

## PRESS RELEASE

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Shaping the future of the ecumenical movement is challenging, particularly in a post-Covid-world, and the struggle has been no less taxing for the Pennsylvania Council of Churches. With this in mind, the Council has developed a strategic vision for its future and its executive director, Rev. Dr. Larry Pickens, to expand the Council's focus.

We are excited to announce that Dr. Pickens has been selected this year to be a recipient of the Reflective Leadership Grant, awarded annually by the Duke Divinity School. The \$15,000 grant supports opportunities for structured reflection for lay or clergy leaders of Christian organizations that are advancing their mission following the multiple pandemics — COVID-19, racial inequity, economic disruption, and mental distress. The grant will allow our executive director to broaden his perspectives and gain clarity about what needs to happen next in his personal and professional life.

Leadership Education aims to create lasting change in U.S. congregations by supporting Christian leaders and the institutions they serve. Leadership Education designs educational services, develops intellectual resources and facilitates networks of institutions that cultivate a coherent vision of Christian institutional leadership and form Christian leaders. Leadership Education is a non-degree-granting initiative of Duke Divinity School funded by Lilly Endowment Inc. and based in Durham, N.C.

“We have been selected to receive a Reflective Leadership Grant from Leadership Education at Duke Divinity. These grants of up to \$15,000 support an opportunity for structured reflection for leaders of Christian organizations that are advancing their mission in the midst of today's rapidly changing context. Thirty-one Christian leaders from a variety of faith-based organizations are funded in this third year of the Reflective Leadership Grant program.

““The Reflective Leadership Grant at Leadership Education at Duke Divinity recognizes and supports the faithful and innovative work of lay and ordained Christian leaders who find themselves at a pivotal moment in their ministry,” says Mycal Brickhouse, a director of program and grants at Leadership Education. ‘Using Harvard professor Ron Heifetz’s language, we want to help leaders experience “balcony time,” which allows them to move from the dance floor to the balcony to gain a broader picture of the work, organization, community and trends. We want to encourage grantees to continue to develop their leadership capacities in ways specific to their work and context. For some, this might look like attending interdisciplinary conferences, and for others it might look like observing similar work in different settings. We are excited about the interest in this grant program from both traditional and non-traditional Christian leaders and we look forward to learning alongside them and their communities.””

Dr. Pickens' proposal, titled, "Reimagining the Pennsylvania Council of Churches for Ecumenical and Interfaith Engagement," includes three components:

- 1. Family Systems training in Bowen Theory:** This work considers family of origin, one's place in it and how it impacts behavior within family and work systems. This follows the theory of Murray Bowen who pioneered this work Georgetown University Bowen Center for the Study of the Family.
- 2. Observation of Council of Churches:** Learning for ecumenical organizations doing similar work in relation to the PA Council of Churches-Dr. Pickens will meet with leaders at 5 other Councils of Churches to dialogue about their structures, challenges, and strategies for the future.
- 3. The Equal Justice Initiative- Montgomery, Alabama:** The Equal Justice Initiative is committed to ending mass incarceration and excessive punishment in the United States, to challenging racial and economic injustice, and to protecting basic human rights for the most vulnerable people in American society. EJI challenges poverty and racial injustice, advocates for equal treatment in the criminal justice system, and creates hope for marginalized communities. EJI provides legal representation to people who have been illegally convicted, unfairly sentenced, or abused in state jails and prisons. The organization challenges the death penalty and excessive punishment and provides re-entry assistance to formerly incarcerated people. EJI collaborates with communities that have been marginalized by poverty and discouraged by unequal treatment. Dr. Pickens will meet with the leadership at EJI.
- 4. Something Good in Englewood!**

Chicago's Englewood is the community in which Dr. Pickens grew up. It has been challenged both socially and economically for the past 60 years. This is an opportunity to gain experience from what this community organization is doing with respect to community development and addressing socio-economic issues. This is a growing focus of the Pennsylvania Council of Churches.
- 5. West African Cultural. Mission and Ecumenical Visit**

This will involve visits with episcopal and ecumenical leadership to discuss ways in which the Pennsylvania Council of Churches can establish mission and social justice partnerships and relationships in their areas. This will include West African leadership in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, The United Methodist Church, Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, and The All-Africa Council of Churches.

These far-reaching initiatives will enhance the work of the Pennsylvania Council of Churches, and we celebrate the vision of our Board of Directors.

Dr. Pickens is an ordained clergy member of the Northern Illinois Conference of The United Methodist Church with Dual Standing in the Penn Northeast Conference of the United Church of Christ.

