



Message from Rev. Warren Lesane, Jr.

The countdown is on! On June 30, 2025, we will celebrate 45 years of ministry and service to Almighty God through the Presbyterian Church (USA) by the Rev. Warren Lesane Jr. What a remarkable journey it has been, and what an incredible way to conclude this chapter of faithful service! With deep gratitude, I

extend my heartfelt thanks to the Synod of the Mid-Atlantic for the profound honor of recognizing my work over the past 11 years. The announcement at the 255th Synod Assembly that the Commissioners have established Warren J. Lesane Jr. Next Generation Initiative Fund moved me to tears. Praise God from whom all blessings flow! This initiative is a powerful testament to the enduring commitment of the Synod to nurture and call forth the next generation of Black Church leaders, reversing the troubling downward trend within many African American Presbyterian congregations. I am deeply grateful for the overwhelming support already shown and encourage continued contributions to this transformative effort. Donations can be made by visiting the Synod's website at www.synatlantic.org and clicking the "Donate" button.

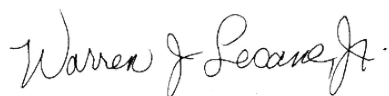
The 255th Synod Assembly, held in Richmond on March 10–11, 2025, proved to be a defining moment under the theme “A Matthew 25 Moment – A Cry for Mercy and Love.” Over eighty individuals engaged in the vital work of speaking truth to power, and the assembly was enriched by dynamic sermons and keynote addresses that commanded attention and inspired action. Notable highlights included:

- Thought-provoking addresses by Union Presbyterian Seminary President Dr. Jacqueline Lapsley and Professors James Taneti and Rodney Sadler.
- Insightful panel discussions featuring presbytery leaders, grassroots community organizations, and national staff, offering strategies for amplifying the PC(USA)'s voice in challenging times.
- A virtual gathering with Co-Moderators Cecilia Armstrong and Tony Larson, alongside the Stated Clerk and Director of interim Mission Agency, Rev. Jihyun Oh.

- Plenary sessions that equipped attendees with actionable responses to current governmental policies, enabling them to resource sessions, presbyteries, and communities effectively.
- The revival of the Montgomery Immersion Experience by former Synod Moderators.
- Affirmation of strong and stable leadership within both the Synod and Presbyteries, with strategic planning underway for a thriving future.
- A call for nominations to serve on the Committees on Nominations and Representation.
- An approved increase in Synod per capita from \$1.15 to \$1.50, effective in 2026.
- Plans for the annual Presbytery Minutes Review, with forthcoming dates to be shared.
- The Assembly distributed \$680,909 in grants, scholarships, and support for retired ministers.
- The confirmation of the Synod Executive Search Committee, composed of dedicated Ruling and Teaching Elders from across the Mid-Atlantic region.
- The adoption of the Commissioners Resolution addressing the staff reductions and significant shifts with area of PCUSA Mission Co-Worker.

To ensure the broader dissemination of these significant updates, we urge all Synod Commissioners and Presbytery leaders to share the Synod Highlights document widely. It serves as an invaluable resource for newsletters, church and presbytery websites, and direct communication with constituents.

In Christ,



Rev. Warren Lesane, Jr.
Synod Executive and Stated Clerk
Synod of the Mid-Atlantic



**HIGHLIGHTS OF THE 255TH
Stated Meeting of the Synod of the Mid-Atlantic (PCUSA)
March 10-11, 2025, | Drury Plaza Hotel, Glen Allen, VA**

The 255th Stated Meeting of the Synod of the Mid-Atlantic (PCUSA) unfolded over two powerful days of spirit-led worship, prophetic teaching, justice-centered dialogue, administrative diligence, and heartfelt celebration. Held at the Drury Plaza Hotel in Glen Allen, Virginia, the Assembly brought together commissioners from all fourteen presbyteries, corresponding members, PCUSA agencies staff, volunteers, and guests to engage deeply with the pressing challenges and sacred opportunities before the church today. How will the PCUSA (SMA) Speak Truth to Power?

Grounding in Spirit and Land - Moderator Barry Parks commenced the Assembly with a heartfelt prayer, warmly welcoming everyone into the sacred space we were about to share. Afterwards, Valerie Luna Serrels, drawing from the Celtic Tradition engaged the Assembly in a deeply moving land acknowledgment. Through a powerful call-and-response prayer, we honored the Pamunkey, Mattaponi, Chickahominy, Nansemond, and Rappahannock tribes. It was more than a ritual—it was a moment of grounding. Together, we paused to remember the truths of the land we stood on, to feel the weight of history, and to commit ourselves to justice, healing, and compassion.



Worship as Witness: Justice, Mercy, and Communion - Vice Moderator Leah



Epps gently guided us into a time of worship, setting the tone with grace and intention. She introduced Dr. Jacqueline Lapsley, President of Union Presbyterian Seminary, who brought a powerful word to the Assembly. Drawing wisdom from Isaiah, Jonah, and the teachings of Bishop Mariann Budde, Dr. Lapsley reminded us that justice and mercy go hand in hand—they are not optional; they are at the heart of who we are called to be as

the Church. Hymn singing during worship was at its absolute best as we were led in song by West Moore who engaged full participation. “I the Lord of Sea and Sky” and for “Everyone Born” echoed throughout the hotel as they complimented the piercing message of the sermon. Praise be to God!

The service concluded with the Lord’s Supper, administered by Vice Moderator



Leah Epps assisted by Rev. Warren Lesane. In that sacred moment, as bread was broken and the cup was shared with all in attendance, we were reminded of our unity in Christ—one body, many stories, bound together by grace.

Virtual Prophetic Witness: A Challenge from the Co-Moderator - Joining us via Zoom, Co-Moderators Tony Larson and Cece Armstrong brought a commanding message from afar—Tony from San Antonio and Cece from Charleston. They spoke candidly and with conviction about the path of



denominational recovery, grounded in what they called “CAR”: Communication, Alignment, and Relationships. Their reflections reminded all that following Jesus dictates staying aligned with God’s justice, love, and mercy—especially in a time when those values are being tested. Tony encouraged us to live in relationship with those experiencing disadvantages, pointing to the parable of the Good Samaritan as a model for

modern discipleship. Cece built on that message with a poetic benediction, urging us to be people of love and compassion in a world that desperately

needs both. After their remarks, Moderator Barry Parks led the Assembly in prayer, grounding us once more in the Spirit.

Setting the Stage: Purpose, Presence, and Participation - Before diving into the work ahead, Moderator Parks laid out the theme, the purpose, and the flow of the Assembly. We are gathered for more than just business—we were here to discern God’s will together, in a spirit of love, truth, and accountability. He encouraged everyone to practice self-care during hard conversations and to stay open to what the Spirit might be saying. As Christians, we know that God sent his only Son to us, to bring us all into loving relationships. To love God and love each other - God's children, everyone. And Jesus was very particular about what he expected all of us to do. We are supposed to feed the hungry, give drinks to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the poor, care for the sick and visit the prisoners. Today, we are faced with those in power who do not share these values. Those who hate, those who do not share God’s love. Those who deny food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, who oppress the stranger. Our friends are crying out for help. How do we respond? How do we, members of the body of Christ, bring people back into loving relationships? Loving relationships with God, and with each other, all of God’s children? With a quorum confirmed, the Synod Administrator was appointed as temporary clerk, and the docket was adopted with ease. Corresponding members were enrolled, and volunteers were acknowledged.

“The Sin of Hostility” – Plenary one began with an intense keynote from Rev. Dr. James Taneti, founding director of the Syngman Rhee Global Mission Center and teaches World Christianity at UPS. Taneti invited us to step outside of our comfort zones and stand in true solidarity with the marginalized. He drew from Hebrews and Exodus, naming the harsh realities faced by undocumented immigrants—particularly from India—and the hypocrisy of relying on their labor while criminalizing their presence. Dr. Taneti called us to practice “xenophilia”—a love for the stranger—rather than fear. His message was a clear call to walk with Christ by walking with those at the margins.



Following his address, a panel discussion brought the message to life.



Facilitated by Ruling Elder Patricia Morse, the panel featured Rev. Dr. LaKeisha Cook, Ruling Elder Amanda Pine, and Ruling Elder Tony De La Rosa, each offering wisdom rooted in experience:

- Amanda called churches to move beyond vague welcomes and step into the work of prophetic hospitality.
- Tony lifted the importance of naming and resisting the toxic patterns of white heteropatriarchy and emphasized the need for spaces where men can express emotion without turning to violence.
- LaKeisha introduced us to the Zulu greeting “I see you, (Ngiyakubona)” and connected it to advocacy work—including a bipartisan win that ended the shackling of minors in courtrooms.

Additional Commissioners shared concerns, ideas, and hopes for how presbyteries can support bold pastors and prophetic congregations. Resources like Just Faith Ministries and Shaping Sanctuary were named as practical tools for transformation.



A Prophetic Word from Esther - Rev. Dr. Rodney Sadler keynoted Plenary Two boldly ‘For Such a Time as This.’ With fire, brilliancy and clarity, he spoke about the moral crossroads at which the church and nation stand. He named the dangers of remaining silent when injustice is

on the rise, reminding us that silence is not neutral - it is consent. Sadler provoked us with three statements, (1) Do not think that in the Kings house you will be immune; (2) If the church keeps silent, silence has a high cost; (3) Silence is not an option with Justice at stake. He explored the weight of privilege, especially white privilege, and challenged everyone to consider what they are willing to risk protecting the most vulnerable.

Following his keynote RE Flo Barbee-Watkins moderated a second panel bring to bear focusing on critical questions about the message in the sermon. Panelists Jonathan Barton, Kim Priddy, and Susan Krehbiel shared deeply personal stories of courage, struggle, and growth. From accompanying migrants in detention centers to comforting grieving families and stepping into hard conversations about sexuality and race, each story reminded us that courage is not solitary, it is communal. The panel wrapped with a powerful question: How do we cultivate the kind of courage Esther had? Their answer: through community, prayer, and a willingness to show up even when we are afraid.



Reflections to Action - The Rev. Dr. David Cho brought a combined perspective in the final plenary. Building on the themes of Esther and previous messages, he introduced the “Five A’s of Social Action”: Awareness, Assessment, Action, Alliance, and Advocacy to enable everyone to process what they heard today. He then invited commissioners into small group conversations around three deeply personal questions:

1. What is breaking your heart?
2. What can/will you do about it?
3. What is your next faithful step?



The responses were as varied as the people in the room, but all shared a common thread: a



desire to build something better. Groups talked about everything from building ministries of welcome and hosting interfaith potlucks to addressing job insecurity and reclaiming the prophetic role of the church. Several small

groups, according to their presbytery developed action plans that will guide their work upon returning home.

Day Two: Looking Forward Together - The second day began with prayer and a compelling presentation from PCUSA Stated Clerk Jihyun Oh. Speaking candidly about inclusion, sanctuary, and international partnerships, she reminded all that PCUSA is still on the move—still answering the call of Matthew 25, still working for peace and justice in a divided world.



State of the Synod Address: Warren delivered his final State of the Synod Address. With humility and vision, he shared the story of how the Synod moved from uncertainty to strength—from contemplating closure to becoming a leader in justice and innovation. He lifted moments like the response to Charlottesville, the Montgomery Immersion, and the powerful shift sparked by Matthew 25. His message: stay rooted, stay connected, and keep going.

Business Rooted in Mission - The business session was full of activity—it was a clear reflection of a Synod deeply engaged in justice, equity, and transformation. Committees reported vital work across the board and recommendations were adopted: The full commissioners Resolution can be found [here](#).

- The Assembly approved Wells Fargo Bank be authorized on 12/10/2024 to distribute \$650,557.62. This figure represents one-half of four percent of a three- year rolling average of the Kate Bitting Reynolds Fund market value, minus administrative fees of the Synod/Presbyteries. The distribution should be made in equal shares of \$1,465.22 to the certified ministers, the odd cents guaranteeing that the entire \$650,557.62 is disbursed.
- **Stated Clerk** reminded Synod Commissioners that they represent the presbyteries for which they have been elected. Synod Assembly meets twice annually, and the dates are provided far in advance. The Synod expects commissioners to make every effort to represent your presbytery

during Assemblies and to make a report to the appropriate council or presbytery meeting following the Assembly. If you are unable to attend an Assembly, you are required to request excuse from the Synod Stated Clerk. A Commissioners Resolution has been filed with the Synod Stated Clerk that seeks actions from the 255th Synod Assembly related to supporting a compassionate comprehensive missional mandated in keeping with the PCUSA. The Administration Committee reviewed and supported the resolution to be presented.

- **Emerging Ideas** wrapped up the Wild Church project and launched a new partnership with NEXT Church. It continues to seek new ministry opportunities that may need initial grant support. It is looking for ministries that are creative, innovative, and energizing.
- **Grants** distributed over \$25,000 in scholarships and support for small congregations. They included:
 - Cellonia Ndede (new applicant) \$6,000 – Westminster PC (JAM)
 - Joshua Gilhart (renewal) \$3,275.00 – Cumberland MD (BAL)
 - Nenio Pfuzeh (renewal) \$3,275.00 – Ginter Park PC (JAM)
 - Praveen Pulukuri (renewal) \$3,275.00 – Ginter PC (JAM)
 - White Memorial \$5,000 for senior lunch program (NHO)
 - Freedom Presbyterian \$4,521 for tech for virtual services (PCC)
- **Finance** approved disaster relief funds for Western North Carolina Presbytery in the amount of \$25,000 to assist in hurricane/flood recovery and Salem Presbytery in the amount of \$7,500 for the disaster recovery. 2026 per capita increases and updated financial policies for staff.
- **The Administration Committee** shared ways to enhance staff benefits through synod personnel policies and updates. It presented a Commissioners Resolution which Commissioner Cassandra Thomas brought to the Assembly. The committee adopted it. Commissioners Tim Bird and Cassandra Thomas drafted the Resolution. The committee announced that there will be a called Synod Assembly to receive the candidate for the next Synod Leader. It approved a powerful resolution to



protect global mission funding, and reviewed leadership structures with the Unified Mission Agency.

- **The Next Generation Initiative** expanded its mission to empower Black congregations and develop new leaders. Its work is subdivided into four work groups, namely, Research, Funding, Marketing and Recruitment. The committee meets four times a year and working groups meet in between time.
- **The Executive Committee** reaffirmed names of the Synod Executive/ Stated Clerk Search Committee to be ratified by the Assembly. Those individual approved were Bill Rienhold, Steve Scott, Cherry Peters, Addie Peterson, Susanne Hooker Taylor, Kate Rascoe.
- **Partner Reports** from Massanetta Springs, the Board of Pensions, and Mission Engagement Services showed creative adaptations and meaningful ministry continuing throughout the region.
- **The Nominations Committee** elected RE John Barker (ABI) as its co-moderator. The committee worked through collaboration with the Executive and Administration Committees to develop a list of nominees to serve on the Synod Executive and Stated Clerk Search Committee. Vacancies exist in NHO, JAM, and SHE presbyteries on Representation; Vacancies exist from NEW and PEA presbyteries on Jubilee Fund; Vacancies exist from EVA, JAM, NAT, and PEA presbyteries on the Nomination Committee. Presbyteries are urged to fill these vacancies as soon as possible. It is critical that every presbytery is represented on synod committees.

Honoring a Legacy: Celebrating Rev. Warren Lesane



Monday evening closed with joy, laughter, and a few tears as the Synod celebrated the leadership and legacy of Rev. Warren Lesane. Through photos, music, video tributes, and warm words, the community honored his 11 years of service. A plaque was presented, officially naming the “Warren J. Lesane Jr. Next Generation Initiative Fund”—a lasting tribute to his commitment to the future of the church.

Shortly, communications describing the fund will be shared very soon as to how the public might contribute to the Next Generation Initiative Fund established in Warren’s name. For the moment, one can visit the Synod of the Mid-Atlantic website at www.synatlantic.org and click the donate button. Then click in Next Generation Initiative.



Warren closed the evening with heartfelt thanks and a full heart. The video he was presented can be viewed [here](#).



- Thank you, Rev. Warren Lesane, Jr., for eleven amazing years of service to the Synod of the Mid-Atlantic.

Worship in the Wild - Before the 255th Synod Assembly concluded, the Assembly stepped outside for a Wild Church worship service, led by Valerie Luna Serrels. Under a canopy of trees, the Assembly was led in a seven-point prayer that invited them to listen, breathe, and remember that God's presence is as near as the breeze.

Going Forth with Prayer: Moderator Barry Parks adjourned the 255th Synod Assembly at 12:30 p.m. on March 11, 2025. "Go back to your presbyteries," he encouraged, "renewed, equipped, and ready to serve."

Next Synod Assembly: September 9-10, 2025, at the Drury Plaza Hotel, Richmond VA.