

240th SYNOD OF THE MID-ATLANTIC

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 240TH ASSEMBLY

SEPTEMBER 11-12, 2017

While Commissioners were departing their homes destined for Synod Assembly, Caribbean Islands had been devastated by Hurricane Irma. So we prayed before we left, we prayed as we traveled, and we prayed as the Assembly convened. Friday prior to the hurricane, Mid-Atlantic leadership talked with leadership in the Synod of the South Atlantic to offer our prayers and support.



Attacking Critical Issues - The traditional large rectangle table setting was replaced with single tables in order to create small groups so that dialogue would be optimized. Urgent issues to be addressed included White Privilege, Racism and Hate Groups. Presentations by four individuals whose feet were on the ground during the August 12, 2017 rally where White Supremacist, Neo-Nazis, and Hate Groups marched in Charlottesville, VA, gave substance to the critical conversations. In addition, the Assembly resumed responding to the 239th Assembly Ted Talks and engaged in discussions to further “Brand” the synod with a compelling vision.

These courageous exchanges prepared commissioners to experiment with imagining a synod mission that exudes energy and vision. Presbyterians ended two days of very heavy lifting by participating in the Washington Office Press Conference via Facebook live to advocate for a fair and just 2018 Federal Budget. The synod’s statement was presented by the Rev. Kevin Powell.

And Then There Was Charlottesville – Moderator Alice Tewell reminded commissioners of their Christian responsibility to stand together, advocate and take risks for the vulnerable. She introduced guests who were each given 10-minutes to share their August 12, 2017 Charlottesville encounter. Rev. Ken Henry, Pastor Westminster Presbyterian Church Charlottesville, shared that the city has become a symbol of racism. Residents feel badly about this stigma. Leading up to the Charlottesville Rally was a July 8th event where the KKK marched in the city parks. Ken witnessed Neo Nazis, KKK and other hate groups; people beating each other and bleeding; looks of hate on people’s faces. What he thought to be the National Guard instead were Neo-Nazis in military gear. Young sons marching alongside their fathers appeared to be primed and ready to escalate violence. The decisive message from Ken is we must educate our children at an early age about the effects of hatred and violence so not to encourage future events such as Charlottesville. Ken said, *“Whenever you push this kind of hatred and violence out into the street, someone is bound to die.”*



Rev. Elaine Ellis Thomas is Associate Rector at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church and is also Co-convenor of the Charlottesville Clergy Collective, a group started by an African American clergy to meet with other pastors for mutual support. On August 11th, a mass prayer meeting was hosted where 700 people attended including Cornell West, Tracy Blackman, students and rabbis. Attendees at the prayer meeting feared violence as hate groups congregated outside of the church. The day of the KKK rally, the Clergy Collective gathered and marched to Justice Park. Elaine realized the need to be available to people who were physically and emotionally attacked. People were being traumatized. City council has since voted to take

down the civil war memorial. Elaine's hope is that Charlottesville will be known as the place where change came. As hundreds of young persons approached a group she was leading and as the young persons recognized the clergy by their dress, Elaine said that the young people shouted, "The Clergy are here, the Clergy are here." They were excited to see the clergy and the church present in the midst of this real life struggle.



Mrs. Lana Heath de Martinez is the Welcoming All Coordinator and Mrs. Kim Bobo is Executive Director of the VA Interfaith Center for Public Policy. While attending a service on August 11, 2017 in Charlottesville, worshippers were alerted that there were people outside with Tiki Torches threatening violence. Hate groups are slated to come to Richmond September 16, 2017. De Martinez has been doing outreach to churches in the area to become a safe place for water, mental health care, spiritual care etc. There will be a peace rally at Maggie Walker Monument and then a march to announce that RVA is united against hate and will have a call to action to be distributed. She asked Commissioners to become activists. She challenged churches to provide fellowship and purpose to the youth in order to see a positive cultural shift. This will help prevent our youth from joining these terrorists groups. Kim Bobo stated, "I was unprepared for Charlottesville." She had never seen this level of hatred and violence. She commended the faithfulness of the religious community as amazing. She suggested the next steps for her organization might include Passing Legislations for immigrants – give them driver's license; Instate Tuition for Dreamers; Forming a commission on racial justice, truth and reconciliation (like in Greensboro); Criminal Justice reform; Wage theft reform-getting rid of Jim Crow language in major labor laws and Push the VA Delegate commissioner for a new dream act.

Stated Clerk/Executive reported that the Synod Stated Clerk drafted a statement condemning White Supremacist, Neo-Nazis and all hate groups in response to Charlottesville, VA on August 11-12, 2017. The statement was sent to presbytery stated clerks/executives, synod commissioners and across the denomination. Silence should never be the response of Presbyterians in matters of this nature. He led the Assembly in recalling September 11, 2001. Additional matters addressed in his report included four complaints of The Permanent Judicial Commission has four complaints and the Hurricanes Harvey & Irma, the Mexico City Earthquake and the Peace and Global Witness Offerings related to the Freedom Rising Initiative. Warren is an elected member of the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board. Many presbyteries are experiencing staff transitions. NC Presbyteries are hosting the GA Stated Clerk for worship, lunch and conversations. He introduced three resources being used across the church to address White Privilege, Race and Reconciliation. They include *Tears We Cannot Stop – Michael Eric Dyson*, *Waking Up White – Debby Irving* and *30 Days with the Belhar Confession*.



GRANTS AWARDED

Grants and Awards Committee approved six requests totaling \$22,827.00 to the following church bodies. Covenant PC, (BAL) for handicap bathroom amounting \$3,800.00; Dulatown PC, (WNC) for renovation of food pantry amounting \$3,800.00; Ginter Park PC, (JAM) for kitchen ADA Compliance amounting \$3,800.00; Milner Memorial PC, (NHO) for replacing Church doors amounting \$3,800.00; Ninevah PC (SHE) for replacing roof and manse repairs amounting \$3,800.00; St Paul PC (SAL) for a new roof amounting \$3,800.00; and a Peacemaking Grant awarded to the Synod to form a Special Administrative Review Commission to address the conflict in AKAP in the amount of \$25,000.00.

Kate Bitting Reynolds Trust Fund Committee awarded 438 Honorable Retired Teaching Elders a total of \$574,575.00. Each certified minister received a distribution of \$1,311.82.

Jubilee Grant Fund Committee approved seven applications totaling \$17,500.00. The awardees included Cameron PC Summer Camp (SAL), \$2,500; Carver Memorial PC (EVA), African American Leadership Development to Address Hunger, \$2,500; Community PC (NEW), The Journey-A Path of Discipleship, \$2,500; Faith Point Fellowship, (SAL) Faith Point Fellowship Internship, \$2,500; Presbyterian Campus Ministry at NCCU, \$2,500.00; Silver Hill PC (CCC), Youth Evangelism Project, \$2,500; and The Fellowship Place (CHA) Real Talk, \$2,500.

Presbytery Initiatives Committee approved four grants totaling \$12,312.00. The applications include Authentic Parenting Retreat from James and New Hope Presbyteries \$2,156.00; Charlotte Youth Ministry Consortium from Charlotte and New Hope Presbyteries, \$2,156.00; Mid-Atlantic Black Caucus Youth Retreat, \$4,000.00; and Synod Presbyterian Men's Council Mission Trip to Kenya, \$4,000.00.

COMMITTEES REPORTING

Nominations Committee asks for presbytery's assistance in filling the following vacancies.

- ✚ Abingdon Vacancies: Nominating, Jubilee and Speer Trust
- ✚ AKAP Vacancies: Jubilee, Representation and Speer Trust
- ✚ Baltimore Vacancies: Nominating and Speer Trust
- ✚ Coastal Carolina Vacancies: Representation and Jubilee
- ✚ Eastern Virginia Vacancies: Representation, Speer Trust, Nomination and Jubilee
- ✚ James Vacancies: Jubilee Fund
- ✚ National Capital Vacancies: Representation
- ✚ Peaks Vacancies: Representation
- ✚ Salem Vacancies: Speer Trust

Committee on Representation reported that the synod is reviewing the practices of several presbyteries that have chosen to consolidate the duties of Representation with the duties of the Nominations Committee. It urges presbyteries to provide training opportunities to equip persons to serve as committee leaders. Funding was provided in the 2018 budget to allow the COR to meet for two days in order to complete its work.

Finance Committee reported that the Cherry Bekaert Firm stated favorable findings of the synod audit ending December 31, 2016. Presbyteries are to be commended for submitting per capita consistently. The 2018 Operating Budget was approved totaling \$261,171.32. Using a percentage from the synod board designated funds capital gains and interest income; the 2017 and 2018 operating budgets were balanced without drawing down synod reserves. Baltimore COLA, chaired by Rev. Carrie Finch Burriss, presented a financial request to help host the 2020 General Assembly. This item was tabled until the March Assembly.

Administration Committee reported that the Presbytery Minutes Review for 2017 is complete. Presbytery minutes were not received from AKAP and most presbyteries do not have in place a Child Protection Policy which was mandated by the 222nd General Assembly of the PCUSA. The By-Laws of Westminster Presbyterian Homes, Inc. were approved along with Rev. H. Carson Rhyne, Jr., to serve on its board. The Annual Review of the Synod Executive and Stated Clerk was conducted. The committee recommended that the Synod Moderator appoint a committee to oversee a comprehensive review of the synod and its bylaws and to hire a consultant to assist. The dates for 2018 Assemblies are March 12-13, 2018 and September 10-11, 2018. Beginning 2019, one assembly will be held Mon-Tue and the other will be held Fri-Sat.

Appreciation Expressed – Nearly one-half of commissioners will end service to the synod in 2017. The synod is grateful to commissioners and committee moderators who served unselfishly in promoting the mission and ministry throughout the region. Moderator Tewell presented certificates to those whose terms will end. Vice Moderator Richard Claterbaugh presented the Moderator with a gift and certificate of service from the synod for her leadership for the past year.

A Compelling Vision - Rev. Jim Moseley challenged commissioners to reimagine the synod. What is God calling the synod to be at this time and who is it that the synod is called to serve? He challenged the assembly to be creative and imaginative in their thinking. What are our Ted Talk take-a-ways? He pointed out reoccurring themes from past assemblies and the current one which include immigrant communities, advocacy, and engagement of young adults, intercultural ministry networks, racial ethnic ministry and African American churches in critical need of “next generation” pastors. Using two existing synod models that have clear and defining missions (Branding), Jim again urged commissioners to THINK BIG! Synod of the Living Waters is known for “Living Waters for the World.” Synod of the Sun is known for “Solar Panels for Third-World Countries.” Might we IMAGINE that the Synod of the Mid-Atlantic be known for *Recruiting, Nurturing and Developing the Next Generation of African American Leadership (Pastors) who will serve the congregations and councils?* Partnerships for this initiative can be built with existing ministries and missions of our denomination that might include Johnson C. Smith Seminary, Union Presbyterian Seminary, Existing associations of African American Leadership within the PCUSA, Presbyterian Mission Agency, Office of the General Assembly, etc. This initiative can be complemented by the resources and talents of the Mid-Atlantic, resonates with our legacy and purposes and suggests to us a defining mission around which we can focus our energies, rally our resources and make a significant contribution to the larger church. Jim will assist the synod with next steps.



Press Conference - The assembly attended the live stream Office of Public Witness Press Conference outside of our Nation’s Capital. The conference advocated a fair and faithful 2018 federal budget. TE Kevin Powell (NAT) and past synod commissioner read the synod prepared statement. The statement was built on the Great Ends of the Church. Commissioners and guests looked on with pride as Kevin spoke firmly that, “We lift up the shelter, nurture and spiritual fellowship of the Children of God”.

Worship and Installation - Commissioner Dale Brown, preaching from Romans 12:9-21, threaded together the key elements considered during the Assembly. The final worship experience sermon was entitled, “*Living our Faith*” and it stressed the importance and power of Love. Dale expounded that “*We must overcome evil with good and hate with love.*” In the face of Charlottesville, his words were convicting. This service provided a time for commissioners to reflect on their work, to celebrate God’s Redemptive love and goodness and prepare them to transfer this experience to their presbyteries, churches and homes. Thank you for reminding us of our biblical mandate to love. After the preaching, Moderator Alice Tewell led the assembly in prayer as she installed Richard Claterbaugh as Moderator and Susanne Taylor as Vice Moderator of the Synod of



the Mid-Atlantic. Moderator Claterbaugh received the gavel by giving thanks to the past moderator for her work and mentorship. Moderator Claterbaugh adjourned the assembly with prayer and all were invited to gather for the Moderator’s reception with cake.

Assembly Dates: 241th Assembly is March 12-13, 2018 and the 242st Assembly is September 10-11, 2018.