

In recent weeks the covenanted ministries boards of the United Church of Christ held their fall meetings at the Church House in Cleveland. Kiely Todd Roska, member at New Brighton United Church of Christ and of the Faith Formation for Children and Youth Team of the Minnesota Conference, is the Minnesota Conference representative on the Justice and Witness Ministries Board.

The Justice and Witness Ministries Board met October 29-November 1 in Cleveland. At the new board member orientation, I learned more about all of the work that Justice and Witness ministries does across the country and across the world.

During our meeting, we discussed history and the process of changing the governance structures of the National setting of the UCC. Over the past year, there have been some difficult conversations about how different groups will be represented in the proposed governance structure. Two representatives from the Justice and Witness Board are serving as liaisons to the Unified governance working group, which will continue the conversation about autonomy, covenant, and representation in the new structure.

We participated in a session on the newly-developed Justice LED (Justice Leaders Engaging and Developing) curriculum. The curriculum provides a way for people to engage in meaningful faith-based advocacy work. 30 people were trained in this curriculum in October, including John Guttermann from Minnesota. These people will be paired together to train at least 10 people in every conference of the UCC. There was great energy and excitement about this curriculum. Three JWM Board members were trained in October and each of them said it was one of the best trainings they have ever participated in.

I personally learned about many ministries that I did not know about, including Centro Romero and Franklinton Center at Bricks. Centro Romero facilitates educational-transformational immersion seminars for youth and adults along the U.S./Mexican border. Franklinton Center is a former slave plantation in North Carolina that is now a retreat and conference center, hosting a variety of programs for all ages. In addition, JWM is exploring the possibility of creating an Environmental Justice Center in Washington state in partnership with the Pacific Northwest Conference.

I was overwhelmed by the number of justice initiatives being led by our National staff and by the amount of information on the JWM section of the UCC website: www.ucc.org/justice. There are so many great people and resources that could benefit the Minnesota Conference and much justice work happening in Minnesota that the National staff should know about. My challenge will be to become an effective liaison between the Minnesota Conference and the Justice and Witness Board.

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