president and general minister, Rev. John Dorhauer. I have been privileged to visit with that wonderful congregation several times, including helping to celebrate their 75th Church Anniversary on March 19, 2016.

The March to Albany to support farm workers is a justice issue.

New York farmworkers are excluded from basic labor protections such as collective bargaining, overtime pay and a day of rest. Too many still face indignities such as lack of bathrooms and clean water in the fields. The time is now to demand justice.²

How will we answer that call? I encourage you to join the march or pledge as a congregation to support the marchers with meals, places to sleep, or financial support as they march from Smithtown, Long Island, to Albany between May 15-June 1, 2016.

Fundraising to strengthen the endowment and to support the ministries and work of this Association is a justice issue! We are called to increase our ability to continue to support our youth who are in or bound for college and to be able to respond to churches and indeed ministers in crisis.

Churches that fail to pay their dues or are slow to pay them in a timely manner, place an unjust burden for the financial health of the Association upon the sister churches. That is a justice issue. I both invite and challenge all of us to take our rightful place at the table and in the spirit of covenant, to contend with each other for what we feel is just and right and for what is required of us by the law of love. We have challenges in front of us. How will we answer those calls? What will our response be? Let Justice roll down like waters? Indeed!

Respectfully Submitted,

Rev. Reginald Brantley
President

² From Rural and Justice Ministry website, www.ruralmigrantministry.org.

**Metropolitan Association Board of Directors' Covenant
Developed Fall, 2015**

We, as members of the Board of Directors of the Metropolitan Association of the United Church of Christ, covenant to perform our duties declaring that:

We have been chosen as stewards of a sacred trust: called and empowered by God to be servants of God's vision for the UCC Metro Association.

We come together in this time and space to learn, grow, teach, love, reconcile ourselves to each other and to God and to offer our worship to God together as we minister to the spiritual and practical needs of the Metropolitan Association.

Now each of us, individually and collectively, takes responsibility to make this meeting our highest form of Worship to the One and true God that we serve.

This is our covenant, and by its practice, we pray that we will honor God, the membership and each other as we seek to promote the common good.