



**Wisconsin Conference
United Church of Christ**

Immigrants in Dane County and Wisconsin

By Paulette Harder, member, Lake Edge UCC in Madison, and the Wisconsin Conference UCC Immigration Working Group

COVID 19 has had a devastating effect on Wisconsin. By early June, Wisconsin had over 20,000 confirmed cases and over 600 deaths as a result of the virus. The unemployment rate was over 14%.

The effects of COVID-19 on immigrants, minorities and low-income workers are devastating. Our most vulnerable citizens are the most affected by this pandemic. The Latinx community is uniquely vulnerable to COVID 19. For example, although the Latinx population is 6% of WI population, Latinx workers compose 30% of COVID-19 cases in Wisconsin. The following data from Dane County shows vulnerabilities of this community: 70% are renters, 68% live in multi-unit dwellings, 34% fall below the poverty line and almost two of every five work in the service industry. Nearly 50% of Latinx lack healthcare coverage.

Examples of workplace problems faced by low-income immigrant workers include: being laid off against plant closing laws; workers laid off due to COVID-19 closure without receiving their previously earned pay; working without PPE to protect workers; lack of safe working conditions and general lack of money to support their families.

There are immigrant workers in all parts of Wisconsin who are working in some of the workplaces most affected by COVID-19, including meatpacking, cleaning and janitorial, and farm operations.

There is a lack of resources to meet the needs. One unique problem faced by many immigrants is that even though they pay taxes they do not qualify for unemployment and will receive little to no financial assistance from the COVID-19 laws.

Organizations are trying to help. One example in Dane County is the Latinx Consortium Action Emergency Relief Fund which provides emergency funds for undocumented Latinx workers and small immigrant-owned businesses.

One of the things that individuals and congregations can do to support our immigrant and low-income workers is to find the organizations in your community that are working to

help immigrant and low-income workers. You can provide support: volunteer, donate or act on legislative calls for action.