

There is a river whose streams make glad the City of God.

- Psalm 46:4

Come to the River . . . Come to the River . . ." (c'mon, sing along with me), come to the river where 3,000 persons gathered. Young, old, brown, black and white skin, on scooters, using canes, jumping for joy, we all gathered at the river, or in this case, Baltimore's Inner Harbor, for the meeting of the 31st General Synod of the United Church of Christ. Some came to move forward issues of justice, others came to enjoy the colorful, energizing worship services; and still others were moved by the Holy Spirit to assemble as one. As we gathered at the river from all corners of the country, we were going to be immersed in the waters and become a community restored to act in love.

Along with the stirring word from the Rev. Traci Blackmon in the opening worship service, we shared in a service of baptism. This service probably looked a little different than the one we are accustomed to in our churches! Each person was given a small piece of sponge, gently soaked in water. At the appropriate time in the service, we were asked to "play" with the idea of baptizing those seated near us. It was an activity enjoyed by the entire convention hall as laughter prevailed and the bonding of new friendships had begun.

Over next two days the delegates met in discussion with small groups to discern a resolution that was assigned to them. We had energizing worship sprinkled in; and time to walk to the Harbor to take in the sights and sounds. An exhibit hall was situated aside of the main hall and there you could find information on many UCC related organizations as well as vendors selling fair trade items, Synod t-shirts, and even crab mallets!

On Sunday we welcomed over 120 persons from PCC who made their way to Baltimore to share in the afternoon worship service. The United Church of Christ is excited about the new vision and the speakers sharing the stage gave us some insight into the meaning they wished to convey in three great loves . . . Love of Neighbor, Love of Children and Love of Creation. See below to learn more!

On Day 4, our delegation crawled out of our pillow-top beds to join together in a breakfast caucus . . . at 7 a.m.! A long day awaited as a majority of the resolutions were brought to the floor to be discussed and amended and to ensure that there is a just world for all. Once the gavel hit the wood and business convened for the day, we shared in worship where the dancers, singers, liturgists and speaker shared the story of Namaan and how he was encouraged to get in the Jordan River to cure his leprosy. (2 Kings)

The dynamic, inspirational speakers invited us to think of the wider church and asked us to make "space" not "room" in our churches for the under-represented; we are to dismantle the balconies as we work for justice for all. And, as Rev. Dr. David Vasquez-Levy urged us to "get in the water, Namaan!" we, too, need to get off the safe shores and jump into the water to do God's work. There is much work waiting for us to get done, and it just takes a small pebble to start the ripple . . .

-Kay Boyer, Delegate, Penn Central Conference

From Our Moderator, Dr. Craig Ellis

Nearly 3000 delegates and visitors from across the nation met June 30 - July 4, 2017 for the 31st General Synod of the United Church of Christ in Baltimore, Maryland's Convention Center. This was located right between Baltimore's Inner Harbor and Orioles' Camden Yards.

Synod is convened every two years at different cities across the United States and this was a perfect venue. It was great to have it near Penn Central Conference as many Penn Central folk traveled to Baltimore for the public Sunday service and on other days to visit.

The theme of the Synod was MAKE GLAD based on Psalm 46:4, "There is a river whose streams MAKE GLAD the city of God" and all those attending did just that-- MAKE GLAD!

We did that with inspiring worship services and presentations led by such luminaries as author Glennon Doyle, The Rev. Traci Blackman, newly elected Executive Minister of Justice and Witness ministries, and Rev. Dr. John C. Dorhauer, General Minister of the United Church of Christ.

We did it with workshops, hearings, plenary sessions for business and voting, perusing exhibits in the exhibit hall and connecting with many new and longtime friends and participants attending Synod

We prayed, sang, studied, voted, deliberated, debated, celebrated, danced, spoke our truth, acted upon and reacted to proposed resolutions and pronouncements from all over the United Church of Christ with such varied topics as:

- New Endowments to strengthen future ministries
- Endorsing raising the minimum wage
- Gun violence
- The Environments
- Children living under military occupation
- Corporal punishment of Children
- Immigrants
- Persons with disabilities
- and Bylaws changes to name a few

A full reporting of all the actions of the General Synod will be available UCC.org under the Synod section. Ask any Synod Delegate about their experience or invite them to report at your church or consistory meetings. They will be glad to share. Also, be sure and thank them for all their work in preparation and participation the Synod process as we again had a very hardworking and dedicated delegation representing Penn Central Conference at Synod 31.

As moderator, I had the opportunity to meet with other moderators representing various conferences across the nation. Many were reporting diminishing staff and considering cooperative models and merging of resources in a survival mode mentality. We can be extremely proud of recent initiatives of the Penn Central Conference indicative of a thriving mode for "Together we are doing great things."

Thank you for the opportunity to represent the Penn Central Conference at General Synod 31.