Reflection of UCC General Synod 34 June 29-July 4, 2023

"*Making All Things New" Isaiah 43:18-19*

I preface these highlights begun while on the road in mid-July. I am now home in the mountains of Northcentral PA and have computer access!

7/12/2023

We, almost 30 Penn Central Conference Delegates with voting privileges, began prep in February with a zoom meeting, followed by another in April (to be informed and discuss proposed by-law changes of Synod frequency from 2-3 years, beginning post 2025) and then in person in May after a regular PCC Board of Directors meeting at St. Thomas UCC in Linglestown, home of Penn Central Conference office. I, as a lay person (she/her) was one of 3 delegates representing our Central Association.

Our Resolution Committee assignments were random and mailed in early June. Mine was # 12 of 15 (2 were later combined). Entitled "Condemning Prolonged Solitary Confinement as a Form of Torture", a Resolution of Witness, proposing action, was submitted by 8 conferences, some combined in states North, South, East, and West. It covered our nation and spoke to "raise our voices with human rights groups, survivors of the torture of prolonged isolation and their loved ones and replace the practice with humane, rehabilitative alternatives rooted in community and racial justice."

This resolution spoke to me as I/we correspond with a friend and member of NCUCC currently incarcerated and having spent some time in isolation. I found helpful resources concerning many aspects of "Moral Injuries in 'restrictive housing' (Colorado based) and UCC Justice and Peace Action Network (JPANet). This was background material I shared in my committee work. Others spoke of personal family situations. (An end to torture was previously addressed as a resolution using Rule 43 of the United Nations' "Nelson Mandela Rules" prohibiting the use of indefinite or prolonged solitary confinement. I had the opportunity in 2009 to view the Robbin Island prison conditions of Mandela while participating with an educational People to People group to South Africa).

Beyond discussing and voting electronically, using "Silo", new to almost everyone attending, during our Plenary sessions am/pm doing the "business of the church", we listened, watched, worshipped, snacked a lot (especially chocolate-thank you Rev. Carrie), laughed and prayed as a group of 4 Pennsylvania Conferences: Northern, Central, Western and Southeastern future "Keystone Connection"? We were at 2 tables amongst other national representatives, some from combined state conferences. We also had separate meetings, "caucuses" with our own PCC and one with the three other PA groups. These were early morning, 6:30 am gatherings enhanced with food and visiting dignitaries including our new national president elect and general minister, Rev. Karen Georgia Thompson.

Aside from the scheduled duties of the day, we had "free time" to explore Indianapolis: museums, stadiums, eateries, and parks, all within walking blocks of our downtown accommodations. We stayed connected through "Group Me" texts. Our 10th floor hotel room, Phil's, and mine (Thank you, Paul) was a wonderful panoramic view of the city, especially for the 4th of July fireworks post-closing worship.

For me, being in a Green City environment was refreshing even though my time outdoors was limited as a delegate. The friendly welcome of the Midwest was everywhere. Highlights for me included singing with the Synod choir at closing worship, taking advantage of the "Nap/Quiet Room" for a morning meditation, reconnecting with former PCC friends (Rev. Jenna Beatty, Rev. Rachel Hackenberg, Rev. Monica O. Indiana Kentucky Conference; Pilgrim Lodge, Maine and Uplands, Pleasant Hills Tenn. and being a 1st time delegate with the privilege of voting. As individuals representing different locals, we were encouraged to "vote our conscious". While consensus would be the ultimate resolve of issues, predominantly voting hails. I missed participating in a community service project. I have attended 5 previous Synods as a visitor, including one as a resolution proponent. And I look forward to the next Synod in 2025, in Kanas City, Missouri. The leadership these next two years will be under the guidance of Rev. Karen Georgia Thompson, newly elected 1st woman to serve in that capacity and a woman of color as well.

Being locally rooted and globally focused, we were and are challenged to be open to God's plan (better than ours), to do the "right" thing, which may not always be the easiest and to "be kind". To be "humbly bold with serene courage" (the words of Jackie Robinson via Rev. John Dorhauer, retiring General Minister and President of the UCC). Implementation of all resolutions is encouraged but will be done selectively upon local issues and needs through prayer in mindful discernment and discovery.

The Garden of Creation, our central worship area in the Indianapolis Convention Center, remained lighted and visible throughout our time together, providing "healing leaves for the wholeness of creation". We were inspired also listening to Theological Reflections in the form of Living Psalms, letting "everything that breathes praise God." Our new conference ministers were invited to share one word. hopes for the future (from our 66 years of combining as the UCC in June 1957), making all things new. I've included 6 of them here: "reimagine, impactful, opportunity, reconcilliative, wonder, resilience. I now include 6 of my own: return, recover, readapt, receive, reconnect, rejoice!

I plan to share monthly notes addressing the resolutions beginning with my environmental passion, the effects of single use plastics. I also plan to highlight workable resolutions in our New Covenant UCC monthly newsletter, The Ark, along with the Social Awareness Team (NC) and the Christian Social Concerns group of the United Churches of Lycoming County that I participate with. At some point, before the year ends, there will be an opportunity to share with our Central Association of PCC that sponsored me as a delegate. Workshops I attended included Abundant Aging and Archiving Records.

Synod is a rejuvenating experience with ideas shared, challenges presented and the adventure of the unexpected, listening to the "Prophetic voice of God's committed presence for the love of justice."

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7/30/2023