

# 238th SYNOD OF THE MID-ATLANTIC

March 12-13, 2016

Synod Commissioners invested nearly three hours discussing how individually and corporately we can 'Live into the Belhar Confession' during the Assembly in Richmond, VA. The Belhar Confession, adopted by the 222<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly (2016) PCUSA, provided the foundation for continued conversations on race and reconciliation in light of the shootings (black males and police) and the political context that we currently live.

**BELHAR** – Roberts stressed how the Belhar Confession obligates us to discuss Unity, Reconciliation, Justice and Faithfulness. “It calls us to turn away from and reject racism, discrimination, redlining, Jim Crow, and any system seeking to oppress humanity.” Rev. Dr. Raymond R. Roberts, Pastor and Head of Staff at River Road Presbyterian Church in Richmond and co-chair of the Advisory Committee for Social Witness Policy of the General Assembly of the PCUSA, conducted two riveting plenary segments. He taught and facilitated discussion on the role of confessions, the history of Belhar, and ways Christians are called to live out the Confession. “The Belhar Confession is written out of the context of Apartheid and its name comes from a town in South Africa.” He pointed to metaphors found in the Belhar such as Sin and Grace, Lost and Found, Estrangement and Reconciliation. He challenged us explicitly stating that “Unity is a Gift and an Obligation, and that we must believe that Unity is a Reality in order to live into it.” Commissioners were urged to return to their presbyteries, congregations and communities to continue the conversations and practice living into Belhar. Verbal and written evaluations indicated the richness and value of this discussion.



**HUMAN TRAFFICKING** – Overwhelming positive responses were echoed following Jessica Willis', (Executive Director of the Richmond Justice Initiative), presentation. The initiative stresses education, equipping and mobilizing communities with the tools needed to be a force in the movement to end teen and human trafficking. Human Trafficking is the trade of human beings through force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of exploitation for labor, sexual purposes or organs. It is the second largest and fastest growing criminal industry in the world. Willis was joined by Rick Tatnull who emphasized the prominence of trafficking in Richmond and the need to build coalitions to address this societal evil.

**GA MID-COUNCIL** – Rescinding the mandated actions of the 221<sup>st</sup> General Assembly (GA) was supported by commissioners voting 421 to 158 in Portland Oregon. With a 3 to 1 vote, Synods are to maintain their current boundaries and are urged to continue conversations and discernment processes. Past Synod Moderator, Laura Lupton, and Coastal Carolina Commissioner to the 222<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly (2016) reported from a personal vantage point. Laura was a member of the GA Mid-Council Committee and strongly advocated in support of leaving synods in their current

configuration. Lupton and other synod committee member's supporters such as James Pak (AKAP) affirmed that synods faithfully followed the mandate of the early assembly. However, the



outcome was different than the assembly desired. Laura listed additional notable GA actions: (a) Clarification on an Authoritative Interpretation with reference to racial ethnic and immigrant congregations to non-geographic presbyteries; (b) The creation of a Korean staff position to assist Korean congregations and leadership in the Office of the General Assembly; (c) Synods were urged to continue conversations and collaboration of ministry and mission between and among synods. Laura was one of three

leaders representing the Synod of the Mid-Atlantic at a 2015 Synod Boundary Consultation in Dallas wherein each synod process of discernment was highlighted. Other team members included David Sanders and Jim Moseley.

**BIG EVENT** – “The synod recognizes the importance of reaching its many constituencies. We want everyone to attend.” Jim Moseley, chair, explained the idea for a Big Event came from recommendations of the 2015 Synod Discernment Committee. This Event would offer a time of learning, fellowship and worship in much the same manner as the General Assembly’s Big Tent. The proposed theme is “Gathering around the Table” as it is felt that people in the synod need to see one another. Massanetta Springs will host the March 16-18, 2017 event. Lodging and meals have been secured. The cost in shared guest rooms is \$170. The 239<sup>th</sup> Synod Assembly will be held March 16<sup>th</sup> through Noon on Friday, March 17<sup>th</sup>. The Synod Big Event will convene at Noon on Friday, March 17<sup>th</sup> through Saturday, March 18<sup>th</sup>. **SAVE THE DATE!!!**

**CONSULTATION** – Commissioners enthusiastically instructed the synod to convene a Per Capita Funding Consultation in 2016. Each of the synod’s 14-presbyteries is invited to send up to three persons of its choosing. Participants could include, but not be limited to the presbytery executives, finance chairs, business managers and council chairs. In its vote, the synod has set aside \$6,000.00 provided by the Presbytery Initiatives Committee to cover expenses of the consultation. Synod Finance Chair, Kevin Powell (NAT), reported on the operating budget for which per capita dollars fund. For several years, the budget was balanced by drawing down on synod reserves. Per capita giving is being reduced by presbyteries due to membership loss and unique policies limiting contributions. Powell explained that the synod is living out GA’s Mandate of continuing to ‘discern its mission based on an emerging sense of purpose, partnership, context and call,’ thus identifying new and compelling opportunities of mission, ministry and needs, without funding sources. He suggested two approaches to ending deficit spending; one short and one long term. This strategy also enables the synod to respond to new and emerging ministry opportunities across the region. The Consultation will consider these and other possibilities. Encourage your presbytery to participate.



**STATED CLERK** – Warren Lesane serves as the Synod Executive and Stated Clerk. Through his ministry, the Synod is involved in a number of ecumenical activities with the Virginia Council of

Churches and the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy Dialogues Interfaith Dialogue. Further, the Stated Clerk reported that the 222<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly of the PCUSA rescinded the actions of the 221<sup>st</sup> General Assembly's mandate to reduce the number of synods. Synods are urged to continue conversation and collaboration of ministry and are also urged to undertake an intentional system of review and self-study and report to the General Assembly on a bi-annual basis. The synod's 2014-2015 minutes and records were approved without exception. The Executive/Stated Clerk has been elected to the Board of the Presbyterian Mission Agency (PMA). Baltimore Presbytery's new General Presbyter is Jackie Taylor. Abingdon Presbytery no longer has a Presbytery Shepherd (Leader). The Synod Permanent Judicial Commission has received three remedial complaints. It is awaiting the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission's final order on a SPJC challenge. Presbytery Minute Review was conducted per instructions of the Administration Committee. All fourteen presbyteries submitted minutes. Relevant comments will be shown in the synod minutes and communicated to the appropriate presbytery stated clerks.

### REPORTS IN BRIEF

- Committee on Representation (COR) Chaired by Rule Elder CW Hargrave reported several items worthy of noting. (1) The COR Presbytery Reporting form and the Synod COR Review and Evaluation forms should be revised so that what is asked of the presbyteries to report and what we are reviewing and evaluating are the same information and (2) Training for Presbytery COR's is requested and needed; and (3) The racial ethnic designations should be updated in order to reflect immigrant congregations.
- Permanent Judicial Commission (SPJC) Teaching Elder John Goodman shared highlights of the eleven complaints the SPJC has managed since March 2014 until the present. All complaints at this time have been remedial cases. Three cases are active with the synod and one is awaiting the General Assembly's Permanent Judicial Commission to rule on in early October 2016. The SPJC has 14 members, one from each presbytery. Its moderator is Ruling Elder Carol Haas and Teaching Elder John Goodman serves as its clerk.  

- Worship and Guest Preachers – The synod was blessed with refreshing preaching during its two worship services. We thank God for the gifts, talents and passion of the Rev. Dr. Frances Gench – Union Presbyterian Seminary and Rev. Kathryn Lester Bacon – Second PC Richmond. Vice Moderator Alice Tewell coordinated the services. Opening Worship included celebration of the Lord's Supper and reading of the Necrology Report.
- Massanetta Springs Executive Director Clayton Rascoe updated the assembly on its activities including its new mission statement. 'Massanetta Springs is a place for all people to experience God through renewal, discovery and hospitality.'

**FINANCE** – The Synod of the Mid-Atlantic per capita for 2017 is \$ .80. The Assembly adopted the 2017 Operating Budget in the amount of \$287,333.00. \$67,440.00 from reserves will be used to balance the budget. The committee is working to facilitate a synod per capita funding consultation

in 2016. The synod's financial review was conducted by Cherry Bekaert Auditors. Russell Coleman-CPA attended the finance committee meeting to respond to questions.

**GRANTS AND AWARDS** - \$30,075.00 totaled all grants awarded. Visionary Grants were awarded to Western North Carolina Presbytery \$1500 for spiritual retreats; Lumos at University of Del (NEW) \$2000 for vocational discernment; Northminster PC (WNC) \$1500 for daycare; and Riverfront PC (NEW) \$1250 for New Worshipping Communities leadership. New & Small Church Grants were awarded to Oakland PC (NAT) \$3000 for doors; Westminster PC (JAM) \$3000 for Handicap ramp; Bryson City PC (WNC) \$4000 for termite repair; Ryburn Memorial PC (WNC) \$1325 for painting and computers; Third Street PC (WNC) \$3500 for heating system; Second Kannapolis PC (CHA) \$4000 for painting; and Coastal Carolina Presbytery \$3450 for coaching. A Peacemaking Grant was awarded to Cann Memorial PC (NHO) \$5000 for Stop Hunger.

**PRESBYTERY INITIATIVES** – \$12,000.00 in grants were awarded. Two presbyteries agreed to sponsor an application to fund the Synod Per Capita Funding Consultation in the amount of \$6,000.00. Two presbyteries agreed to sponsor an application to provide funding in the amount of \$6,000.00 for the 2017 Synod Big Event at Massanetta Springs Conference Center, March 16-18, 2017.

**KATE B. REYNOLDS** – The Certification Committee approved \$589,750.00 to be distributed to qualifying retired minister members of North Carolina Presbyteries. Wells Fargo Bank was authorized to issue 450 checks each in the amount of \$1,310.36 on June 25, 2016. The committee continues to determine if the application form needs to be updated.

**ADMINISTRATION** – The minutes were received from all 14 presbyteries and approved. Exceptions in the minutes will be communicated to stated clerks for attention and correction. A Synod Child Protection Policy was adopted and will be posted on the website. Synod Assembly's dates and locations for 2017 are as follows: March 16-17 (Massanetta Springs); September 11-12, 2017 (Richmond VA). An evaluation of the synod will be conducted with recommendations to be brought to the September 2017 Assembly. Administrative staff will receive a 2% cost of living increase in 2017.

**NOMINATION** - Vacancies on synod committees exists in the following presbyteries: **AKAP** – Jubilee 2018 and Speer Trust 2018; **BAL** – Jubilee 2019, SPJC 2021, and COR 2019; **CHA** – Speer 2019; **EVA** – COR 2019, Speer 2019 and SPJC 2021; **JAM**- Jubilee 2019; **NHO** – Nominating 2018 and Jubilee 2018; **SAL** –Speer 2017; **SHE** – Speer 2019; and **WNC** – COR 2019. A five-year-term of service for SPJC Members elected in the class of 2021 was approved to comply with the Synod Standing Rules of having only three classes for membership.

**MODERATOR AND VICE MODERATOR** - Moderator Sanders installed Alice Tewell as the new Synod of the Mid-Atlantic Moderator and Richard Claterbaugh as Vice Moderator. The Assembly thanked David for his service by presenting him with departing gifts.