

2017 Synod Gathering, Baltimore, MD



Thank you to the Gettysburg Association for supporting delegates to the 2017 Synod gathering in Baltimore, Maryland.

Two years ago we elected and installed Rev. Dr. John C. Dorhauer as General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ. This year he provided many reflections on his first two years of interacting with all levels of the church and with

other partners near and far. Central to his messages to us are priorities that we can, and should, embrace; They are: **“Love Unites; Love Children, Love Neighbor, Love Creation”**. Three Great Loves that, if used as a starting point in our deliberations, can point us in the right direction. Even more basic and important-- **“A Just World for All”**.

We stayed in the Hilton which was two blocks from the Convention Center and connected with an overhead walkway.

Our 2017 Synod experience began with an opening worship and one of many messages from Traci Blackman about a wheelbarrow. There is a story that Traci Blackmon told from a June 30, 1859 feat by Charles Blondin over Niagra Falls – the rally cry used many times over the course of Synod was “get in the wheelbarrow”. Traci herself is now in the wheelbarrow as she was elected and installed to the national church as Minister of Justice and Witness to take Linda Jamarrio’s place. Researching the tightrope wheelbarrow walk across Niagra Falls, Here’s the implication in our lives. It is said that Blondin asked his audience, after crossing the rope pushing an empty wheelbarrow -- "Do you believe I can carry a person across in this wheelbarrow?" the crowd shouted yes! It was then that Blondin posed the question –"Who will get in the wheelbarrow? No one did. How do we put this to the test in our lives? Do we see injustice to children, neighbors, or creation and say we need to do something? That’s the wheelbarrow test – we need to get in the wheelbarrow and take the risk that would help ease the injustices we see.

This 31st General Synod of 2017 had, 737 registered delegates and 1,931 guests the first day. A main reason for Synod meetings is to give voice to members of the United Church of Christ as opposed to having the Board of Directors be the only decision-making group. We had nearly 20 resolutions to review, edit, and to vote upon. Youth of the Synod were active in these events and had voice during deliberations over the various resolutions that we worked on. Two such business items stick in my mind in these days after the votes. The first of these centered on the issue of Rights of Adoptees to Access their Birth Certificates. At first reading I thought I would Support this resolution. The debate on the floor was pretty even, pro and con, as the concerns were discussed. I am thinking that delegates were swayed by a concern for a birth mother who wouldn’t want to be contacted, and in some cases stalked. The vote was close and the resolution failed to pass.

The second had to do with gun violence On Recognizing and Studying Gun Violence as a Public Health Emergency. The resolution passed when set to the vote but what was an eye-opener was the presentation by several youth who recounted “bullets whizzing by”, “fear of leaving my home”, and somewhat terrifying **Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, and Evacuate trainings** in some Ohio

schools. These trainings, to the sounds of simulated gunshots, take a proactive approach to intruder situations.

Moving on to the “Chicken Coop”, perhaps a more believable situation to us farm people. A Coop was created for a chicken, a most protective space with a beautiful nesting area. The chicken would sit in the coop, she tried to lay her eggs, but no eggs appeared. The chicken disappeared for several days and the owners went looking for her and after a long worrisome search found, in amongst several trees and bushes, the egg. The moral? Sometimes we **have to get out of the coop** to do our business!

I served on a committee called “Bring down the wall in the Caribbean”. This was a resolution about ending the U.S. embargo in Cuba. We did a lot of word changing and off course added “ending the U.S. embargo on Cuba” to the title. This resolution than easily passed with a 92% vote and no discussion.

The resolution in support of “Legislation Authorizing Aid in dying” after a lot of discussion did not pass.

A resolution that many are interested in was “Enact Minimum Wage Laws of \$15 per hour” After a fair amount of discussion, this passed with a 75% vote.

“How do we embody love? “How do we create space, but not room?” This statement has a story from a church, that decided to build a balcony in their sanctuary because the main floor was getting crowded. We can all make a list of the tools needed to make this space. The problems start when the people on the main floor take ownership of their seats or pews and relegate others to the balcony. The question “Who are we seating in the balcony today?” And what tools are now needed to tear down the balcony and make room, real room for everyone on the main floor.

We convened in the Baltimore Convention Center in the lower level “Swing Room” with delegates at tables near the front. Guests gathered directly behind the delegate area and viewed the proceedings either directly or on 8 large overhead projection screens. There was always a visual on the screens or the video feed of the presenter or groups singing or dancing or a feed of the water fountain that was front and center. Life sustaining water became a central image as various scripture and meditations built upon the gentleness, the necessity, the power of water. An evening worship speaker was recounting stories of Jesus and water. Tying our daily work into that of Jesus when he walked on water. He first had to get out of the security of the boat. We **have to first get out of the boat**.

A final remembrance from Synod –We need to “Connect the dots” as we preserve creation – the speaker referred to a 1987 UCC study about hazardous waste sites and their location in relation to race. This study, the first of its kind, was reference in a 1992 EPA study concerning the location of similar sites. Environmental Justice is the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.