



August 23, 2020

Re-cap of the Special Meeting of the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference

The present Coronavirus Pandemic moved the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference to adapt gathering for the Special Meeting on August 15th through the use of Zoom technology. This was a first-time event for the conference, with a tremendous expenditure of time, energy and talent by the staff of the conference and many volunteers. Their efforts enabled the delegates and members to do the work of the conference for the benefit of the churches of the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference.

Though unable to gather in person, we praised God together through meaningful worship designed for this meeting. From lament to joy, we expressed our faith in the continuing presence of a still speaking God! The Holy Spirit flowed freely in our responses spoken and prayed, in reflections which challenged our hearts and through moments of awareness of new possibilities before us.

Many reports were received by the delegates, informing us of the work of the conference and its committees through this past year. We discovered 73 churches achieved the 5 For 5 status, an achievement to be celebrated. The Conference financial reports and audits were reflective of the adjustments we are making in this covid era. We were reminded of the need to continue to support the work of our churches and of the Conference through our OCWM giving. For that work continues, even in these days of Zoom meetings in place of personal gatherings.

I was impressed to hear about the various approaches churches are using in this time for sharing their ministries of worship, caring and justice. "Online" has become the buzz word for the church, from worship to Bible study to justice and witness planning, we affirm the endeavors of the churches to speak the gospel of Jesus Christ in a new way.

The Conference also speaks the gospel in new ways. From nascent beginnings at the fall meeting in 2019, several task forces brought forth fruit to the conference. The Addiction Task force has produced not only a listing of resources for the use of churches in addressing this scourge, but four faith reflection essays which the conference affirmed and will provide to the churches in both print and electronic form for use.

This pandemic has advanced the work of the Mobile Office Platform task force, as this committee works to implement a mobile office model for our conference. The pandemic has advanced the original timetable, but has also yielded much needed information of the impact of moving towards such an arrangement in the future. There is continuing feedback on how well this model supports the conference churches.

A new initiative was introduced and affirmed by the delegates, the Zachariah Walker Racial Justice Initiative. In this time of addressing systemic racism, the delegates affirmed honoring the memory of Zachariah Walker, an African-American who was lynched on August 13, 1911 in Coatesville, PA. In honoring his memory, the conference will seek to recognize the sin of systemic racism, seek to confess our embrace of the racist past, and repent and turn our hearts to God who calls us to love one another. The initiative will include a period of worship and reflection, with resources provided to the congregations beginning with Advent for a year long emphasis on seeking to become the beloved community God intends us to be.

During this meeting, the delegates affirmed the leadership of the conference. Our Moderator, Ms. Jennie Strauch was recognized for her service to the conference. She has led the conference through a difficult time, and will be greatly missed. I was fortunate to be elected as your Moderator, and will do my best to build upon the work of those who have come before. With joy, we also elected Mr. Charles Kuthuru as Vice Moderator. Many other positions were elected, I refer you to the reports found on the Conference website for a thorough accounting.

With joy, the delegates affirmed the calling of the Rev. William Worley to a second term as the Conference Minister of the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference. His leadership will continue the work of sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ in justice and witness, love and compassion through the ministries of the conference.

This is a time for celebration as we move into the future, with confidence in the presence of God's Spirit to guide and lead us. For those who were delegates of this gathering of the conference, we thank you for participating in this unique meeting. For the members and churches, we encourage you to hear from the delegates, and to seek ways in which you can share in the work of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world; through the ministry of your church in its local setting and through the work we do together as a conference. May God's blessings of peace, justice and love be upon all of us as we endeavor to become the beloved community we are called to be!

Rev. Antonio L. Villareal
Conference Moderator

