



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

GREENBURG - It was ironic, yet fitting, that Dr. Melissa Marks was on a family vacation to Memphis, Birmingham, and Atlanta to witness first-hand the impact of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s when she received word that she was the recipient of the YWCA Westmoreland County's 2021 Racial Justice Award. The award presentation took place in conjunction with the YWCA annual meeting on Tuesday June 29, 2021 at the YWCA Mansion.

Dr. Marks' full-time job is professor of education at UPG, but she began her career as a middle school social science teacher, which she held for 10 years. In addition to preparing the next generation of secondary education teachers, she has provided, for the past several years, workshops in the area of Implicit Bias. In 2020 she presented 11 separate trainings to groups that included medical personnel, social service providers, community members and local United Way agencies.

The YWCA Racial Justice Committee agreed to present this year's award, which has been given annually since 1993, to Dr. Marks because she has demonstrated a commitment to racial equity through efforts to build community, raise awareness, and further racial harmony and inclusiveness. As a champion of racial justice, Dr. Marks has shown through her actions a common vision for peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all people.

Included in the narrative for Dr. Marks' nomination submitted by the CEO of United Way of the Laurel Highlands, Karen Struble Myers, was the following:

"As a trainer on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Dr. Marks brings a unique blend of historical perspective, sociology, and psychology to her sessions. Taught with humor and activities, her workshop on implicit bias gives participants insights regarding what implicit bias is, why it occurs, and how it affects society. Audience members explore biases about race, gender, age, socio-economic status, and many others, learn how to recognize the biases they have, and then talk about the biases we all have. Dr. Marks through her commitment to empathy and equity, reminds us that biases are not inherently bad, but that in order to do no harm to others, we must be aware of our biases, understand where they come from, and how to proceed in building more welcoming, inclusive communities."

In her acceptance speech Dr. Marks detailed the impact that her family's civil rights tour showed her about racism in our country. "What I observed," explained Dr. Marks, "was a combination of three things: I observed the litany of hate, hate crimes, laws, and discrimination categorized and presented at all these locations. I observed that injustice for one is injustice for all and I concluded that all individuals matter." In accepting this award, Dr. Marks encouraged the YWCA to continue to act to promote social justice. "It is not always easy. It is often inconvenient and sometimes scary," said Dr. Marks. "But these actions on both small and large levels makes a difference to individuals and to Westmoreland County."

The YWCA of Westmoreland County is dedicated to eliminating racism, empowering women and promoting peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all. The YWCA envisions a world that holds equal promise for every person. We invite you to join us in this fight by becoming a member of the YWCA and

the Racial Justice Committee. Membership information can be found at <https://www.ywcawestmoreland.org/> or by calling 724-834-9390.

Pictured in attached photo:

(from Left) Karen Struble Myers, CEO of United Way of Laurel Highlands; Diane Hightower YWCA President; Dr. Melissa Marks, RJ award recipient; Diane Krivoniak, YWCA Secretary/RJ committee Co-Chair