

Pennsylvania Southeast Conference Fall Meeting
November 15, 2020
Via Zoom and New Goshenhoppen UCC, East Greenville

Welcome and Opening Worship

Rev. Bill Worley, conference minister, welcomed everyone to the meeting and invited them to participate in the opening worship. During the music, participants entered a comment on how they were feeling and their words were used to create a word cloud. Next, participants were dispersed to breakout rooms where they reflected on those things for which they were thankful.

Returning to the meeting, Rev. Worley shared scripture from Matthew 25:23 and James 1:17. The latter passage deals with a community that was divided over how to deal with the poor. Rev. Worley noted that we are at our weakest when we define ourselves by what we are not, and at our strongest when we see our separation from God and others as the illusion that it is. He drew on Rabbi Kushner's book, Conquering Fear, that offers a four-step prescription for facing an uncertain future: face life as it really is, without illusions; develop a sense of duty, a personal mission; live by the realization that you don't have to do it alone; and know that you are resilient. Rev. Worley encouraged us to let endurance have its full effect from James 1 and offered a closing prayer.

Rev. Tony Villareal, moderator, added his welcome to the meeting. Rev. Homer Royer, interim pastor at New Goshenhoppen, offered thanks to the local technical team assisting with hosting today's meeting. Rev. Worley added his thanks to the conference technical support staff. He then introduced the conference consistory officers and members, and the conference staff. Rev. Villareal introduced the association moderators.

Call to Order and Credentials Report

A motion to adopt the agenda was passed. (Motion: Rev. Ann Few; 2nd: Rev. Craig Zimmerman)

Mr. Charles, Kuthuru, vice moderator, was appointed to give the credentials report. 155 delegates are needed to call the meeting to order. There are 197 voting delegates which constitutes a quorum: 109 clergy, 67 church delegates, 6 consistory members, 1 lay moderator, and 14 visitors.

A motion to accept the credentials report passed. (Motion: Rev. Steve Ohnsman; 2nd: Mr. Bill Gross)

A motion to accept standing rules for the meeting passed. (Motion: Rev. Steve Hamilton; 2nd: Ms. Kate Hoffman)

Approval of Minutes and Reports

Minutes from the August special meeting were approved as submitted. (Motion: Rev. Tyson Frey; 2nd: Mr. Gerard Kufrovich)

Rev. Villareal shared a letter regarding an inquiry related to comments made at the August 2020 Conference meeting. Rev. Sue Bertolette of the Personnel Committee contacted the person who made the comments and it was concluded that Rev. Worley did not violate the ministerial code of conduct and no further investigation is required. (for the questions this might raise in the minds of future readers, I suggest that paragraph be added here).

Mr. Ray Edwards presented the treasurer's report. He indicated that the financial picture is fairly good considering the pandemic. He thanked those churches who submitted their pledges for 2021. At this point, pledges are at approximately 25% of budget for next year. We have recouped most of our losses from earlier this year in the endowment accounts. He encouraged all churches to review their endowment investments with an eye to using environmentally and socially responsible investment vehicles.

An offering will be taken online later and will be designated for the Zachariah Walker Racial Justice Project. A link was provided in the comments section.

A question about asked about our loan under the Payroll Protection Plan. Mr. Edwards explained that the money was used for Conference staff salaries. It has not yet been forgiven; when that happens, it will show as income.

Mr. Edwards presented the 2021 spending plan. It anticipates a 20% shortfall in income. The conference will be saving by moving to a mobile office. We continue to maintain some physical office space, but have reduced the footprint. The spending plan provides for a 1.5% salary increase for staff; the Personnel Committee asked for 3%, but the Consistory approved half of that amount. Note that OCWM is paid to the National Church monthly regardless of income and is set at 10% of the budget.

A motion to accept the spending plan (Recommendation from Consistory; 2nd: Rev. Bob Stewart) was passed by electronic Zoom ballot (170 for, 2 against, 4 abstain). A video on the United Church Funds was shared.

Conference Minister Comments

Rev. Worley called on us to lead worship and our churches in ways that protect our members during this time of pandemic. Also, he encouraged us to transcend the issues that divide us so that we can build up the body of Christ. Rev. Worley recognized the fatigue and stress that pastors and congregations feel, the losses and economic challenges they face, and the hard work that continues. Some churches are moving to parttime and shared pastorates; some may need to close.

He encouraged churches to complete a forthcoming survey that will help the consistory to work on a new strategic vision and to begin the search and call process for an ACM of search and call. Note that Rev. Susan Minasian, the acting ACM, is not eligible for that position.

Task Force Reports

Addiction Task Force

Rev. Dr. Deborah Rahn Clemens pointed out that, unlike referrals to agencies, we in the church are uniquely positioned to offer love to people struggling with addiction. She encouraged us to find and use the resources in our communities and to talk about the disease of addiction through a Christian lens, in a compassionate way. Resources, including financial, are available for churches. Ms. Trish Rathbun spoke about her addiction experience and recovery and provided a list of "Do's and Don'ts" for congregations.

Climate Justice Team

Rev. Marian Shearer reported that several more churches have signed up for the 50-50-50 challenge. She invited us all to see if there is something more we can do. Ms. Liz Brunton shared a NASA animation showing how our planet has warmed over the decades. Recent years have been among the hottest on record. Slides showed how the increasing number and severity of global environmental disasters such as hurricanes and wildfires correlate with rising global temperatures. She described the many ways our local churches have worked to help address climate justice issues.

Zachariah Walker Racial Justice Initiative

Rev. Anne Cormier reported on how the team is working to offer education and expand conversation. There is now a page on the conference website containing liturgical resources. She listed a number of ways people can get involved.

Rev. Dr. Steve Ohnsman presented an anti-racism statement for the PSEC. He noted that slavery is our nation's original sin and the churches have been complicit in that process. We are invited to sign the statement which the team hopes to release to the press on MLK Day in January.

Announcements

General Synod is scheduled for the summer of 2021. It will be a virtual meeting and our conference is still in need of delegates and alternates.

Clergy Convocation is scheduled for early May in 2021 in Lancaster and will combine Pennsylvania Southeast, Penn North and Penn Central conferences. Rev. Dr. Emily Heath will be the speaker.

The PSEC Spring Meeting is planned for June 4-6, 2021. The format is still being discussed, but may be hybrid of virtual and in-person; the location is undecided. The guest speaker will be Sister Simone Campbell.

The online offering currently totals \$1,235 for the Zachariah Walker Racial Justice Initiative; donations are still being accepted on the PSEC website.

A motion to adjourn the meeting was passed (Motion: Rev. Ann Few; 2nd: Rev. Anne Cormier), followed by a closing prayer.

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Jenny Smith, Secretary