

# Synod of the Mid-Atlantic (SMA)

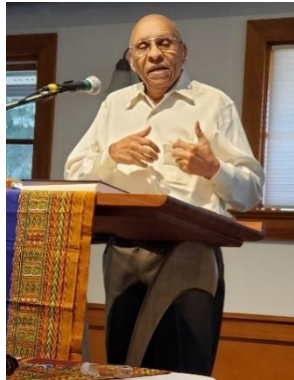
## 252<sup>nd</sup> Assembly Highlights

**SACRED LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT** – Ever since the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) renounced the Doctrine of Discovery; councils have been encouraged to acknowledge the land on which meetings are being held. The Mid-Atlantic on previous occasions invited decedants of a Tribal People or current Tribal Leaders to attend the Assembly and provide the land acknowledgement. We were honored to have Commissioner Teresa Harris (SHE), a resident of Harrisonburg in attendance. She shared that the Tribes occupying the Valley in the long period prior to the arrival of English settlement included the Iroquois, Shawnee Nations, Catawba, Cherokee and the Susquehannock. We thank God for this land and the inhabitants who lived on it, cared for it, and nurtured the land long before white settlers arrived.

**FIFTY YEARS AFTER** the March on Washington DC which is in our boundaries, Presbyterians convened at Massanetta Camp and Conference Center in Harrisonburg, VA, to delve into the state of Black Church Health and Leadership. The 225<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the PCUSA highlighted a concerning statistic: over 80% of Black Churches lacked installed pastors. Further, this Assembly acknowledged that since the 1983 Reunion, Black Congregations had, whether intentionally or unintentionally, lost Vision, Vitality, and Community Connections. Therefore, we recognize that the Synod of the Mid-Atlantic (SMA) consisting of 14-presbyteries, emerged as a response to the dissolution of five all-Black Presbyteries. In essence, the Synod's inception stemmed from the profound pain and loss of community, self-determination, positions and power and identity for Black Presbyterian Presence, Mission, and Witness in the PCUSA.

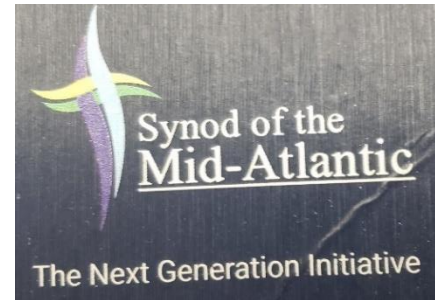


**FORTY YEARS AFTER** the reuniting of the two largest bodies of Presbyterianism in the United States, the 252<sup>nd</sup> Synod of the Mid-Atlantic Assembly came together. Mid-Atlantic Synod boundaries were the last of the sixteen synods to be established, largely because in doing so, five All Black Governing Bodies would have to agree to being dissolved. The Rev. Dr. Edward Newberry, HR member of Charlotte Presbytery reported on the last meeting of the All-Black Catawba Presbytery which he described as sad and ended in tears. The final meeting would bring to end the rich history of Education and Evangelism. It was the end of the significant heritage and the leadership fountain of a presbytery organized seventeen months after the end of the Civil War. Dr. Newberry's article entitled, "Reflections on Reunion" published in Periscope 3, provides perspective to the gravity and impact of Catawba Presbytery. *"The lovely carols of Christmas still lingered in our ears. But a solemn assembly convened at Memorial Church in Charlotte NC on December 29, 1988. Constituted with prayer, we conducted concluding business of our historic judicatory. One of the significant acts of that last meeting of the presbytery was the ordination of Jerry Lytle Cannon to ministry. As an ironic twist of history or act of providence, this was the ordination of the brother of the Rev Katie G. Cannon, who Catawba Presbytery had ordained as the first Black female minister. There was a reluctant motion to adjourn. Yet with hearts and voices, we thanked God for the blessings of in all our generations. We petitioned God's gracious care as we move into tomorrow. Prayers being ended, the Catawba story was finished, now to be inscribe in the Book of Life."* Ed's presentation was illuminating and amazing! His



presentation set the stage for the Assembly to address the historical past, current engagement, and possibilities for the future. Would Commissioners who were part of the 114 individuals present be willing and capable of addressing historical and current harms that created structural racism, vestiges of slavery, issues of poverty and dying Black Churches? We are delighted to report that the 252<sup>nd</sup> Assembly rose to the occasion! Things that are impossible for humanity to accomplish is the STUFF that God does on the REGULAR! The Assembly dedicated itself to doing the heavy lifting, while at the same time taking care of each other in the face of challenging and difficult conversations. We are grateful to Vice Moderator David Cho, who monitored the room thoroughly ensuring that the Assembly consistently took care of each other!

**THE NEXT GENERATION INITIATIVE(NGI)** rolled out and was amazing! I have yet to attend an Assembly of any sort where more than 114 commissioners, presbytery leaders Black church leaders, COM and CPM were locked and engaged to the max! Can I Get a Witness? The initiative was bathed in worship, drumming, preaching, fellowship, table talk conversations, affinity group gathering and times of intense celebration. WOW! Each presenter spoke of its urgency, validity, and willingness to partner in its further development and implementation. What is the NGI? Please visit [www.synatlantic.org](http://www.synatlantic.org) to review the full proposal. In short, the NGI seeks to address the SHORTAGE of Black Presbyterian Clergy Leadership for Churches, Mid-Councils, Agencies and beyond. At the same time the NGI is calling Black Presbyterian Churches in the Mid-Atlantic to task for examination, diagnosis and prescribing a way forward that will resort or create Congregational Vitality, Purpose in Vision and Direction, Spiritual Formation and Congregational Wholeness. This synod contains more than one-quarter of the Black Churches in the PCUSA. We have accounted for 124-Black Presbyterian Congregations located in eleven of the synods fourteen presbyteries, namely Baltimore, Charlotte, Coastal Carolina, Eastern Virginia, James, National Capital, New Castle, New Hope, Peaks, Salem, and Western North Carolina. We are grateful to these presbyteries for granting synod permission to contact and gather data (Congregational Snapshots and Presbytery Snapshots) from these churches and the presbyteries. Responses to critical questions about pastoral leadership, post-covid congregational challenges, who occupies the pulpit and administers the Lord's Supper have been collected. The synod is grateful to the 12-Snapshot Facilitators who worked more than 3 weeks to gather the critical information.



**RADICAL COLLABORATION** – Success, as measured in energy, content, design, participation, and engagement, would not be possible without the input, presence and facilitation of the Rev. Dr. Diane



Moffett, President and Executive Director of the Presbyterian Mission Agency, and Dr. Corey Schlosser-Hall, Deputy Executive Director of Vision and Innovation, PMA. Their team of thirteen highly motivated National Staffers from the PMA, BOP, ASG, and Foundation were present in mind, body, intellect, and spirit. In early May, the Planning Team began collaborating and engaging key partners who were interested in the NGI, and we met every two weeks to share, learn and grow. Representatives from Seminaries, GA Agencies, Presbytery Leaders, Historians, and Persons with Passion gathered religiously. The outcome of these gatherings and listening sessions gave rise to an alignment and a perfect partnership between the National Staff and the Synod of the Mid-Atlantic. Dr. Moffett and Staff were in fact MID-WIVES who were present

and coaching the synod as it gave birth to this critical initiative that will benefit the entire PCUSA. This unique aspect of the collaboration involved Staffers facilitating and recording information for a total of six specifically designed Guided Table Talk Sessions, Affinity Groups and Agencies Listening Engagements. One

poignant question raised during engagement was, “What would the NGI look like ten years from now?” The Mid-Atlantic Region is grateful to the individual contributions made by:

- ✚ Diane Moffett – Preaching the Opening Worship Service/Motivation for Listening Engagement
- ✚ Tim Cargal – Presentation on Shifting Trends in Church and Society and in Theological Education
- ✚ Jermaine Ross-Allam – Presentation on the Center for Repair and Historical Harm
- ✚ Shavon Starling-Louis – Facilitation of the Emerging Young Black Presbyterian Voices
- ✚ Carlton Johnson – Presentation on Healthy Pulpits – Healthy Pews
- ✚ Alonzo Johnson – Preaching the Closing Worship Service
- ✚ Corey Schlosser-Hall – Facilitation and Instructions for the PCUSA Agencies Listening Engagement
- ✚ Big Props to Tabletop Facilitators and Conveners Barry Creech, Sara Lisherness, Denise Anderson, Sy Hughes, David Loleng, Elizabeth and Keenan Rodgers

**NEW LEADERSHIP:** The Nominating Committee is always at work to secure the best leadership from presbyteries to serve synod leaders on committees and commissioners.



The Assembly elected and installed the Rev. Dr. Eunil David Cho (AKAP) as Moderator and RE Barry Parks (JAM) as Vice Moderator. David is Professor of Pastoral Care at Boston University and Seminary and Barry is retired and serves as Clerk of Session at Westminster PC in Charlottesville, Va. We hope you will have multiple opportunities to meet and chat with them in person or over zoom. With newly elected leadership, the Assembly paid tribute to Rev. Addie Peterson (EVA) for completing her year in style. Addie now assumes the position of Past Moderator for which the term ends in 2024. In that role, she will serve on the Synod Executive Committee. On behalf of the Assembly a gift of

love was presented to Addie by Moderator Cho. Join us as we lift and keep in prayer those whom God has called to synod leadership for such a time as this. Additional individuals were elected to serve on committees and commissioners accordingly to include TE Mary Speers (BAL) Committee on Representation, Class of 2025 and RE Alice Freeman (ABI), Committee on Representation Class of 2026; TE Teresa Page (CCC), Jubilee Fund Committee, Class of 2026 and RE Leslie Bailey (JAM), Class of 2025; and RE Barbara Yancy (BAL), Nominating Committee, Class of 2026.

**ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE** Co-Chairs thanked their members as 80% of the committee are completing two terms of service at the end of the year. Co-chairs are WD Hasty (PEA) and Felicia Hoyle (SAL), Mariam Dewhurst (NAT), Dorothy Descieux (WNC), Kim Robinson (AKAP), Ed Terry (BAL) and Alice Freeman (ABI). Upon the recommendation from the committee the Assembly approved the following actions: A new Child Protection Policy was approved; Fulltime Synod Staff receive a 3% pay increase for 2024; The 2022 Presbytery Minute Review was approved and the Synod Stated Clerk was instructed to communicate to each presbytery stated clerks with a certifying letter expressing thanks and appreciation for their work, and where appropriate request that all exceptions found in the 2022 Presbytery Minutes Review be address before March 2024 review cycle. It is working thru a task force to partner with the Committee on Representation to develop an Anti-Racism Policy. This committee said Farwell to five of its veteran members who will complete two terms of service, namely, Dot, WD, Mariam, Ed, and Kim. Well done!



**GRANTS COMMITTEE** Chair, Tolokun Omokunde (NHO), thanked Elease Wilson (PEA), David Lovelace (NEW), Chip Stapleton (CCC), Brian Harroff (EVA), Becky Stanley (WNC), Teresa Harris (SHE) and Betty Perkins (CHA). \$15,000 of College and Seminary Scholarships were awarded accordingly. Stultz Scholarships were awarded to Isaiah Grady and Kerry Olivia Lowery each for \$4,000. The Euler Scholarship was awarded to Nenio Pfuzeh in the amount of \$7,000. Small Church Grants awards totaling \$20,000 were given to four churches with each receiving \$5,000, namely, *First Presbyterian Church, Staunton (ABI)* for HVAC; *Good Hope Presbyterian Church (WNC)* for Window Replacement; *First Presbyterian Church, Jacksonville (CCC)* for HVAC; and *First Korean Presbyterian Church (AKAP)* Air Condition in the Church Manse. Visionary Grants totaling \$5,000 were awarded to *Farlington and First Presbyterian Churches* in the amount of \$5,000 to nourishing congregations. Peacemaking Grant was awarded to *Voices of Jubilee* in the amount of 25,000 to support a Prison Youth Ministry. *National Capital* received a \$5,000 grant to certify trainers and facilitators. *Williamsburg Presbyterian Church* was awarded \$5,000 to support a Hunger Program. The Assembly voted to place a \$10,000 cap on requests for Peacemaking Grants. Applications denied included Hillsville PC because it received funding last cycle; Forest Hill PC (Entry Doors) Fund limitation; and Dellebrooke PC was asked to reapply with more specific needs.



**FINANCE COMMITTEE** Chair, Cherry Peters, was gracious in thanks and praises of her committee members who included Elease Wilson (PEA), Tim Bird (ABI), Carl Wilton (BAL) and Clifford Thomas (NHO). The committee assumed just under 4% decrease in per capita donations from Presbyteries which increases



the draw from reserves to cover loss of per capita and new requirements. Overall increase in income + draw 10.5%. Areas of expense include a 3% increase for full-time staff salaries, plus concomitant increases to board of pensions, payroll taxes. Impact of the decision earlier this year to increase marketing and grant writing using professional help. 13.6% increase

in cost of two Synod Assemblies in 2024 over BUDGETED amount in 2023. The 2023 actual will be over budget and the effective increase for next year will be more modest. The overall increase in expenses comes in at 9.0%. The committee advised the Executive Committee concerning the synod's capacity to contribute to the Centennial Capital Campaign. The Assembly approved the 2024 Mission and Operating Budget in the amount of \$421,139.91. **Per capita remains at \$1.15 for 2024.**

**THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE** is composed of Moderator Addie Peterson, Steve Scott, Felicia S. Hoyle and WD Hasty, Amanda Pine and Cassandra Thomas, Tolokun Omokunde and Vice Moderator David Cho. Seven recommendations were approved by the Assembly:

- (1) Edits to the Kate B. Reynolds Certification Committee Guidelines.
- (2) Permission was granted to the 252<sup>nd</sup> Assembly Planning Committee to finalize planning.
- (3) Amanda Pine (EVA) and Cassandra Thomas (CCC) are co-chairs of the Emerging Ideas Committee.
- (4) \$50,000 was approved for Massanetta Springs Centennial Campaign.
- (5) \$50,000 was approved to launch the NGI for Leadership and African American congregations.
- (6) \$25,000 was approved for PDA to assist in responding to the tragic fires in Hawaii.
- (7) \$26,000 was approved in support of Emerging Ideas Committee for 2024 budget.

**THE EMERGING YOUNG BLACK PRESBYTERIAN VOICES** were hard hitting and astute. The biggest mistake



of the Assembly was to designate only 75 minutes for this segment. It needed a full 2-hours; however, the wisdom of Moderator Addie Peterson extended the time. Facilitated by the Pastor of Memorial Presbyterian Church in Charlotte NC, the Rev. Shavon Starling-Louis guided four other young voices who were seminarians or recently ordained in

the PCUSA. The Late Rev. Dr. Gayraud Wilmore in writings raised gut-retching questions such as, 'Can one be Black and Presbyterian at the same time? Does Reformed Theology allow me to authentically who I am in the White Denomination? When most students entering seminary today are not choosing pastoral ministry as their vocational call, why did you choose to become a pastor or are a pastor? Shavon, who is also Co-Moderator of the PCUSA General Assembly in partnership with Grace Ruth Santana, navigated this and other critical questions. The responses were electrifying. Our region must hear more from these young emerging prophetic voices. They are the church leaders now and church leaders for the future. Big Props to the Rev. Serenitye Taylor and the Rev. Antonio MK Lawrence Jr, and Seminarians Ryan G. Atkinson and Kirk Louis. The Synod Emerging Ideas Committee will continue collaborating with them to establish ongoing, open, and meaningful dialogue with seminarians and recently ordained candidates Ministers of Word and Sacrament. It was great to have five faculty members present from Eastern Mennonite College and Seminary, where Rev. Dr. Dan Ott is Dean of the Seminary to be present for these conversations. You bet there will be an Encore in the coming months!

**HEALTH IN PULPITS AND PEWS** – Reflecting the mirror side of the NGI was the Assistant Director of

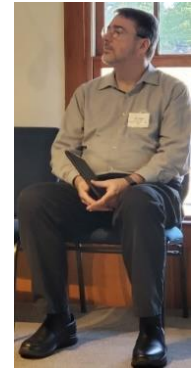
Theology, Formation and Evangelism of the PMA, Rev. Dr. Carlton Johnson. When we talk about healthy Pulpits and Pews, we are talking about people who were formed at one point in a particular way. Spiritual Formation is essential to have both healthy preachers in the pulpits and healthy parishioners in the pews. The lack of Spiritual Formation is one reason congregations are declining and failing to nurture and recruit the Next Generation of Leadership. Spiritual Formation is a life- long, continuing process that takes place in a community of believers. It involves heart, mind, and soul; therefore, it can be every action, experience, or relationship that nurtures a transformative relationship of trust with God and shapes the way we see and interact with God's world. Spiritual and Faith Formation will come from home and then we can carry it into the streets. Spiritual Formation has to do with *Valuing Life, Creation care, Relationship, Community building, Legacy building, Stewardship, and Institution building*. Real chance that structural racism, poverty is affecting the people who are sitting in the pews. How are we able to serve folks who are experiencing structural racism, which is different than calling someone the "n' word. Systemic poverty is not just the food pantry, the question is not how you feed them this week but why they have been hungry all year. Intersectional foci (Climate Change, Gender Justice and Heteropatriarchy, Militarism). As we listen and engage the foci, they are larger in AA communities. Why are more young people trading in church for African Spirituality. Participants were asked how the song that he opened with made them feel as if he lined the hymn and sang it in Long Meter, a style that is still used in a number of Black Churches. Just sit in it. Kids are connecting with African Spirituality. I do not have to surrender my culture to be in touch to be with the Divine. Whoever you are, being authentic is what draws you closer to God (with all your flaws). How do we move with an understanding of separating ourselves with who we are to be closer to the divine?



**SHIFTING TRENDS** - The Assembly benefited significantly from powerful presentations highlighting the



changes occurring in Church and Society. Rev. Dr. Bruce Grady is the Executive Presbyter for New Hope Presbytery. As a lifelong theological educator, he has served Duke Divinity School, Shaw Divinity School as Dean and directed the Orman Center which helps to make connections between the academy, church, and community. Rev. Dr. Tim Cargal is the Associate Director for Ministry Leadership Development for the Office of the General Assembly. Tim's membership is in the National Capital Presbytery where he served as synod commissioner in 1999. This segment



sets the foundation for understanding some of the societal and cultural shifts occurring at the intersection of church and society. The devastation the pandemic has wreaked havoc among people and organizations has been acutely felt by churches and their leaders. In addition, Baby boomers are greater in number than successors in many churches. Christianity membership is shrinking in the United States. Non-denominational affiliation is the largest denomination. We examined the Presbyterian Church in general and then discussed the Black Presbyterian Church and Congregations. Further, there have been major shifts in Theological Education as articulated by two scholars in this area.



The Rev. Dr. Tim Cargal is the Associate Director for Ministry Leadership Development for the Office of the General Assembly. Tim's membership is in the National Capital Presbytery where he served as synod commissioner in 1999. The Rev. Dr. David Cho is Assistant Professor of Spiritual Care and Counseling and Co-Director of the Center for Practical Theology at Boston University School of Theology. Currently, he also serves as synod Vice Moderator. Each presenter offered ideas and thoughts on who is attending seminary today. What motivates young people to consider theological education? What career fields are young seminarians gravitating to or from? What are the shifting trends in theological education? How are these factors impacting the next generation of African American leaders to preach in the pulpits, lead mid-councils, and

do community organizing? How are seminarians of color navigating theological education? Are seminaries and presbyteries really making space for different kinds of hermeneutics?

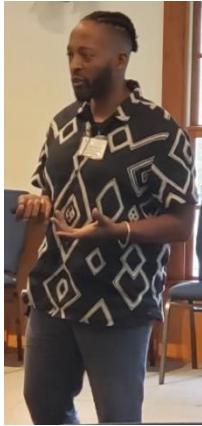
**STATED CLERK REPORT** – Excuses were granted to Commissioners requesting them. AKAP and CHA did

not have a commissioner present for this Assembly, and it was noted. Thanks were extended to the class of 2023, many of which served two consecutive terms on commissions and committees. Commissioners were reminded that they are the connections to each presbytery and because of such, they are responsible for sharing the work of the synod accordingly. Three separate consultations were held since the last assembly and included Synod Grants, Atlantic Korean American Presbytery and Kate B. Reynolds Fund. The Synod Clerk participates in the Virginia Council of Churches Judicatory leaders Retreat and as member of the Steering Committee and Coordinating Council. All fourteen presbyteries submitted 2022 minutes for review, and we thank each clerk. I am grateful that the Executive Committee granted permission for the 252<sup>nd</sup> Assembly to focus on and launch the Next Generation Initiative. Presbytery Search Committees currently active include Salem and Eastern Virginia. Presbytery leaders who will retire before the end of 2023 include Liza Hendricks and Barbara Smith. Appreciation was extended to the Assembly Planning Committee. Synod Staff has added a contract Communication Coordinator who is doing a superb job. The Synod Permanent Judicial Commission has one remedial complaint before it. The Omnibus Motion was approved which included the minutes from



the 251st Synod Assembly, Committee on Representation Report, Kate B Reynolds Minutes and Guideline changes.

**CENTER FOR REPAIR OF HISTORICAL HARMS** featured the Rev. Anthony Jermaine-Ross Allam, director in full blaze and armor. He blessed us with information from the office, but more than that, he shared how that information can apply to the Synod. He was a sharer of the Good News that Repair and Reparations are common sense for the common good. Jermaine was ordained as minister of Word and sacrament by the Presbytery of the Twin Cities in 2013 where he began ordained ministry as executive director of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Academy at Kwanzaa Community Church PC(USA) in North Minneapolis—renamed Liberty Community Church—and, later, Associate Pastor for Social Justice at Oak Grove Presbyterian Church. In addition to serving as the Center for Repair’s first director, Jermaine is a PhD candidate in Social Ethics at Union Theological Seminary in Manhattan where he is completing a book tentatively titled “Trammeled by the Bonds of Union: Social Ecology of anti-Black Violence and Impunity after Emancipation.” Jermaine is also a proud theology co-lead volunteer with Restorative Actions—an economic equity initiative born from the intersection of theology, justice, and economics based at the



Synod of Lakes and Prairies. This segment will introduce and help make a deeper connection to the 1983 Denomination Reunion and how the Black Presence was weakened, voices eradicated, and relationships eroded. Rev. Ross-Allam raised questions for consideration such as: Was the agency of Black Church Leadership intentionally or unintentionally rendered a slow death blow? What did the Black Church lose in the process and what might be gained because of it? What ought to be the White Presbyterians response to this? What did Dr. Gayraud S. Wilmore predict about Black Presbyterianism in Black and Presbyterians the Heritage and the Hope? He was laser focused on helping the Assembly to understand the difference between Repair and Reparations.

**SOUNDS OF THE DRUMS** – The Assembly kicked off, throughout, and concluded its activities with the powerful and rhematic sounds of African Drumming led by Commissioner Tolunkun Omukunde, Alonzo Johnson (PMA) and Keenan Rodgers (BOP). These sounds permeated both the opening and closing worship experiences which were formatted in the best of the Black Church Worship Tradition. The preaching was prophetic, jampacked with life-led illustrations, the liturgy was convicting, and the music satisfied the SOUL’s desire. The Fellowship during plenary, Table Talks, Affinity Groups and after hour gatherings was unbelievable. What a Time!!!



**CLOSING WORSHIP** - The Rev. Dr. Alonzo Johnson is the National Coordinator for the Self-Development of People Program (SDOP) of the Presbyterian Church (USA). SDOP is a branch of the PCUSA’s Compassion, Peace, and Justice Ministry. He is also the convener of the “Educate A Child, Transform the World initiative. Alonzo has more than 25 years of experience specializing in urban, youth, education, creative arts, anti-racism, and social justice ministries. What better way to end four days of inquiry, presentations, table talks, development of strategies and good fellowship than with a Celebration of Worship? Dr. Johnson utilized powerfully charged illustrations that enabled his sermon to be seen and heard. He projected a picture of the late and great soul musical performer, James Brown, holding an infant and later pointed out that he was the infant being held by James Brown. This was a vivid reminder that one never knows in whose presence of greatness one might find her or himself. The sermon accentuated and raised the level of responsibility as new officers were installed. The Assembly recognized Synod



Commissioners whose terms will end this year and thanked them for years of faithful service to Christ Church in the Mid-Atlantic Region.

**RAMBLING THOUGHTS:** Several Gospel accounts describe a landowner planning a wedding feast in which many were invited, but for various reasons chose not to attend. He then ordered his servants to go out onto the highways and byways to invite those from the margins. So, they did! The Assembly Planning Team was intentional in inviting its fourteen presbyteries to commit to sending individuals who occupy the following spaces with their presbyteries or churches: Presbytery Executive, Stated Clerk, Representatives from the Committee on Ministry and the Committee on Preparation, three to five Black Church Leaders and its two Synod Commissioners. Further, we invited various agencies from the General Assembly who showed up in large numbers. We are grateful to all who made it a priority to attend and were fully present for the entire Assembly to help launch the Next Generation Initiative. Might God strengthen the ties between the Presbyterian Churches, Presbyteries, Synod and the General Assembly. After all, we are a connectional church!