

Synod School sets participation record

686 participate in week-long ministry of the Synod of Lakes and Prairies

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STORM LAKE, Iowa — The well-known midsummer ministry of the Synod of Lakes and Prairies — Synod School — drew a record 686 participants to the Buena Vista University campus here this week.

Synod School takes place every year during the last full week in July. It is the only remaining Synod School of its type within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). This year Synod School took place July 23-28 with the theme, “Let Justice Flow.”

With the Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson II, stated clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), serving as convocation speaker, and Cláudio Carvalhaes, a well-known worship leader, and professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, leading evening worship, Synod School attendees had no shortage of inspirational activities.

This year’s event saw first time a stated clerk of the General Assembly has served as convocation speaker. Carvalhaes was the convocation speaker several years ago.

And in addition to those leaders, Rachel Corpus, director of child and family ministries at Plymouth United Church of Christ in Des Moines, Iowa, and Erin Kaye, pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Camden, Ark., led morning prayers.

Beyond the convocation speakers and worship leaders, there were more than 70 classes listed in this year’s Synod School catalog. Classes ranged from the serious to the more light hearted — “Praying and Living the Psalms,” but also “From Gutenberg to Google” and “Sheldon Cooper and the 10 Commandments.”

There’s even an artist in residence. Susan Coyle, who has explored art in many expressions, uses colored pencils, paints and watercolors to explore mandalas, a spiritual symbol for a diagram that represents the cosmos.

Synod School is coordinated by a committee of nine members and Katie Estes, co-pastor of First Presbyterian Church of South St. Paul, Minn., served as dean of this year’s experience. The committee is staffed by Deb DeMeester, director of leadership development for the Synod of Lakes and Prairies.

For those who may be Facebook users, Synod School has one of the more unusual names for a group on the social networking site: "Synod School: 'Is this heaven? No, it's Iowa.'" The open group has more than 500 members. There also was an active Twitter hashtag at #SynodSchool.