

# 241<sup>ST</sup> SYNOD OF THE MID ATLANTIC HIGHLIGHTS

## MARCH 12-13, 2018

**Square Pegs in Round Holes** - Can a square peg really fit into a round hole? Yes, if you are Presbyterian. Try it! I suspect this model of visioning and decision-making has averted the church from creating conducive venues to stimulate minds and bring the beloved community closer. The 241<sup>st</sup> Assembly is a reminder of the



contemporary Gospel song, *“Come on in for the table is spread and the feast of the Lord is going on.”* Nearly 45 commissioners, corresponding members, presenters, and guests showed up! The square/round table set-up was large enough to accommodate everyone. It enabled the Assembly to address its business matters. Plenary sessions were generative in nature. They were facilitated in a very large circle setting. As Presbyterians gathered from across the region, we united under the theme from Ezekiel 37:1-6. As a result, God blew a fresh Spirit of boldness and generosity upon the Synod’s dry bones! At the conclusion of two days of working, praying, worshipping, debating and fellowshiping, the results affirmed that God’s Spirit is alive and well in and across the synod. God can place square Presbyterians into circles of faith that work. Square pegs can fit into round holes!

**Unexpected Gift** – How does a Mid-Council respond to an unanticipated financial gift of \$40,000.00? The synod was the recipient of such a gift during the 241<sup>st</sup> Assembly. Presbytery Executive Jim Moseley and Vice-Moderator Elect Mawuna Gardesey made a special presentation to Synod Moderator Claterbaugh. With a mouth gaping – the Moderator murmured ‘Thank You.’ The check was in support of the Speer Trust Fund, a foundation in Delaware focused on alleviating the root causes of poverty. The synod has been a regular beneficiary of Speer Trust Funds but as New Castle Presbytery moves to a new model of ministry and leadership, the future funding from Speer Trust is in question. This check was one way of expressing “Gratitude” to the synod for its outreach and impactful ministries. The Synod Speer Trust Fund Committee awards grants to churches and organizations across the region engaged in this special ministry.



Synod’s priorities of addressing **Race and White Privilege** continued as Jim Moseley introduced three noteworthy scholars who are experts in their subject. Each brought groundbreaking facts that educated and strengthened commissioner’s resolve of allowing their Christian values to outweigh hate and hostility.

- Rev. Dr. Jon Barton is the General Minister of the Virginia Council of Churches and resides in Richmond VA
- Rev. Veronica Cannon is the Interim Pastor of Avondale Presbyterian Church and resides in Charlotte NC
- Rev. Dr. Jerry L. Cannon is Senior Pastor of CN Jenkins Memorial Presbyterian Church and resides in Charlotte NC

**Doctrine of Discovery** – Retiring VCC General Minister, Jon Barton, transformed the Assembly into a History Classroom. An ardent supporter for Native American State and Federal Recognition, Barton



introduced the Doctrine of Discovery. This was new information to most persons present. This doctrine or law was placed into action by European monarchs in order to legitimize the colonization of lands outside of Europe. It allowed European entities to seize lands inhabited by indigenous people under the guise of discovery. In 2000, VCC was invited by six Virginia Tribes to support them in seeking Federal Recognition. Jon has personally provided testimony to various committees of the US House and US Senate for the purpose of garnering recognition of six Virginia Tribes (Chickahominy, Chickahominy Eastern Division, Monacan, Nansemond, Rappahannock and Upper Mattaponi). These tribes have been largely overlooked.

As a result of the systematic discrimination created by the Virginia 1924 Racial Integrity Act, their records have been altered and destroyed by official acts of the Commonwealth. Passage of the federal legislation would enable these recognized tribes to become eligible for up to \$12 million per year in federal Indian Health and Indian Education benefits. Most powerful to Barton's presentation was the reminder that The Doctrine of Discovery was used by the Christian Church which gave divine blessing and calling to European monarchs. The impact of this doctrine is felt today. Racism and White Privilege are alive and present in the church more than ever. Recognition means validation of one's personhood and value.

**The Catawba Story** is also new to many; however, for Veronica Cannon this story is real talk. On October 6, 1866, the Catawba Presbytery was organized just after the end of the Civil War. Northern missionaries saw the newly liberated African Americans as objects of mission and began to evangelize. Hence, congregations were organized; presbyteries were created as well as synods related to the Northern Presbyterian Church. In 1887, the General Assembly organized the Catawba Synod which would be made up of the presbyteries of Catawba, Cape Fear, Yadkin and Southern Virginia. Since its inception, Catawba had strong ties to Johnson C. Smith and Barber Scotia College. These institutions of higher learning prepared men, women and young people for leadership in Black Presbyterian Churches and communities. The churches, presbytery and synod produced prophetic Presbyterian Leadership. Men and women were catapulted into civil rights leaders. Many became ardent advocates for social justice changes. However, with the 1983 Reunion of the PCUS and UPC, these presbyteries and synod were dissolved. Restructuring led to African Americans feeling a loss of their voices and clearly diminished their presence and participation. Racial Ethnic ministries ended, mission functions ended and advocacy groups lost their seats on the council. Cannon challenged Commissioners to restore the lost voices, fund educational opportunities to help African Americans leaders to become stronger in their communities and across the denomination. Several commissioners bore witness to her presentation as they were alums of Scotia and Smith and/or products of churches that came out of Catawba or a similar history.



Jerry Cannon is an effective practitioner in ministry and is Senior Pastor of the largest African American Presbyterian Church in the Synod and possibly the PCUSA. Jerry knows a lot about rationales for a new African American initiative. In fact, he is a walking and living history for the impact of the Catawba Presbytery and Synod. Jerry was the last Teaching Elder to be ordained by Catawba Presbytery. His sister, Rev. Dr. Katie Cannon, is the first African American female to be ordained in the Presbyterian Church by Catawba Presbytery. Jerry's presentation focused on providing a rationale for this new initiative. He charged the assembly to invest in the Next Generation of African American Leaders. He provided 10-key poignant themes: (1) Point the Next Generation of Christian Leaders to God, 2) Make them our primary focus, 3) Be in it for the Long Haul, 4) Allow for mistakes, 5) Foster authentic and long lasting relationships with them, 6) Teach them Structure and Orderliness, (7) Investing in the Next Generation requires hard work and financial investment, (8) Be prepared to step aside for the next generation but work alongside of them, (9) He stressed the importance of accountability and for all of us to hold each other accountable in terms of spiritual discipline and recruitment, and (10) Finally, he encouraged all to engage in the discipline of Prayer.



**Connectionalism** – Catherine Lynch, Presbyterian Church Investment & Loan Program (PILP) Development Specialist represents Synods of the Trinity and Mid-Atlantic covering the East coast (New Jersey to North Carolina). Catherine demonstrated beautifully the connectional nature between the General Assembly, Synods, presbyteries and congregations by delivering Rebate Checks to commissioners from six presbyteries. In turn, presbyteries are asked to present rebate checks to individual churches during their

presbytery meetings. Checks could range from more than \$50.00 to \$10,000.00 depending on the amounts a particular congregation, presbytery or synod has invested. Churches from Baltimore, Eastern Virginia, Salem, Shenandoah, WNC and National Capital Presbyteries were benefactors. Thanks Catherine and PILP.

### **Committee Reports**

Administration Committee welcomed Helen Bessent-Byrd (EVA) as its new chair. The committee addressed, (a) Approval of Massanetta Springs Articles of Incorporation, (b) Referred the Kate B. Reynolds Certification Committee guideline changes back, (c) Established dates and processes for the presbytery minutes reviews, (d) Reinstated the Synod Executive and Stated Clerk Position to temporary full-time effective March 13, 2018 to December 31, 2018, (e) Future Assembly dates are March 11-12, 2019 and September 13-14, 2019 at Ginter Park PC. (September dates are a Friday/Saturday rather than a Monday/Tuesday).

Finance Committee Co-Chaired by Riley Burgess and Robbie Phillips (CHA/CCC) reported the following: (a) Referred the revision for finance policies/procedures and the synod Treasurer position description to the Administration Committee; (b) Discussed the 2018 synod per capita rate and decided to leave it at \$.85, but will be revisited later; (c) Shared that synod 2017 investments achieved more than \$590,000.00 in returns; (d) Establish "The Synod Mission Support Fund" from the proceeds of the sale of the Synod property in the amount of \$135,000. The Finance Committee is working on a plan to grow the fund for the purpose of funding the operations and mission of the Synod; (e) Received the Audit of the 2016 Financial Statements. (f) Committed \$10,000.00 to the Baltimore Presbytery COLA for the 2020 General Assembly. The possibility of more funding at a later date can be sought.

Grants and Awards Committee chaired by Jim Kirkpatrick (EVA) reported that Peacemaking/Global Witness applications have increased resulting from an informational letter having been sent to the synods 14 presbyteries in December. \$25,000.00 of Peacemaking funds was reallocated to underwrite Administrative Commission cost which will address concerns that the synod has about AKAP. Grants, Scholarships and Awards were approved for the following:

- ✓ **Peacemaking Offering** funded projects at Ben Salem (CHA) Forklift Training Program - \$5,000; Davidson College (CHA) Immersion Trip for college students - \$7,500; Milner Memorial (NHO) Creation of a space for community groups to foster stronger community relationships - \$5,500; and Virginia Law Enforcement Assistance Program – VALEAP, (JAM) to support police officers involved in traumatic incidents - \$20,000.
- ✓ **New and Small Church** – Seven applications totaling \$22,351.00 were funded. They include All Souls (JAM) sanctuary repairs for worship \$3,500; Bear Grass (NHO) Music ministry \$3,500; Francis Makemie (EVA) exterior painting of sanctuary \$3,500; South Plains (JAM) organ repairs \$2,800; The Fellowship Place (CHA) handicapped ramp \$3,500; Third Norfolk (EVA) purchase new windows and blinds for fellowship hall \$2,051; and Bethesda PC (JAM) replacement of the church roof \$3,500.
- ✓ **Euler Scholarship** funded Christopher Speaks in the amount of \$7,500.

Presbytery Initiative Committee welcomed Cindy Privette (ABI) as its new chair. The committee's purpose is to respond to initiatives by two or more presbyteries. This cycle, the committee received and approved an application for a Retreat for Presbytery Leadership in the amount of \$3,000.00 (NHO/CCC Presbyteries). This retreat is aimed at exploring ways to enhance relationships and encourage healing between Presbytery leadership and wounded congregations.

Nominating Committee Susanne Taylor is Synod Moderator Elect and Mawuna Gardesey is Vice Moderator Elect. The following Presbyteries have vacancies on synod committees. AKAP: Jubilee; EVA: Representation and Speer; JAM: Nominating; PEA: Representation.

Executive Committee summarized its work between Assemblies. A recommendation to form an Administrative Commission (AC) to address the life, health, and vitality of the Atlantic Korean American Presbytery was approved. Further, the Synod Moderator and Stated Clerk were authorized to name seven persons to serve on the commission with at least half being Korean. After allowing time for debate, the 241<sup>st</sup> Assembly approved the AC and prayer was offered by Commissioner Keith Page (BAL) on behalf of AKAP.

**THE NEXT GENERATION INITIATIVE PROPOSAL** was distributed Monday evening. Tuesday morning, Commissioners were given additional time to read it as they gathered in the huge circle. Moseley then read the proposal aloud with everyone listening attentively. Presenters J. Barton, V. Cannon and J. Cannon joined the group in Plenary One which provided ample opportunity for commissioners to interact with them. Discussion evolved around the churches complicity in the Doctrine of Discovery and the unintended impact of the 1983 Reunion which resulted in dissolving All Black Governing Bodies. One commissioner compared this event to a Presbyterian Church member who was forced to give up her home because government chose to build a road through it. One commissioner remarked, "What have we done in the name of Jesus Christ?" Some feel that complacency is the enemy and the millennials are not complacent, they want change NOW! Purposefully, Jim placed the Assembly in a position to make a decision about the Next Generation Initiative as he identified the relationships between the presentations and the new initiative. Synod of the Living Waters is noted for developing water systems for third world countries. Synod of the Sun is known for developing solar panels to use in countries and areas where electricity is unavailable. What will the Synod of the Mid-Atlantic be known for and whom shall we serve? Commissioners did not hesitate approving the **Next Generation Initiative**. The 241<sup>st</sup> Assembly empowered the Executive Committee to appoint a "team" to plan a strategy to move the Initiative forward to include such features as (a) conversation and collaboration with identified partners, (b) a timeline for actions and engagement, (c) a process to share the Initiative with member presbyteries, (d) a projection of funding needs, and (e) considerations for staff support and consultation. The sum of \$6000.00 was approved from Presbytery Initiatives Funds for the team to cover expenses related to meetings, travel, production, interviews, research etc. The Initiative is on the Synod's website at [www.synatlantic.org](http://www.synatlantic.org)



**Synod Stated Clerk** reported that the PCUSA Freedom Rising Pilot Initiative is taking specific action to confront the societal and racial issues facing black communities in the U.S. by living into a new church initiative to address the plight of African American males in our country. Four presbyteries are out of compliance with the synod standing rules and the clerks of each presbytery will be notified of such: 1) NAT elected two ruling elders instead of one teaching and one ruling elder, 2) NHO elected two teaching elders instead of one teaching and one ruling elder, 3) PEA elected two teaching elders instead of one teaching and one ruling elder, 4) SAL elected one commissioner. All but Peaks Presbytery completed its per capita giving in 2017. The Synod Stated Clerk and Peaks Transitional General Presbyter are working to address this. Concerns continue to evolve about the life, health and vitality of the Atlantic Korean American Presbytery. Judicial and Civil Cases have occurred in this matter. The Synod Executive and Stated Clerk, Warren J. Lesane, Jr., has been elected vice-chair of the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board. The Assembly instructed the Synod Moderator and Stated Clerk to communicate with all General Presbyters/Stated Clerks in the Synod of the Mid-Atlantic encouraging them to talk with commissioners attending the 223<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly about the proposed per capita increase.



Dates for upcoming Synod Assemblies are March 11-12, 2019 and September 13-14, 2019 at Ginter Park PC.