



The 247<sup>th</sup> Synod Assembly was a Matthew 25 design. More than 50 commissioners, corresponding members, and presenters participated during the March 13, 2021 Virtual Assembly. Pre-assembly orientation and introductions were high energy and commissioners could NOT speak without mentioning their grandchildren. Everyone came ready to work.

Occupying St. Paul Presbyterian Church's pulpit was CRE Pastor and **Synod Moderator Felecia Hardy**. She convened the Body, welcomed everyone, and reminded all to abide by particular Zoom Courtesies and Community Practices. Maybe that's why everyone was on their best behavior or did it have anything to do with the assembly being on Facebook Livestream? This assembly showcased inclusivity and diversity. Recognizing March as Women's History Month, women moderated, preached, and presented. BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) were front and center.



**Chief Emeritus Ken Adams**, representing the Upper Mattaponi Tribe (located in the area of Eastern Virginia Presbytery), propounded a powerful reminder that God owns the land and we are stewards of God's land. Chief Adams greeted the Assembly, thanked Presbyterians for its renunciation of the Doctrine of Discovery and offered the gifts of grace, love, and hospitality. The Chief was presented to the assembly by his very good friend, TE Jon Barton (HR). Jon was the 2020 recipient of the PCUSA Office of the General Assembly's Ecumenical Award. Jon also testified before the US House and Senate advocating for federal recognition of Six Virginia Native American Tribes which were awarded in 2018.

It was noted that present during this assembly were three individuals who have or currently hold the distinction of GA Co-Moderator. They included TE Byron Wade, now General Presbyter of Western North Carolina Presbytery, TE Cindy Kohlmann, now Connectional Presbyter of New Castle Presbytery and the current Co-Moderator, RE Elona Street Stewart. The gallery of pics provides a sample of the beautiful people who all were chumping at the bits. <https://photos.app.goo.gl/2i9xsrjvbcqnC9es6>.

**Co-Moderator Elona Street Stewart** stands with Co-Moderator Greg Bentley drawn in solidarity to present a moral witness to talk about the repairing, healing, damage and loss caused by racism and poverty in this country. "African Americans and Indigenous people have always been part of this church but not always recognized." Her focus is to speak to truth telling and reconciliation to fulfil a commitment to justice in our diverse faith communities. Both Moderators have been guided by prophetic messages of inspiration of "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me to preach good news to the poor.*" This good news is



translated into being **good medicine**, and the invitation to lift up the M-25 vision for church and to strategically address the issues of poverty and inequities. We are encouraged to see our neighbors through Jesus's eyes. People who are hungry, sick, who need access to housing, food and shelter, are owed the basic necessity of life as anyone else. They are also due respect, purpose and protection of their human rights. God sends gifts our way so that we can generously use them to repair lives. This begins when we respond to needs to feed, provide shelter or speak for those whose voices are denied and to pursue justice with one another. We must walk carefully and deliberately to repair. Our institutions, including the church, are culpable of issues leading to systemic racism. We must remember, repair and restore! During breakout group time, four questions drove the conversation; these are questions the synod will continue to discuss as it digs deeper into Matthew 25.

**Spotlight – Charlotte Presbytery:** Associate General Presbyter, Alice Ridgill, effectively highlighted the presbytery's response to M-25: (1) Locust PC is partnering with the presbytery's



Community Disaster Response Team to build a warehouse on church property where the Disaster Response team can house supplies, vehicles and equipment. The response team supports mission trips, provides clothing and provides no or low cost supply transportation for local agencies and the Presbytery Disaster Agency of the national church; (2) The Presbytery has established COVID-19 grants as well as technology grants to help congregations gather virtually, livestream their services and provide online giving. (3) The presbytery made M-25 the theme for 2020 and each presbytery meeting featured a sermon and worship on the M-25 initiative to ensure that all three of the focus areas were highlighted over the course of the year. In 2021 the presbytery still demonstrates a commitment to M-25 specifically while planning presbytery worship services for the year, the presbytery leadership were intentional about having more preachers of color to preach at presbytery meetings. (4) The presbytery administration committee, along with council, has recognized that there are 28 historically black congregations in its presbytery that can no longer afford a call and installed pastor; they rely on temporary ministers which means that many ministers do not have benefits. They are exploring ways to assist with this dilemma. Alice provided four questions for Breakout room discussion and for synod committees to follow up throughout the year.

#### Nominating Committee

Class	Name	Designation	Presbytery
2023	Mary Newbern Williams	BFTE	Eastern Virginia
2023	Doug Sensabaugh	WMRE	Shenandoah

#### Jubilee Fund Committee

Class	Name	Designation	Presbytery
2023	Veronica Thomas	BFTE	Eastern Virginia
2023	Margaret Washnitzer	BFRE	National Capital

#### Committee on Representation

Class	Name	Designation	Presbytery
2022	Rian Baldwin	BMRE	Western North Carolina

Re-balancing the Committee on Representation by moving TE Paul Min to the class of 2023; and TE Jerry Cannon to the class of 2023 was approved.

### **Committee Reports:**

- Kate B Reynolds Certification Committee approved Wells Fargo Bank authorization on December 10, 2020 to distribute \$598,873.31, and the distribution was made in equal shares of \$1,324.94 to the certified ministers.
- Committee on Representation urges adoption of Matthew 25 to all Presbyteries; SCOR Team to hopefully select Anti-Racism curriculum to complete as a Team Study; and encourages Synod Nominating to “Rebalance” class sizes. Request Paul Min (Abingdon) and Jerry Cannon (Charlotte) to move from Class of 2021 to Class of 2023.
- The Emerging Ideas serves as an incubator and promoter for new projects. It solicits, receives, evaluates, develops and promotes proposed creative ideas and recommends appropriate responses to proposed ideas or projects that arise from presbyteries, related groups, and the synod. This assembly introduced the newest synod committee. More to come!
- Finance Committee continues to monitor the inflow and outflow of funds, as well as keep close watch on the performance of the asset funds through the markets and will take actions before the end of the year to move funds and allocate shortfalls and surpluses as best suits the financial interests of the Synod of Mid-Atlantic.
- Grants Committee presented the following grants and scholarship requests that were approved by the Assembly: (a) A \$3,000 Stultz Scholarship was awarded to Hanna Alma Jeffrey's; (b) A \$4,000 Stultz Scholarship was awarded to Rian Wesley Freeman; (c) A \$6,000 Euler Scholarship was awarded to Jenny Chunn; and (d) a \$5,000 Small Church Grant was awarded to Bethesda Presbyterian Church to replace a water well at the church manse.
- Administration Committee reported conversations will begin with the Synod Stated Clerk. His term of office ends December 31, 2021. The committee will address the Board of Directors for Westminster Presbyterian Homes Inc. and their request for the Synod to assume their responsibilities, synod policies on the per capita apportionment and will be determining the dates and venue for next year's assemblies.
- Executive Committee reported the following: (a) Matthew 25 surveys were developed and sent to Presbyteries for responses and the feedback will assess whether the presbyteries are implementing Matthew 25; (b) Emerging Ideas Committee is chaired by Walter Canter (JAM); (c) Synod will resume receiving grant applications for the August 1 deadline; (d) A Pastoral Epistles was drafted by Moderator and Vice Moderator in response to the assault on our Nation's Capital; and (e) Synod leadership has committed to greater visibility at Presbytery meetings.
- The Assembly received insightful reports from Massanetta Springs Camps and Conference Center Executive Director and from the Board of Pension Church Consultant.

**Stated Clerk's Report** presented a statement about Violence Against Asian Americans "Over the past year, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have been increasingly targeted for discrimination and violence in the United States – which we have seen intensify over the past several weeks. The pain, fear and uncertainty that accompany this horrific trend are being felt across the country and around the world. As families cope with this new reality, we urge Presbyterians and Americans to look out for one another, to be thoughtful about the language they use, and to embrace inclusivity as a core principle of this nation and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)." The Clerk's Report highlighted the following: (a) COVID deaths in the US has surpassed 500,000 lives lost; (b) Judicial Charges against the synod were dismissed by the GAPJC; (c) Matthew 25 Presbyteries include AKAP, CHA, NEW, NHO, SAL, SHE, WNC and also Massanetta Springs Camps; (d) PMA/PMAB is in transition and involved in an eight month discernment process surrounding Matthew 25. Warren is appreciative to the Synod Moderator and Vice Moderator who are assisting to ease his workload in order for him to effectively chair the PMAB; (e) Presbytery Leadership Changes includes BAL Mary Gaut Acting SC, NEW Cindy Kohlmann CP, PEA Carl Utley as GP and David Baker as SC, SAL Barbara Smith TGP, WNC Byron Wade GP. JAM will elect a Search Committee in June for leadership and NHO will employ an Interim GP as Ted Churn retires May 2021; (f) Kate B Reynolds Certification Committee, in partnership with Wells Fargo, is transitioning from paper checks to electronic deposits for those who elect; (g) Ecumenical Ministries are ongoing with the Virginia Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches; (h) While synod offered presbyteries up to one-quarter of relief on 2020 per capita to the synod, no presbytery requested relief and nearly all presbyteries are current with per capita payments; (i) Website Enhancement has been made to the synod website. Presbyteries are able to remit per capita and anyone can make contributions or donations at [www.synatlantic.org](http://www.synatlantic.org); (j) Presbytery Minutes for 2019 were certified by the synod and minutes with exceptions noted should be addressed in the 2020 minutes.

**Worship Services:** The Assembly began its meeting with the prophetic preaching of TE Cindy Kohlmann, Connectional Presbyter (NEW). The sermon, "Impatience and Misery" was based on the pillars of Matthew 25 (Eradicating Systemic Poverty, Dismantling Structural Racism, and Building Vital Congregations). Highlighted was the people's impatience as they journeyed cross the Red Sea out of enslavement in Egypt. Vice Moderator Steven Scott led the Assembly in a solemn time of remembrance during the closing devotion. Candles were lite; names were called in recognition of those who have died from the pandemics. Can you recount where you were when this pandemic arose? What did you think? What did you feel? We have been changed forever.

