

THE SYNOD OF THE MID-ATLANTIC

A Digest of the 253RD Assembly (PCUSA)

CELEBRATION: Hospitality reigns supreme within the Synod of the Mid-Atlantic, where every member, from committee volunteers to commissioners, experiences the warmth of care as our defining trait. The culmination of our 253rd Assembly was marked by a poignant farewell to Tami Scott, our longstanding Administrator, as she embarks on a new chapter six months short of 11 years of dedicated service. The Administration Committee, under the leadership of TE Felicia Stewart Hoyle, orchestrated a splendid celebration featuring heartfelt video tributes from colleagues and staff from across the Mid-Atlantic region. Tami's retirement was commemorated with gifts from the Emerging Ideas Team and Synod Staff, accompanied by tributes from the Synod Executive and the Financial Manager. Do not worry at all, Tami has helped to pick a successor. As we say farewell to Tami, we say welcome to Cameron Motley. Cameron and Tami's time overlapped for two weeks. The festivities concluded with a group lunch and a grand cake, symbolizing our fond wishes for Tami's future endeavors. Well - Done!



INSPIRED WORSHIP: Over the past five years, the Synod has embraced Matthew 25 as a guiding principle, inspiring nine of fourteen presbyteries to adopt the vision and focus of the Presbyterian Church (USA). At the heart of the Assembly's Worship Service during the 253rd Assembly was a stirring message from the Rev. Chris Burton, Director of the Leadership Institute at Union Presbyterian Seminary. Burton illuminated the parable of the talents from Matthew 25:14-30. With a call to invest our time, talents, and resources faithfully, he urged us to embrace God's abundance and extend our impact through outreach. His sermon challenged us to move beyond mere survival and actively engage in glorifying God through our stewardship. Thank you, Chis for blessing the Assembly with such inspiration. The Synod applauds your witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.



CONNECTING THE DOTS: Under the adept leadership of Synod Moderator Eunil (David) Cho, the 253rd Assembly seamlessly connected to its predecessor, the 252nd Synod Assembly, by centering both Assemblies around the theme of "Vital Black Leadership and Vital Black Churches." Presbyteries rallied their commissioners and leadership teams to actively participate, resulting in a robust turnout. The Moderator skillfully framed the continuity between the two assemblies, focusing on the past, present, and future of the Black Presbyterian Church and Black Presbyterian Leadership. The Assembly was invited to look at the past with a rich history of Presbyterianism offered by Rev. Edward Newberry highlighting five All-Black Governing Bodies that were dissolved resulting from the 1983 Reunion in the PCUSA. Rev. Cho asked us to look at the present and what is going on now with the Black Presbyterian Church resulting from the past assembly. Finally, he challenged us to consider and shape the future possibilities of Vital Black Presbyterian Churches by learning about the past and evaluating the present. Moderator Cho, you are a gift to AKAP, Synod and PCUSA. Thank you!



based organizations which is integral to the NGI's success. The NGI will detail the long-term role of the Synod in supporting and sustaining the NGI's mission and activities. Finally, the presentation outlined the structural design of the NGI, including funding mechanisms to ensure its sustainability and impact. The Next Generation Initiative represents a bold step forward in addressing critical challenges facing Black Presbyterian communities. With its comprehensive approach and strategic vision, the NGI promises to be a beacon of hope and renewal, ensuring a vibrant future for Black clergy and congregations within the denomination.

CONVERSING STEWARDSHIP: RE Cherry Peters guided the assembly in a discussion on Stewardship.

The mandate from the 2016 General Assembly of the PCUSA was to recreate and redefine the mission of synods. Peters outlined the synod's mission and its alignment with the directives mandated by the GA Mid-Council Commission. She emphasized the synod's commitment to reimagining and tailoring its ministries to address the specific needs of its region. Peters stressed the crucial relationship between vision and mission, noting that finance naturally follows ministry. Highlighting the diverse range of innovative ministries the synod is currently undertaking, including the Matthew 25 Foci, Emerging Ideas, the Next Generation Initiative, and the Montgomery Immersion Experience, she posed a fundamental question: How can the synod sustain and expand its mission and ministry given the limitations of the current financial model?



Referring to the BOO G-3.0106, Peters underscored the significance of mission in determining the structures and forms necessary for the church's work. She quoted the section which emphasizes the unity and interdependence of the church through the funding of mission activities, cautioning against any failure to participate in stewardship that could weaken this unity.

- Providing context, Peters presented data on synod per capita rates from 2016, revealing the Synod of Mid-Atlantic's low per capita rate of \$1.15. She also noted a trend of declining church membership throughout the synod. Currently, 52% of the synod's budget is funded through per capita contributions, with the remaining 48% sourced from investment revenue.
- Looking ahead, Peters announced that the Finance Committee would propose a recommendation to the 254th Synod Assembly regarding synod per capita rates, which would impact the budgets of presbyteries in 2026.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

- Trustees: The Synod as a Corporation met to ratify a line of credit with the Presbyterian Investment and Loan Programs to support the Atlantic Korean American Presbytery in meeting its financial obligations of a civil litigation.
- The Emerging Ideas report was shared by RE Amanda Pines who introduced the members. The committee's focus has been in their work with the Wild Church Network (a radical idea that God can occur outside of a church building). The partnership will offer a workshop on May 2, 2024, from 12 to 4 pm (via Zoom). Registration can be done via the Synod Website or by scanning a QR Code that was provided.
- Finance: RE Cherry Peters introduced members and provided background information concerning its sole recommendation. Checks have been delayed or even lost through the USPS, so payments being made through the Synod website's 'Donate Now' button could combat this challenge. Therefore, in the interest of efficiency and security, the Finance Committee recommended that each of the fourteen presbyteries remit their per capita contributions and other fund payments through the Synod's online payment portal. Per capita will remain at \$1.15 for 2025. Commissioners are asked to return to their presbyteries to share



the information shared during the Conversation about Stewardship. The Assembly approved the following recommendation that synod per capita and other fund payments to the Synod be made through the Synod's online payment portal. Correspondence is forthcoming to inform each of the Synod's fourteen presbyteries.

- **Administration:** TE Felicia Hoyle introduced committee members and welcomed RE Miriam Dewhurst – a former member but has now been coopted. The committee conducted a comprehensive review of Synod Policies, updating policies and guidelines as needed. Additionally, they facilitated the review of Presbytery Minutes and served as a personnel Committee, overseeing Synod Staff matters. A key focus moving forward will be the development of an Anti-Racism Policy, reflecting the committee's commitment to equity and inclusion. The committee is also in charge of the celebration for Tami Scott, Retiring Synod Administrator.



- **Grants:** TE Tolokun Omokunde introduced committee members. More small church funding requests than funds available were received. This may be an ongoing trend. The committee met one day prior to the Assembly to begin framing a new direction and emphasis for synod grants. The Assembly approved the following requests.



Euler and Stultz Scholarship: Approved scholarships of \$7,000 each for Pravee Pulukuri and Spandama Valbhapuram. Approved scholarship renewals of \$3,275 each for Nenio

Pfuzeh, Geoffrey Kanyugi, and Josh Gilhart. Approved Rein Wesley for \$5,000 from the Stultz Scholarship fund. **Small Church Grants:** Approved grants of \$5,000 to Campbell Memorial (PEA), Hope PC (BAL), Iglesia Santurio (NHO), and \$3,000 to Makemie Memorial (NC). The following churches will be notified that their requests could not be approved because of lack in synod funding: Bethpage United (CHA), Danbury Presbyterian (SAL), Providence Presbyterian (JAM), and Bethlehem PC (JAM). The **Eiler Fund** is a restricted fund and has not been used in years. No applicant has met the stringent Eiler Fund criteria in twenty years. The committee asked the Assembly to direct synod staff to begin proceedings to broaden the application of the Eiler Fund.

- **Nomination:** RE Doug Sensabaugh reported efforts to fill vacancies. Correspondence was sent to presbytery stated clerks enlisting their assistance. Western North Carolina Presbytery will provide the next nominee for synod Vice Moderator. Nominations were opened from the floor.
 - Representation vacancies- PEA and WNC
 - Jubilee Vacancies – PEA and WNC
 - Nomination Vacancies – PEA and WNC

Executive Committee: Vice Moderator Barry Parks introduced members and provided an overview of its work. The Assembly approved eight recommendations from the committee.

1. That the Synod of the Mid-Atlantic guarantee a line of credit up to \$80,000 from the Presbyterian Foundation for the purpose of assisting AKAP in paying legal fees.
2. That the Minutes of the 252nd Synod Assembly be approved.
3. That the 253rd Assembly Planning Committee be empowered to make decisions on behalf of the Executive Committee related to the 253rd Synod Assembly.
4. That the 2024 IRS Mileage Travel Reimbursement rate of \$.67 for commissioners, committees and other authorized individuals incurring auto travel for 2024 be approved.



5. That TE Chip Stapleton be approved as Co-Chair of the Synod Grant Committee.
6. That the Synod Stated Clerk be directed to write a letter of non-compliance under the signature of the Synod Moderator and Synod Stated Clerk. This pastoral letter is notifying the presbytery of the synod's concerns of its failure to elect commissioners to synod.
7. That the Synod of the Mid-Atlantic's geographical boundaries overture to the 226th General Assembly be approved.
8. That the Synod of the Mid-Atlantic concurs with the Synod of the Northeast's overture requesting that the General Assembly create an Administrative Commission.

PRESBYTERY VOICES: This Assembly, like the past Assembly, actively engaged transformative



discussions and actions centered around the Matthew 25 initiative. Various presbyteries are demonstrating commendable commitment to addressing historical injustices and fostering meaningful change. This movement, which focuses on actively engaging in three critical areas—eradicating systemic poverty, dismantling structural racism, and nurturing congregational vitality—has gained momentum and is driving impactful initiatives across congregations and



communities. Vice Moderator Barry Parks and Past Moderator Addie Peterson addressed profound developments unfolding within the Presbyterian community. Parks shared a poignant reflection on his personal journey of discovery, revealing insights into his family history that sparked contemplation and a call to action. He bravely acknowledged the possibility of ancestral connections to slaveholders, highlighting the need to confront this historical reality with humility and accountability. Purposeful Matthew 25 initiatives are aimed at fostering justice, mercy, and reconciliation.

- The Peaks Presbytery, for instance, has appointed a Ministry Specialist for Justice and Mercy, demonstrating a commitment to fulfilling promises made during past assemblies. This presbytery has allocated substantial funds for anti-racism efforts and embarked on educational visits to historical sites, acknowledging and addressing its historical ties to slavery.
- Similarly, the Presbytery of Baltimore has made significant strides since transitioning to a Matthew 25 Presbytery. Their Dismantling Racism team has organized workshops, launched campaigns promoting civic engagement, and initiated educational activities to deepen understandings of racial injustice. Plans for further engagement, including a forthcoming Mini Summit, underscore a dedication to sustained and evolving efforts.
- Other presbyteries, like Salem and Coastal Carolina, have leveraged the Matthew 25 initiative to foster growth and inclusivity. Salem Presbytery convenes regular meetings to discuss the recruitment of African American pastors and strengthen partnerships within the community. Coastal Carolina has experienced notable expansion, welcoming new congregations inspired by the Matthew 25 Summit.
- The Presbytery of Eastern Virginia stands out for its tangible outcomes, boasting several new Matthew 25 Churches following active participation in assemblies and summits. This demonstrates the impact of collective engagement and strategic planning in nurturing congregational vitality and fostering transformative relationships.
- New Castle Presbytery continues to advocate for transparency and accountability, urging individuals to inquire about specific actions taken against racism.



- National Capital and New Hope Presbyteries are poised to deepen collaboration and expand initiatives, highlighting the power of collective action in advancing justice and mercy. These efforts reflect a shared commitment to embodying the principles of Matthew 25 and creating communities where justice and mercy prevail.

DEEP DIVE: In the aftermath of the September 2023 assembly, participants from various presbyteries convened for a unique exploration of progress, challenges, and aspirations within their respective congregations. Led by TE Bruce Grady, Presbytery Executive of New Hope Presbytery, this introspective gathering aimed to distill the collective wisdom garnered since their last assembly, igniting discussions that delved into the heart of their communities' needs and ambitions. We are providing the following insights from this session.

- Learning from the Catawba Story, the Western North Carolina Presbytery contingent embarked on a deep dive into the outcomes of the September assembly, drawing parallels with the experiences of the Catawba Presbytery. Insights revealed striking commonalities, particularly concerning the needs of rural churches and the critical necessity for robust pastoral leadership. This introspection highlighted the power of shared experiences and the potential for collaborative solutions.
- The James Presbytery cohort session revolved around clarifying priorities and embracing their collective narrative. Acknowledging systemic racism and the often-negative perceptions of Christians as significant hurdles, they sought to leverage their talented staff as a formidable asset in confronting these challenges head-on. Their commitment to owning their history signifies a crucial step towards holistic growth and inclusivity.
- New Hope and Coastal Carolina Presbyteries assemblies exuded a palpable spirit of reflection and renewal, attributing the presence of the Holy Spirit to their transformative experiences in September. Their focus on engaging with the Matthew 25 initiative and nurturing trust and repair work underscores a collective commitment to meaningful action. Despite acknowledging barriers such as racism and volunteer shortages, they are poised to harness existing resources to effect tangible change.
- New Castle and Eastern Virginia Presbyteries gatherings delved into the historical narrative of their mergers, weaving a tapestry of shared identity within the presbyteries. Amidst goals of articulating their collective story and enhancing collaboration, they navigated challenges like maintaining focus and overcoming power struggles. Their emphasis on faith as a guiding force signifies resilience in the face of adversity, paving the way for collaborative progress.
- Embracing Opportunities, Eastern Virginia Presbytery seized the opportunity to reframe



information and forge vital networking connections across presbyteries. Discussions surrounding the potential transition to a Matthew 25 Presbytery underscored their proactive stance in driving meaningful change. The prospect of increased engagement in Matthew 25 initiatives reflects a collective resolve to translate dialogue into impactful action. In summary, the post-assembly reflections encapsulate a mosaic of resilience, introspection, and collective ambition within the presbyteries. As participants navigate challenges and celebrate milestones, their unwavering dedication to service and community underscores the transformative potential of collective action. These sessions not only

fostered dialogue but also sowed the seeds of collaboration, ensuring that the spirit of growth and inclusivity continues to flourish within these vibrant congregations.

STATED CLERK: Warren introduced Cameron Motley as the new Synod Administrator, succeeding Tami Scott in her retirement. RE Tony De La Rosa was introduced as Salem's Presbytery Executive and invited to make comments. Tony has been in the field since January 2024, and we were delighted to welcome Tony to the SMA in partnership with Salem Presbytery. The Stated Clerk highlighted pastoral concerns, including unexpected deaths and the ongoing health challenges faced by commissioners. Warren stressed the importance of completing the Conflict-of-Interest Form annually. He noted his involvement in Ecumenical Ministries through the Virginia Council of Churches.



- Next Generation Initiative is a ministry in progress and is laser focused on identifying and recruiting Black Presbyterian Church Clergy Leadership and addressing the decline in Black Presbyterian Churches. Last September, the NGI was launched. This Assembly enables all to see the components of the NGI and to understand its structure, its function and how it will relate to the Synod of the Mid-Atlantic
- Matthew 25: A first ever PCUSA Matthew 25 Summit was held in Atlanta, Georgia January 16-18, 2024. It quickly reached its maximum attendance. More than three hundred persons gathered from across the country to address Systemic Poverty, Vital Congregations and Structural Racism, and it did. Plenary presenter, Dr. William Yoo was at his absolute best as he challenged the White Presbyterians to repent for and repair the historical harms of its complicity in the United States treatment of Indigenous and people and African Americans. Dr. Liz Theoharis was in rare form in addressing the idea that Americans can end poverty. The Synod of the Mid Atlantic had the largest contingency present. Rev. Professor Mitri Raheb, Lutheran Palestinian Clergy, keynoted the Summit with riveting effect from a Palestinian perspective. Four years ago, the synod allocated \$6,940 per presbytery to assist them to engage in Matthew25 activities and to challenge their churches to do the same.
- The Clerk acknowledged that National Capital Presbytery was noncompliant because it had not elected commissioners to the Synod as required by Standing Rules.
- He discussed Permanent Judicial Commission work, emphasizing its effectiveness in handling complaints. Presbytery Leadership overview was shared.
 - TE Ann Elyse Hicks as the Presbytery Executive and Stated Clerk leads Abingdon Presbytery (ABI).
 - Atlantic Korean American Presbytery (AKAP), with TE Jung Sook Kim as Stated Clerk and no Presbytery Executive, received approval for a line of credit up to \$80,000 with the PLIP.
 - Baltimore Presbytery (BAL) is under the leadership of TE Jackie Taylor as General Presbyter and TE Mary Gaut as Stated Clerk, having adopted Matthew 25.
 - Charlotte Presbytery (CHA), led by TE Jan Edmiston as General Presbyter and RE Tamara Williams as Stated Clerk, is convening a Black Church Consultation in April.
 - Coastal Carolina (CCC), under TE Jerrod Lowrey's leadership as General Presbyter, is embarking upon strategic planning.
 - Eastern Virginia Presbytery (EVA) has RE Q. John Tamm as Stated Clerk and TE Jeff Bell as a part-time Interim General Presbyter, with an ongoing search for a General Presbyter.
 - James Presbytery (JAM) is led by TE Floretta Barbee Watkins as Lead Presbyter and TE Charles Grant as Acting Stated Clerk, actively engaged in reexamining its staff and funding.
 - National Capital Presbytery (NAT), with TE John Molina Moore as General Presbyter and TE David Baer as Stated Clerk, is out of compliance with Synod Standing Rules.
 - New Castle Presbytery (NEW) is led by TE Tracy Keenan as Missional Presbyter and Cindy Kohlmann as Connectional Presbyter.



- New Hope Presbytery (NHO), with TE Bruce Grady as Presbytery Executive and TE Ed Johnson as the temporary Stated Clerk, is participating in the Presbyterian Leader Formation, partial funded by the SMA.
- Peaks Presbytery (PEA), under TE Carl Utley's leadership as General Presbyter and TE Betsy Soto as Stated Clerk, welcomed back Soto from medical leave.
- Salem Presbytery (SAL) has RE Tony De La Rosa as the new Presbytery Executive and RE David Vaughan as Stated Clerk.
- Shenandoah Presbytery (SHE), led by TE Bronwen Boswell as Presbytery Executive and Stated Clerk. TE Nancy Meehan Yao is the Acting General Presbyter while Bronwen serves as the Interim Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church (USA).
- Western North Carolina Presbytery (WNC), TE Byron Wade serves as General Presbyter and TE Cameron Murchison as Stated Clerk, currently rescheduling its Black Church Summit.
- The Clerk recognized Women's History Month by honoring the leadership and accomplishments of Presbytery Leaders across the Synod. He specifically mentioned individuals such as Jung Sook Kim, Ann Elyse Hicks, and Jackie Taylor, among others, and highlighted Rev. Dr. Bronwen Boswell's role as Interim Stated Clerk of the Office of the General Assembly.

BOARD OF PENSIONS: In a recent presentation by RE Keenan Rogers and RE Elizabeth Little from the



Board of Pensions, significant updates, and changes to the benefits package for pastors were outlined. "The Season of Rebuilding" shed light on various improvements and modifications within the Board's framework, emphasizing a commitment to better serve the needs of pastors and churches.

- A notable highlight of the presentation was the introduction of a new benefits website, designed to streamline access and address previous technical issues. Keenan



and Elizabeth emphasized the importance of creating new login accounts for both benefit providers and employees to ensure a smooth transition to the updated system. They acknowledged that automatic invoice payments did not transfer over to the new platform, necessitating churches to recreate these settings.

However, it was reassuring to note that no late penalties would be imposed during this transitional period, demonstrating the Board's commitment to supporting its member churches.

- Another key aspect covered in the presentation was the provision of employer quick site guides, aimed at facilitating a better understanding of the benefits available and the processes involved. This resource underscores the Board's efforts to enhance accessibility and clarity for employers navigating the benefits landscape.
- Furthermore, a structural update within the Board of Pensions was announced to align more effectively with current needs and challenges faced by pastors and their congregations. This strategic realignment reflects a proactive approach to improving service delivery and responsiveness.
- One significant development discussed was the upcoming nationwide rollout of the Shared Ministry Program in 2025. This program facilitates collaboration between two churches to jointly employ a full-time pastor, optimizing resources and fostering community partnerships. The anticipation of this initiative reflects a forward-looking vision aimed at sustaining pastoral care and support in diverse congregational settings.

It was announced that pension checks have seen a noteworthy 4.5% increase, marking a remarkable 46% rise since 2015. This upward trend underscores the Board's commitment to ensuring financial security for pastors as they navigate their retirement planning.