

Highlights of 2016 Spring Stated Presbytery Meeting

By: Alexandra (Sandra) Hedrick, Presbytery Stated Clerk

May 3, 2016

“It is for God’s sake that we are here this morning!” These inspiring words began the greeting and sermon message from our special guest Heath Rada, who is the Moderator of the 221st General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Montgomery Presbyterian Conference Center (MPCC) welcomed nearly 125 teaching elders and ruling elder commissioners and 35 visitors to worship, fellowship, discussion, and business. During worship, we commissioned our 222nd General Assembly commissioners and our young adult advisory delegate. The morning offering, which was designated for MPCC, was \$1055.

In his sermon message, Moderator Rada shared the story recorded in the 21st chapter of John where, after a night of unsuccessful fishing, a stranger on the shore asks the disciples to cast their nets to the other side of the boat. After their response results in a large catch of fish, they realize that it is the Risen Lord who called to them, and they join him on the shore for a meal that he has already prepared.

Moderator Rada encouraged us to listen to Jesus and follow him in every aspect of our lives, including our shared life as the part of the church of Jesus Christ known as the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). He reminded us that fears of any kind are the antithesis of faith, which he has seen in his travels, listening to Christians around the world who are living faithfully in times of great hardship. When we follow Jesus, we must be prepared to go outside of our comfort zones (or “cast our nets on the other side of the boat”). Wherever we go in our own ministries - blessed with the resources that God has given us to share - Jesus will be there before us and will always be with us!

Highlights of the presentations and actions during the meeting led by our Moderator Ralph Moulder included:

- We remembered the Rev. Dr. Don Harris, who died on April 28, 2016 (thank you to David Lee who spoke about Don with such affection and wonderful illustrations of his special gifts and love for the church).
- We welcomed and prayed for a new teaching elder received into our presbytery: Bethany Benz-Whittington, who is serving our Peace church in Jacksonville as its stated supply pastor. We also welcomed and prayed for James Kendrick, a candidate for ministry under the care of our presbytery.
- We met in small groups for discussion of the preliminary report of the Discernment and Design Steering Committee regarding the presbytery’s transition process. This was an opportunity to get to know sisters and brothers from around the presbytery and to provide feedback that will be critical as the presbytery continues its work of envisioning God’s will for the PC(USA) in our place and time. The Discernment and Design Committee will continue its work over the summer and report again at the Fall Stated Meeting.

- We elected an administrative commission that will assist in the closing of our Highlands church in Gainesville and provide care to the congregation as each member experiences this difficult transition. Members of all of our congregations are invited to the closing service to be held at the church on Sunday, May 15, at 3:00 p.m. The address is 1001 NE 16th Ave, Gainesville, FL 32601.
- We voted against the request from the session of our Fort King church that we concur with Overture 09-01 - “on PC(USA) Fossil Fuel Divestment” which comes to the 222nd General Assembly from the Presbytery of San Francisco.
- Reports were made on behalf of Presbyterian Women (Carol Graff, Moderator - Trinity), the Mutual Mission Committee (Richard Kirk - Ocala First), Montgomery Presbyterian Conference Center (Jim Montgomery, Operating Board Moderator - South Jacksonville - and Terry Patterson, Executive Director of MPCC), and the Board of Pensions (Clark Simmons).
- Under “new business,” a motion from our Faith church in Melrose to establish an annual appreciation day for the Montgomery Presbyterian Conference Center was referred to the team established by MPCC’s Executive Operating Board to work with its visioning consultant.

All who attended enjoyed a healthy and delicious lunch of grilled shrimp or chicken-vegetable kabobs, jasmine rice, sautéed vegetable medley, fruit salad, tossed salad with garlic basil dressing, Hawaiian rolls, chocolate lava cake, and pineapple upside-down cake. The weather cooperated with sunny skies and pleasant breezes as friends dined with friends under the pavilion.

The 2016 Fall Stated Meeting of the Presbytery of St. Augustine will be held at Montgomery Presbyterian Conference Center near Starke, Florida, on Tuesday, October 4, 2016, at 9:00 a.m.

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