PORTLAND – Nearly 2,500 participants in the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) spread out Sunday to worship in about 30 congregations stretching from Vancouver, Washington, to Salem, Oregon.

The connectionalism for which the PC(USA) is known was celebrated in several of them. Ken Evers-Hood, the pastor of Tualatin Presbyterian Church, even devoted his children’s sermon to a mini-polity course – from session to presbytery to synod to General Assembly – and introduced a number of GA visitors from around the country and around the world.

“The great cloud of witnesses we talk about is visible here today,” he said of the more than 20 GA guests on hand. “We are part of something bigger.”

Using the lectionary passage from Luke about the

Worship at Vancouver Korean Presbyterian Church. Photo: Danny Bolin

Continued on page 2

PORTLAND – The final items of business were set Sunday for commissioners to the 222nd General Assembly (2016), as nine of 12 Commissioners’ Resolutions, and part of a 10th, were accepted for consideration during the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)’s biennial meeting.

The resolutions, which must be proposed by two commissioners from different presbyteries, covered issues ranging from sanctuary for refugees to recognizing the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation.

According to the assembly’s standing rules, the resolutions are reviewed by the Assembly Committee on Bills and Overtures, which decides whether the items can be taken up, then assigns them to appropriate committees for consideration. Resolutions can be rejected if they deal with business already before the assembly or if they would require an amendment to or an interpretation of the denomination’s constitution.

Resolutions accepted and referred Sunday were:

• Two dealing with global escalation in the number of displaced persons/refugees. One, submitted by Karen Turney of the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta and Elizabeth Shannon of the Presbytery of Tampa Bay, calls for the denomination to affirm the principles of sanctuary in response to the global explosion in the number of refugees. The other, submitted by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette of the Presbytery of New Castle and Adan Mairena of the Presbytery of Philadelphia, calls for the reaffirming congregations’ ministry of sanctuary. Both were assigned to the Assembly Committee on Peacemaking and International Issues.

• A resolution calling for peace, justice, and reunification in the

Sanctuary, Church Property Disputes Among Topics of Resolutions Referred to Committees

By General Assembly News Staff

By Bob Sloan

Continued on page 12
Gerasene demoniac, Evers-Hood drew parallels between the networks of the early church and the digital networks of today, suggesting that the reason Jesus did not permit the demon-free Gerasene to follow him to Galilee was to send him as a messenger of the Gospel to his connections in a Gentile land.

Noting that the strength of Rome was built on the famed network of roads throughout the Empire, Evers-Hood said the same network was used by early Christians to spread their message.

Jumping forward to last weekend’s tragedy in Orlando, he pointed to the key role digital social networks played in getting help to the victims of the mass shooting in the Pulse nightclub.

While modern life moves fast, and information and news travels faster than we can react, Evers-Hood said, these connectional networks also help keep people “believing that hope and peace and calm and light can make a difference.”

At Westminster Church in Portland, Laura M. Cheifetz used the same passage to urge her listeners to recognize and confront the demons in society and in our lives.

Cheifetz, vice president of church and public relations at Presbyterian Publishing Corp., who served as visiting pastor, was joined in the pulpit by Westminster pastors Beth and Gregg Neel and Laurie Lynn Newman.

“Where are our demons today?” Cheifetz asked.

She said guns, the criminalization of people suffering from addictions, child hunger, homelessness, unwarranted bombings by our military, gender bias, racism, and discrimination against immigrants and minorities as some of today’s demons.

“Is this a story about mental illness,” she asked. “A misunderstanding of how our brains work? I don’t know. Should I keep an eye out for our demons wherever I go? I don’t know. What I do know this: We must take these demons seriously.”

Cheifetz said it is vitally important that we respond collectively and individually to banish these demons in the spirit and with the compassion of Christ.

“We have all had our hearts broken,” she said. “We have seen suffering and have lived suffering … [and] been left cowering on the ground in grief and torment and terror. If we make it out, then we know what it is to go from naked to clothed, from possessed to in our right minds, from chaos and disorder to going out to share the good news of what has been done for us.”

Chiefetz said being a Christian is not “living in some fancy world of butterflies and unicorns,” but to “see a world full of demons.”

“We know these demons better than we would like to,” she said, “and we know what we are up against.” She said we must turn away from our fears and focus instead on the view of what God has done for us, because we are “called to “stare death, chaos and disorder in the face, and to proclaim the gift of life, God’s presence, and the power of healing in the same breath.”

“It is living the resurrection,” she concluded.

Meanwhile, the congregation of Covenant Presbyterian Church swelled when about 25 Assembly visitors piled off a bus and into the sanctuary. Covenant, located in the suburb of Gresham, just east of Portland, has approximately 68 members, including a small but growing contingent of Filipino members.

Despite its size, the tiny church is a powerhouse of mission activity.

“You are a generous church,” said Rene Myers, a visiting member of the Presbyterian Mission Agency staff who was asked to give a Moment for Mission. “My role today is to say ‘Thank you.’”

Covenant ranks second in per-member giving in Cascades Presbytery. The congregation recently raised $1,000 to buy filters for a clean-water project in Guatemala, and is collecting donations for the work of Presbyterian Disaster Assistance. Members are also active in SnowCap, a local agency established by Covenant and several other congregations to provide food, clothing, and other necessities to area residents in need.

Covenant’s pastor, Patricia Berger, and a number of church members are serving as volunteer greeters, communion servers, and prayer partners for the assembly.

Berger, a second-career pastor, was ordained at age 59. She has been at Covenant, her first church, for 10 years. She is ably assisted by Parish Associate Ann Richards, a retired minister ordained in 1979, when ordination of women was still a novelty to many in her presbytery.

In Berger’s sermon, she talked about Jesus’ healing of a man possessed by demons, as described in Luke 8:26–39. “God does the same for us,” she said. “We are more than our mistakes. We are more than our fears. We are more than the demons that bind us.”

In the wake of such horrific events as the shootings in Orlando, many of us “can be bound by our fears,” she said, “but we’ve not been created for fear; we’ve been created for life, for love.”

Before the service, on the bus en route to Gresham, volunteer Kathy Dunford, a member of Covenant for 25 years, asked whether any of the visitors would be willing to sing in the church’s choir. Five people volunteered. After a quick pre-service run-through of the anthem with Music Director Barbara Fredericksen, the choir filled the sanctuary
THREE HONORED WITH WOMEN OF FAITH AWARDS

By Mike Ferguson
General Assembly News

PORTLAND — Three Presbyterian women were honored for tireless and effective bridge-building Sunday during the Women of Faith Awards Breakfast at the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Recognized by the PC(USA)’s Racial Ethnic & Women’s Ministries unit for their proven track records in bringing about reconciliation in their communities were:

- Lucy Apatiki, a commissioned ruling elder at Gambell Presbyterian Church in Alaska, where she works as a sociologist and addiction counselor.
- Sarah Noble-Moag, a ruling elder working on immigration reform and the owner of Noblehurst Farms in Linwood, New York, where she helps milk 1,700 cows three times each day.
- Clarissa Walker Whaley, a ruling elder in Charleston, South Carolina, where she provides services for crime victims, including the nine families who lost loved ones in the shootings at Mother Emmanuel AME Church last year.

In her work, Apatiki uses prayer and Bible study to help bring healing to people trapped in addiction and other ills. “As a teen, God put it in my heart I was here to help people,” she said. “My vision is to see healthy communities all across the state of Alaska.”

Apatiki dedicated the award to her late husband, Morgan Apatiki Sr., who died on the day the news of her award was made public. Earlier, when an early-morning phone call brought the news to the household, she said, her husband “reached across the bed and patted me with pride and support.”

Noble-Moag’s seventh-generation dairy operation employs 40 people, half of them foreign-born. She has worked in her community to ensure safer working conditions and access to pre-K education to the children of immigrants.

She said she is inspired by memories of the women in her grandmother’s fellowship circle, who knitted, made blankets and collected coins for mission. “They put together amazing things with very few resources,” she said. “They paid it forward.”

Walker Whaley, a victim services professional with the United States Department of Justice, said she continues to work and pray with “probably 100 people who are still grieving” the loss of nine lives at Mother Emmanuel Church in Charleston.

“I don’t do it alone,” she said. “God sends me angels to work with me. On that evening (of the tragedy) God had already dispatched and resourced all the people who would walk” with the victims’ families and friends. “I ask you today to continue to keep them in your prayers and to undergird them in the faith that you have.”

Presbyterians are celebrating a number of milestones in the history of church women whose hearts, Stated Clerk Gradye Parsons said, “were bigger than the church.”

It has been 110 years now that Presbyterians have been ordaining women as deacons, 85 years since the church has welcomed women as ruling elders, and 60 years since Margaret Towner was ordained as a teaching elder.

“Happy anniversary!” said Rhashell Hunter, director of Racial Ethnic & Women’s Ministries and Presbyterian Women. Parsons took time during a prayer before breakfast to thank God “for women who stood up when they were told to sit down, and spoke up when they were told to be quiet.”

Parsons, who is retiring at the end of the assembly, was recognized during the breakfast as a Gold Level Life Honorary Member of Presbyterian Women.

MONDAY, JUNE 20th, 9:30 AM

The Rev. Dr. Steve Ranney, outgoing chair of Presbyteries’ Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates. He’ll discuss “The Five Exams that Changed My Life.”

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VISIT THE OFFICE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY EXHIBIT TODAY!
After the service, members and guests shared a lavish lunch in the church’s fellowship room. Before climbing back onto the bus, each visitor was given a copy of Covenant’s cookbook, full of recipes tested in members’ kitchens and enjoyed at church pot-luck meals over the years.

Further north, at the Korean Presbyterian Church in Vancouver, Washington, assembly visitors piling off the bus from Portland were met by members of the church’s youth group, who gave Father’s Day cookies to the males in keeping with the congregation’s tradition of hospitality.

The first seven rows on one side of the simple but beautiful sanctuary were marked off for assembly-goers, who were given copies of the Korean-language worship bulletin and copies in English of the morning’s sermon. The service was conducted in Korean and simultaneously translated into English on a large projection screen.

Pastor Sun Mook Jhee was joined in the chancel by Sun Bai Kim, the Presbyterian Mission Agency’s associate for emerging Korean ministries, who will be retiring at the end of August after 28 years in the position. His sermon, based on Romans 1:14-17, focused on keeping, proclaiming and living the Christian faith in spite of the temptations and challenges of modern culture.

“Do not be shy or ashamed about your faith,” he said. “The gospel of Jesus Christ is the most precious and most powerful thing in this world.”
PORTLAND – Mid-council leaders in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) were challenged Sunday to be ready for a new wave of Christianity – a “global Christianity” – because it’s coming, whether the church is ready for it or not, whether it wants it or not.

“We’re living through one of the most dramatic times of change in the whole of Christianity; it’s at least equivalent to the impact of the Reformation of the 16th century,” Philip Jenkins, a professor of history at Baylor University, said during the Presbyterian Foundation breakfast at the denomination’s 222nd General Assembly (2016).

Jenkins, who was introduced by Tom Taylor, the Foundation’s president, dove into the heart of his message – ready or not, the age of global Christianity is here.

Jenkins, author of “The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity” and more than 20 other books on Christian history, said European and North American Christians soon will be outnumbered by dramatic growth in the faith in the Global South.

Citing statistics on Africa alone, Jenkins said there were 10 million Christians on the African continent in 1900 – and a century later there were 360 million. Today there are approximately 500 million. By 2050, there could be 1.1 billion, which Jenkins said does not account for Christian Africans living outside Africa.

Getting accurate statistics on the number of Christians in many communities is difficult, Jenkins said, sometimes because they are too busy baptizing new believers to count them all.

In other places, he said, burgeoning numbers could pose a threat to dominant cultural and religious populations, making Christians targets of persecution.

Jenkins said demographic changes are a large factor in the growth equation, noting that in 1900 there were three Europeans for every African; by 2050, he said, there will be three Africans for every European.

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“The most important thing that happened in Africa in the 20th century was that half of the population converted from heathenism, paganism and tribal religious practices to monotheistic religions,” he said, adding that 80 percent converted to Christianity and 20 percent to Islam.

Jenkins said these demographic changes are part of a worldwide trend that was foretold long ago, paraphrasing a statement made in 1640 by St. Vincent de Paul: “Jesus said his church would live until the end of time, but he never mentioned Europe. The church of the future will be the church of South America, Africa, China and Japan.”

“All denominations are being revolutionized by this change now,” he said, noting that Korea has approximately 20 million Christians; including nine to 10 million Presbyterians who are “fervent adherents of the faith.” He said such rapid growth brings inherent challenges: “All denominations have to deal with the influx of people with different ideas.”

Some of these ideas include a focus on exorcism and spiritual warfare among churches of the Global South, Jenkins said. He told a story about the president of the Evangelical Church of West Africa – considered a sober, mainline denomination – who advised his church to be sensitive to American visitors: “There will be no exorcisms while our guests are here; they frighten white people.”

Jenkins said such practices must be seen in the context of cultural understanding. “If your worldview is that you are constantly surrounded by evil, you want Christianity to be a religion that is conquering those forces of evil, with Jesus coming as a victor to drag his slain enemies behind him,” he said.

Jenkins noted that evangelical Protestant churches are evangelizing strongholds of Christianity that had faith communities in the earliest eras of Church history – including Egypt, India and Ethiopia. He said this has come about as literacy has risen and common-language Bible translations have become available.

“In Ethiopia – in the last 50 years – there has been a revolution,” he said. “Ethiopia was Christian before the Roman Empire. Traditional Ethiopian Orthodoxy conducted long services in the old language. But about 100 years ago a reformation started, by putting scriptures in the modern languages.”

He said these changes create commonalities between people of the Protestant Reformation and modern Global Christians, resulting in what he called “a fundamental change in consciousness” among believers in the Global South.

Signs of this change, he said, include:

• Believers are now considering themselves “people of the Book,” rather than part of a historic tradition. When converted from “heathenism, paganism or tribal religions” people often have only one book – the Bible.

• A shift in power dynamics, now that women and non-elites are able to read and interpret scripture and exert spiritual authority in traditionally patriarchal cultures.

• In Uganda, the same word is used for “reader” and “Christian.”

• In Central and South America, spiritual authority is shifting from a Catholic, urban, male, older population to Christians who are Protestant, rural, female, and dark-skinned.

“When you can read and look at the symbols and make sense of them, what does that do for your confidence?” he asked. “They are not old men, but young women – what does that do to the change in power and spiritual authority?” It’s a shift of power in age, gender and race, and one for which Jenkins said he believes western Christians should be prepared.

He noted that the Christian message is spreading through popular media such as pamphlets, comics, graphic novels and videos, rather than theological texts, which presents a challenge to western, largely academic theological training.

Shifting his focus to migrant communities in the West, Jenkins said: “[Global Christians] have a hard time understanding a secular society, like Europe or America, where religion is not central to life.” He said these “thriving migrant religious communities may lead to a re-Christianization of Europe.”

After a question-and-answer session, Foundation President Tom Taylor thanked Jenkins and summarized his talk: “Christ’s church was here before you got here, and it’ll be here long after you are gone.”

The Presbyterian Foundation, one of six agencies of the PC(USA), cultivates, attracts and manages financial resources of individuals and institutions in service of Christ’s mission.
PC(USA) DIRECTOR, PRESBYTERY LEADER ARE NOMINATED FOR STATED CLERK

By Mike Ferguson
General Assembly News

PORTLAND – A denominational official from Washington, D.C., and a presbytery leader from Tampa, Florida, were nominated Sunday to be the next stated clerk of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

J. Herbert Nelson, the director of the church’s Office of Public Witness in Washington, D.C., was the first to be nominated. He was the unanimous choice of the 10-member Stated Clerk Nomination Committee, named to find a successor for Gradye Parsons, who will retire Saturday at the end of the 222nd General Assembly (2016) after serving two four-year terms as the denomination’s top ecclesiastical officer.

Minutes later, David Baker, stated clerk and communications director for the Presbytery of Tampa Bay, was nominated by Dan Johnson, a ruling elder in the presbytery.

The 594 General Assembly commissioners will have a chance to meet informally with Nelson and Baker Wednesday morning. Before voting on Friday, they will hear from both candidates and have an opportunity to question them.

On Sunday the Nomination Committee described the process by which Nelson emerged from the 12 other candidates, including five meetings and five conference calls, a churchwide survey on the qualities Presbyterians want in their next stated clerk, and an interview process that cut the field to six candidates, and then to the final three.

“From the very beginning, we were a community, open and honest with one another,” said Carol McDonald, the committee’s moderator.

She said the committee commends Nelson to commissioners

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COMMUNITY AS CLASSROOM

Almost all Princeton Theological Seminary students live on campus. In our vibrant residential community, they worship together, enjoy meals together, and minister to each other and the community. This experience helps prepare students for Christian leadership in theologically and culturally diverse environments.

“How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!”
(Psalm 133:1)
FIRST-DAUGHTER TEASE CREATES BUZZ, DRAWS ATTENTION TO YOUNG ADULT VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

By Eva Stimson
General Assembly News

PORTLAND – Richard Williams, coordinator of the Young Adult Volunteer program of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), had participants in the denomination’s 222nd General Assembly (2016) on the edge of their seats Sunday. Presidential daughter Malia Obama, 17, is taking a year off between high school and college, he said, reminding the commissioners that the YAV program is designed for young adults wanting to take a “gap year” for service.

YAV leaders have “reached out” to her, he teased.

As a bit of a buzz started rising in the convention hall, Richards acknowledged that he hadn’t actually heard from Malia, whereupon the buzzing changed to chuckling. Richards wasn’t teasing moments later when he went on to note that the program has grown to involve more than 1,600 young adults, about one-third of whom have gone into ordained ministry, while many of the rest are serving with non-profits and ministering in other ways.

“It really is a program that leaves its mark on participants,” he said.

Richards and YAV staff associate Lydia Kim encouraged congregations to support the program by encouraging more people to serve, praying for volunteers, and providing financial support for one or more volunteers.

The Sunday afternoon plenary session also included a report from the Task Force for Korean-Speaking Congregations. Luke Choi, the task force moderator, said the group was formed two years ago to address the needs of Presbyterians who speak Korean.

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PASSPORT to Innovation

Tuesday, June 21, 7:00-8:30pm
Register online: pcusa.org/ga222

Mingle and enjoy dessert during the first half hour, after which three exciting initiatives of the Center for Innovation in Ministry will be announced (see descriptions at right). Then, take a seat as our three contemporaries of innovation respond to the question “Where do you see the growing edge of innovation?” in a panel discussion moderated by SFTS Professor of Systematic Theology, Dr. Greg Love.

“Look well to the growing edge! All around us worlds are dying and new worlds are being born; all around us life is dying and life is being born.”
—Howard Thurman

Rev. Dr. J. Alfred Smith, Sr.
J. Alfred Smith Fellow at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute of Stanford University and San Francisco Theological Seminary
This fellowship will ensure the legacy of Dr. Smith as a social activist and prophetic presence. Scholar activists will study the life of MLK as a religious leader. Pastors and faith leaders will craft peace and justice programs.

Rev. Dr. Jane Adams Spahr
Rev. Dr. Jane Spahr Project for Reconciliation and Transformation
This program will provide opportunities for Presbyterian congregations to experience the gift of full inclusion through education, worship and activism. Change happens when people come together to share their stories and their faith.

Rev. Dr. Eric Elnes
Convergence Interactive Lectionary
This will become the fourth major lectionary, with a three-year cycle in six-week segments. Our scholars will interact with the lectionary online. Video content and worship research will be available to view and download.
OUR GIFT PROJECT

Did you know that $10 donated to the Oregon Food Bank provides meals for 30 people? The Committee on Local Arrangements chose the organization as our gift project for the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A).

Why the Oregon Food Bank? Because its mission stretches throughout the Presbytery of the Cascades. Because it is able to buy food more cheaply and therefore to serve more people. Because it is committed to providing immediate relief and eliminating root causes of hunger.

To contribute, bring cash or a credit card to the booth in the convention center or use this link: http://engage.oregonfoodbank.org/goto/GA222.

Help feed the hungry in all parts of Oregon and in Clack County, Washington – by helping the GA222 COLA Gift Project Team reach its goal of $10,000.

Many Thanks!

FIRST-DAUGHTER TEASE CREATES BUZZ, DRAWS ATTENTION TO YOUNG ADULT VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

Continued from page 8

ago “out of concern that too many Korean-speaking congregations were marginalized” within the denomination.

“What we discovered,” he said, “is that there is indeed some disconnect between Korean-speaking congregations and the larger church” – some caused by theological differences, but much of it due to “needless miscommunications and misunderstandings.”

In spite of the misunderstandings, Choi said, these congregations are happy to be part of the denomination and “really do wear their PC(USA) identity very proudly.”

Choi encouraged listeners to pray for Korean-speaking Presbyterians and to find ways to empower them, adding, “We really are less without their contributions.”

The task force’s report will be considered by the General Assembly Committee on Mid Councils.

The session also included a report on the 2017-18 Mission Work Plan of the Presbyterian Mission Agency. PMA Interim Executive Director Tony De La Rosa described it as a “two-year bridge plan” that sets mission priorities and tries to address the areas of greatest need.

De La Rosa said the theological foundation of the new plan is based on the Six Great Ends of the Church, but the denomination has changed, and the PMA “cannot be all things for all people.” With limited funds, he said, “our role is both focused and limited.”

The plan has three “directional goals”: evangelism and discipleship; servant leader formation; and justice and reconciliation. All agency programs are required to align with all three goals.

“We’re doing what we can uniquely do with efficiency and effectiveness,” De La Rosa said, noting that the proposed PMA budget has declined by 15 percent, and “for the first time in recent memory, no unrestricted reserve funds are being used to balance the budget.”

PMA’s 2017-18 Mission Work Plan will be considered by the General Assembly Committee on Mission Coordination and Budgets.

Spirit of GA videos on Vimeo

The special Spirit of GA video series being shown in plenary at the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) also is available online. The five videos, airing June 18, 19, 22, 23, and 24, can be viewed at vimeo.com/pcusaga. The videos take up the themes of leadership, eco-justice, discernment, social justice and identity.

They are being produced by Randy Hobson and Brelin Tilford through the General Assembly Communications Center.

JUSTICE TAKES CENTER STAGE IN PORTLAND

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Presbyterian Hunger Program
Presbyterian Disaster Assistance
Presbyterian Self-Development of People
Office of Public Witness
Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations
Presbyterian Peacemaking Program
Presbyterian Health, Education and Welfare Association (PHEWA)
Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI)
COLLEGE MINISTERS FIND STILLNESS, PEACE IN PORTLAND-AREA PRE-ASSEMBLY RETREAT

By Mike Ferguson
General Assembly News Service

PORTLAND – Two dozen people, most of them involved in college ministries, devoted 40 hours before the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to restoring their souls for the hard work of ministry at the UKirk Collegiate Summit.

The gathering, which ran from Thursday to Saturday, was free to men and women involved in collegiate ministry.

Jason Santos, the PC(USA)’s coordinator for spiritual formation, said the summit, held on the tranquil grounds of Menucha Retreat and Conference Center about 30 minutes east of Portland, produced “a sense of stillness, solitude and peace.”

The summit included time for fireside conversations, long walks, deep prayer and Taize-style worship, Santos said.

The center, located along the scenic Columbia River Gorge in Corbett, is an ecumenical, community-based mission of First Presbyterian Church in Portland.

“I thought it was remarkable,” said Dave Behrs, vice president for enrollment management at San Francisco Theological Seminary, who attended part of the summit.

“To spend 24 hours praying with these guys was awesome,” he said. “It’s probably the most important thing I could have done. The focus was on attention – on the Lord, on others and on ourselves.”

Early on, participants paired up for walks during which they shared faith stories, then continued walking in reflective silence for 30 minutes.

The time around the fire was so successful that the participants didn’t want it to end, Santos said.

“They lingered for about two hours,” he said. “Some got so comfortable they actually fell asleep.”

Campus ministry can be intense, he said, right up until the academic year concludes, in May or early June. Many campus ministers then get a few weeks off before returning to their duties in late August – except for those who agree to lead students on summertime trips.

“We saw our 40 hours together as people taking a deep breath of life, spirit and clean air,” Santos said. “I’m sure we’ll do it again” before the start of the 223rd General Assembly in St. Louis, scheduled for June 16-23, 2018.
PORTLAND – Feelings of celebration, gratitude and hope dominated the Board of Pensions dinner Sunday at the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Cynthia Jarvis opened the dinner with a prayer beginning, “Lord, we thank you for the Board of Pensions, for the way our lives are upheld and directed and secured even as they are upheld by your providential hand each day.”

Board Chair John Hamm recalled the agency’s long history of providing health care, disability insurance and clergy assistance, citing its founding mandate from 1717: “A fund for pious uses to care for widows and children of deceased Presbyterian clergy.”

“We currently have over $8 billion in our pension fund,” Hamm said, praising predecessor trustees for their contributions to the legacy and mission of the almost 300-year-old board.

Hamm said the 29-member board of directors, comprised of one-third clergy and two-thirds lay volunteers elected at the last four General Assemblies, “bring to the table the technical skills and talents we need to implement best practices.”

Frank Clark Spencer, the board president, noted highlights of the 2017 benefits plan and its three goals: Serve more, serve better and serve the church. “All three must be in alignment,” he said.

“Serve more,” he said, “is a question of stewardship, plain and simple.” He noted that the number of people participating in Board of Pensions benefits has declined each year since reunification in 1987, and that fewer than 10 percent of non-clergy employees are now covered.

“The more we serve, the better buying power we have, the greater the array of benefits we can provide,” he said. “The Board of Pensions will indeed grow the number of people we serve with these new offerings.”

In serving better, he said the goal is “to serve as Christ would have us serve,” noting that “economics cannot define our values.”

Referring to the board’s recent work to develop a theology of benefits centered on wholeness, Spencer said: “God’s desire for God’s people is to experience shalom – wellness and health. It’s the ‘life abundant’ promised by Jesus.”

“We are called to justice in how we provide benefits,” he added. “In reality, we have a plan for the few, and nothing for the many.” In 2017 and beyond, he said, the benefits plan must be flexible enough to meet the budgets and needs of many more people, while upholding the communal nature of the church, encouraging healthy living, and providing compassion and dignity for recipients in need of supplemental income. “Not every one will have identical benefits, but all should have what is just,” he said.

“We provide this plan because we are the church of Jesus Christ,” Spencer said, promising that the board will try to “extend these benefits to tens of thousands of members.”

The Board of Pensions, he said, wants to follow the example of Jesus Christ, “who talks of the Samaritan provided care with no expectation of repayment. It’s Jesus Christ who [guarantees] income, no matter when the worker went to the vineyard.”

Calling interagency and ecumenical partnerships “the hallmark of our church life,” Spencer said “reports of our imminent demise have been grossly exaggerated … We must hold on to what has worked well and support traditional forms of church, even as we adopt a posture of flexibility for those on the wane or in ascendance.”

Spencer said the board will remain faithful, flexible, transparent and hopeful, and will uphold “the promises that we, the PC(USA), have made to those who serve God and neighbor in full-time ministry.”

“We undertake this work with faith that our sisters and brothers on sessions throughout the country are disciples of the risen Lord,” he said. “Our operative assumption is that they want to do the best they can for their employees. The board will continue to believe in the transforming work of the Holy Spirit and expect that transformation in our work every day.”

Encouraging commissioners and delegates in their work at the assembly, Spencer concluded: “As you go into the work of the General Assembly, turn your back on decline, proclaim the transforming gospel of Jesus Christ in which all things are new, and live in the hope of that transforming Word, never waiting to be disappointed.”
SANCTUARY, CHURCH PROPERTY Disputes AMONG TOPICS OF RESOLUTIONS REFERRED TO COMMITTEES
Continued from page 1

Korean Peninsula. It was submitted by John Langfitt of the Presbytery of San Fernando and David Hutchinson of the Presbytery of the Cascades, and also was assigned to Peacemaking and International Issues.

- A resolution encouraging all PC(USA) congregations and councils to make prayer for the persecuted church around the world a regular part of their common life. It was submitted by Gale Watkins of the Presbytery of Grand Canyon and Sandra Gandolfi of the Presbytery of Kiskiminetas, and referred to the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee.

- Three of four recommendations made in a resolution seeking clarification and support for settlements of church property disputes. The resolution was submitted by David Green of the Presbytery of New Covenant and Robert Field of the Presbytery of Palo Duro. The Bills and Overtures Committee rejected a recommendation to “seek and work through developing conflict between state law and requirements of the Book of Order” because it would require an interpretation of the constitution. The resolution was referred to the Assembly Committee on Church Polity and Ordered Ministry.

- A resolution that would direct the Presbyterian Mission Agency to help the church make use of “The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity,” the first four chapters of the Book of Order. It was submitted by Gale Watkins of the Presbytery of Grand Canyon and Michele (Mickey) Stueck of the Presbytery of Santa Barbara, and assigned to the Assembly Committee on Theological Issues and Institutions.

- A resolution calling for the denomination to withdraw from the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice. It was submitted by Justin L. Marple of the Presbytery of Western New York and Karen Mizrahi of the Presbytery of the Pacific, and assigned to the Assembly Committee on Mission Coordination.

- A resolution calling for the PC (USA) to end support for and affiliation with the U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation organization because of its opposition to peacemaking tactics that could create a lasting peace for all people in the Israel-Palestine conflict. It was submitted by Michael Gizzi of the Presbytery of Great Rivers and Bryan Franzen of the Presbytery of San Jose, and assigned to the Assembly Committee on Middle East Issues.

- A resolution calling for the creation of a special committee to conduct an administrative review to assure compliance with donor and General Assembly restrictions on the administration of the Jarvie Service. It was submitted by Jill Schaeffer of the Presbytery of New York City and Jonathan M. Brown of the Presbytery of Palisades, and referred to the Assembly Committee on the Board of Pensions, Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program and the Presbyterian Foundation.

On the recommendation of the Stated Clerk, two resolutions were not referred to committee.

A resolution directing the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board to release to the public the final report of an independent investigation into the incorporation and funding of a California 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation was not referred because it is related to a pending civil proceeding. And a resolution to approve the use of Two States for Two Peoples as an informational resource was not referred because it deals with matters already before the assembly.

PC(USA) DIRECTOR, PRESBYTERY LEADER ARE NOMINATED FOR STATED CLERK
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‘as one who models the characteristics most desired in the churchwide survey.’

Spend 10 minutes with him, she said, and you will experience his commitment to Jesus Christ, his passion for communication, his “yearning to build bridges, and his dedication to being a team player.”

She noted that Nelson is a third-generation teaching elder who was nurtured as a child by a father who worked in the civil rights movement. “J. Herbert is a leader for such a time as this,” McDonald said.

In nominating Baker, also a teaching elder, Johnson said he will “provide a new type of leadership for this different age.”

“Our denomination is in crisis,” Johnson said, commenting that the national staff of the PC(USA) “is doing good work, but a new model is needed.”

Johnson said Baker started two companies while working other jobs. “He gives new meaning to multi-tasking,” he said. “I know David to be a man of dedicated faith. He seeks this office not out of sense of prestige, but because he believes the Lord wants him to do so.”

“You have two superbly-qualified candidates to consider,” he concluded. “I ask you to support David’s candidacy.”

The assembly’s co-moderator, Denise Anderson, ended the meeting by dismissing the nominating committee “with our thanks.”
ATMOSPHERE AT CO-MODERATORS’ RECEPTION REFLECTS JOY, NEW HOPE FOR THE CHURCH’S FUTURE

By Erin Cox-Holmes
General Assembly News

PORTLAND – The view of the Portland skyline was sublime, but they weren’t there for the view.

The circulating hors d’oeuvres were tasty, but they weren’t there for the snacks.

They were there – hundreds of people waiting in a monster reception line at the Portland Convention Center – to greet the new Co-Moderators of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

In a historic first, the 222nd General Assembly (2016) overwhelmingly elected Jan Edmiston, a presbytery executive from Chicago, and Denise Anderson of National Capital Presbytery as co-moderators Saturday evening.

Sunday’s reception was a chance for church members to wish them well.

“This is the first time, ever, that I’ve been truly excited about the church,” said Robert Lyons, a Young Adult Advisory Delegate from Prospect Hill Presbytery, who waited along with other YAADs equally eager to express their enthusiastic support for the co-moderators.

“They both are so dynamic, energetic, dedicated,” Lyons said. “It’s a more youthful perspective.”

Gigi Goshorn, the YAAD from Lake Michigan Presbytery, was impressed by the evident friendship between the two women. “Their relationship looks like it will last through a long journey,” she said. “It’s clear that each of them could have done this by themselves, but they have chosen to do it together. They are able to be separate, but also in partnership.”

McCain Walker, the YAAD from South Alabama, was happy to have been a part of an historic election – of the very first co-moderators, both women. “They will be a powerful role model to younger women in the church,” he said.

The YAADs’ enthusiasm impressed Don Brown, a teaching elder commissioner from Lehigh Presbytery, who noted that YAADS had led the way for the General Assembly, casting their advisory votes three-to-one in favor of Anderson and Edmiston just before the commissioners voted.

“The YAADs need to understand the assembly followed their advice, which contributed to the high total for Denise and Jan,” Brown said.

Tim Dooner, a teaching elder commissioner also from Lehigh Presbytery, wanted to look past the election to the future. “They have both written in ways that are prophetic,” he said, “and now their fingers are on the pulse of local churches and their struggles.” He said he appreciated the graciousness of the election, including standing ovations for all of the candidates, in stark contrast to the acrimony of the national election season.

Members of presbytery and synod staffs also were eager to weigh in on the prospects for the co-moderators.

“Both women are signs of a new diversity,” said Susan Wonderland, transitional executive for the Synod of the Trinity. “It’s a sign of hope that the denomination is willing to elect people who will take on some of the toughest issues of our day.”

Mary Gaut, interim executive in Baltimore Presbytery, was glad to see the co-moderators’ vision for the future, and their energetic synergy. “I am impressed with their willingness to take on deeply rooted institutional ‘isms’ of every brand, and to bring diverse people to the same table.”

Dianna Wright, associate presbyter for Salem Presbytery, found the entire election process inspiring. “I think the church has made a turn,” she said. “This is about relationships, rather than fighting with each other. We finally have a chance to take charge of our own identity, rather than allowing voices that want to tear us apart have the upper hand.”

Cheryl Barnes, a teaching elder commissioner from Northeast Georgia, summed up the upbeat mood in the crowd. “In this election, the role of women in leadership was confirmed by the Holy Spirit and the vote of the people,” she said. “This dismissed the idea that women’s role is to be supportive.”

Barnes said she is glad that her 19-year-old daughter will have role models in the two women, one younger, one older, on white, one African-American, working together.

“I am extremely proud of this denomination,” she said. “Today I am proud to be a Presbyterian.”

Co-Moderators Denise Anderson and Jan Edmiston pose with a guest at the Moderators’ reception. Photo: Danny Bolin