

Synod of the Covenant Assembly Meeting and Retreat  
Weber Center, Adrian MI  
March 16-18, 2017

The synod assembly was convened at 1:00pm on Thursday, March 16 by the Moderator, Timothy Chon with an opening prayer and the lighting of the Christ candle.

The presented docket was challenged because of the inclusion of the proposed Bylaws and Manual of Administrative Operations revisions not having come from a committee, but rather from the Stated Clerk. The docket failed to be accepted as presented.

The Assembly voted to create an intentionally ethnically diverse taskforce chosen by the Moderator to provide proposed revisions to the Bylaws and Manual of Administrative Operations.

The Assembly chose to approve the clerical terminology replacing "Teaching Elder" with "Minister of the Word and Sacrament" due to changes made by the General Assembly. The youth protection and sexual misconduct policy for the Synod of the Covenant was also approved.

It was reported that there will be a workshop for any presbytery that will be hosting the Mobile Health Fair at the Synod Office on April 7 from 11am-1pm. The coordinator for the Mobile Health Fair will be Melanie Shoop.

Rev. Kathy Angi has been hired by the Synod to be the Welcome Refugee Network Coordinator.

Eileen Best reported that the Mission to the USA is looking for host churches.

The Treasurer's report was given indicating the financial health of the synod and was accepted by the assembly.

The Committee on Representation and Inclusiveness reported the nomination of Sung K. Yan and William Sorensen to serve on the Synod of the Covenant Permanent Judicial Committee.

A letter of complaint was presented to the Stated Clerk and the Moderator and was referred on to the Moderator's committee.

Following a break, the Assembly began the retreat portion of the program and viewed a TED film of Megan, formerly of Westboro Church. Megan had been raised by her family of 10 and led by Westboro Church leaders to picket military funerals and other events with hate spewing signs. As a young person, she began using social media to spread the Westboro doctrine. It was through social media that she began to realize there was a different world. She saw a pattern wherein an individual would attack her posted message vehemently. She would respond with bible verses and smiley faces. Then the individual would begin a conversation in an attempt to understand why she thought the way she did. Megan began to meet people up close and personal that she had always thought would go to hell. She found that they had a compelling voice that influenced her to turn away from the Westboro agenda of hate. The Westboro Church and Megan's family disowned her and she left the town in which she had been raised. Following her experiences, Megan has devised four points to have a meaningful shared conversation with those you do not necessarily agree with: 1. Don't assume bad intent. 2. Ask questions. 3. Stay calm. 4. Make the argument.

The Assembly also viewed a film about the Doctrine of Discovery. The film explained that documents written in the 15<sup>th</sup> century by the Pope and known as Papal Bulls gave Christian explorers the right to claim lands they "discovered" and lay claim to those lands for their Christian Monarchs. Any land that was not inhabited by Christians was available to be "discovered", claimed, and exploited. If the indigenous "pagan" inhabitants could be converted, they might be spared. If not, they could be enslaved or destroyed. The Doctrine of Discovery is a concept of public international law expounded by the United States Supreme Court in a series of decisions, initially in *Johnson v. M'Intosh* in 1823. The doctrine was Chief Justice John Marshall's explanation of the way in which colonial powers had laid claim to newly discovered lands during the Age of Discovery. Under this doctrine, title to newly discovered lands lay with the government whose subjects discovered new territory. The doctrine has been primarily used to support decisions invalidating or ignoring indigenous possession of land in favor of colonial or post-colonial governments. The supposedly inferior character of native cultures was a reason for the doctrine having been used. This doctrine governs United States Indian Law today and has been cited as recently as 2005. There is a movement by Native Americans and other indigenous people of the Americas that is attempting to have the papal bulls rescinded.

The remainder of the retreat was focused on discussion on the book *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life* by Karen Armstrong. The Assembly engaged in worship which included the Celebration of the Lord's Supper. The retreat closed with prayer.

Respectfully Submitted,

Rev. Deborah Uchtman, Clergy Commissioner for the Presbytery of Cincinnati