



February 25, 2019

## Dear Commissioners, Presbyters, Presenters and Guests

### ***“Transforming from Institutional Beings INTO Missional Action”***

The 243<sup>rd</sup> Synod Assembly is meeting at a precarious time in Richmond Virginia on March 11-12, 2019! Synod Leaders see a convergence occurring. News headlines and mission opportunities deeply interconnect with the priorities of the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Synod of the Mid-Atlantic, and where the People of God move, live and have their being. The critical societal issues that have plagued the United States since its inception continue to violently clash, thus destroying any chance of developing what ML King, Jr., referred to as the ‘Beloved Community.’

Commissioners, Presbyters and Guests are invited to take a DEEP DIVE approach to addressing the theme. We believe that Synod Assemblies are ‘Safe Spaces’ and are able to address the most difficult challenges facing the People of God and the Christian Church at any time.

**PLENARY I** will address “Virginians for Reconciliation”. (VFR) is a group of leaders from politics, religion and the arts, founded by former Governor Bob McDonnell. Its missional statement shares that the “*Virginians for Reconciliation*” was formed for commemoration of the 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the country’s first enslaved African people landing in Virginia, August 1619. VFR will reflect upon Virginia’s role in enslaving African-Americans. Further, stated as the reason why the VFR is holding this commemoration is, “*The Declaration of Independence*” acknowledges that all people have inalienable rights endowed by our Creator, and the Constitution guarantees equal protection under the law. The Scriptures say that all persons are created in the image and likeness of God.”

In light of this celebration, both the Governor and Attorney General of the State of Virginia have admitted dressing in Black Face(s) at some point in their past. Allegations of sexual abuse have been brought against the Virginia Lt. Governor. Protests are being held almost daily. Question: “How does the Church address all of this in light of American’s History of Systemic Racism, White Privilege, Power and Discrimination?” *The Rev. Dr. Jon Barton, a member of the Virginians for Reconciliation and past General Minister of the Virginia Council of Churches will guide this DEEP DIVE encounter.*

**PLENARY II** will invite attendees into a DEEP DIVE conversation and learning experience of how historical documents and decision such as The Doctrine of Discovery and Past and Current Supreme Court Rulings have undergirded institutions of Privilege, Power and White Supremacy. Charles Mark is a dynamic and thought-provoking public speaker, writer and consultant. He will provide a Ted Talk presentation on the Doctrine of Discovery and the Foundation of the United States. It is worth listening to and reflecting on before you arrived. Simply click on this link: <https://youtube/HOKtqY5wY4A>.

As you watch, what questions come to mind? What actions are you provoked to take? What changes need to be made? What will you do differently? – WHITE SUPREMACY IS NON PARTISAN! *The Rev. Dr. Jihyun Oh, Manager of Call Process Support for the Presbyterian Church USA and a member of Atlanta Presbytery. Jihyun will strategically guide the Assembly in Deep and Provocative dialogue.*

**PLENARY III** will ask all comers and takers to consider trading comfort for more discomfort. In 2018, Presbyterian Synod Leaders were convicted to act definitively on the issues of White Supremacy, Racism, Power and Privilege. Synod Leaders believed it import to address its own ‘isms.” It needed to participate in a personal and significant immersion experience. “Baptism by Fire” if you would! In our current cultural environment, Synod Executives are convinced we have a responsibility to assist the Church in the United States in confronting and dismantling the structures of racism and white privilege. By gathering members of our synods together, we hope to begin the process of “lighting candles in the darkness” by providing ourselves and others with ways of acknowledging our past actions in order to seek ways to make amends.

The group and their Synod Moderators gathered in Montgomery, AL January 13-16, 2019 to experience both “**The Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration**” as well as “**The National Memorial for Peace and Justice**” (commonly known as the “Lynching Memorial”). Afterwards we were led in debriefing by members of the Museum staff in an auditorium with nearly 300 others. The Rev. Denise Anderson, Coordinator of Racial and Intercultural Justice at the PMA and former Co-Moderator of the General Assembly led synod leaders in a time of reflection and work the following day.

This experience, this immersion encounter, this Deep Dive has transformed hearts, minds and spirits. We understand the gravity of the nature. It is in this space of discomfort that hearts and heads must meet God. Might the synod and its presbyteries partner to provide opportunities for Caravans of young, middle aged, seasoned citizens, males, females, LBGTQIA, and others to confront the reality and history of racism face to face?

*Susanne Hooker Taylor is the current Moderator of the Synod of the Mid-Atlantic and attended the experience in Alabama. Cindy Privette chairs the Synod Presbytery Initiative Committee and pastors two congregations in Abingdon Presbytery. Cindy was inspired to recently travel to Montgomery to experience the sites for herself. Warren Lesane Jr., is Executive/Stated Clerk of the Synod. Martha Rollins is a member of Presbytery of the James and Founder of the “Come to the Table” organization. The group has coordinated trips and caravans to experience the historic sites in Montgomery. Each leader will share a particular perspective and then offer an ASK or INVITATION!*

And yes, the Assembly will meet in committee and hear reports however; it seems to me that the real work of the Assembly is contained in Plenaries one, two and three. The Executive Committee is praying you will take advantage of this Kairos moment. Might Individuals, might congregations, might presbyteries be challenged to begin “Transforming from Institutional Beings into Missional Action?”

Peace and Blessings!

In the Service of Christ,



Warren J. Lesane, Jr.  
Executive and Stated Clerk  
Synod of the Mid-Atlantic