

PRESBYTERIAN MISSION AGENCY BOARD
September 23-25, 2015
Racial Ethnic & Women's Ministries Ministry Area
Presbyterian Women in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Inc.

ITEM C.200
FOR INFORMATION

ONE BODY, ONE SPIRIT: PRESBYTERIAN WOMEN'S 2015 CHURCHWIDE GATHERING

“What a beautiful sea of faces!” Shelda Wills, Gathering chair, exclaimed, during the opening plenary session of the 2015 Churchwide Gathering of Presbyterian Women. International guests from sixteen countries, ecumenical partners, Gathering leadership, and more than 1,700 Presbyterian women from all over the United States filled the Ballroom at the Hyatt Regency Minneapolis. Nearly 100 guests, planners and staff processed as the community lifted their voices to the Gathering theme song, “One Body, One Spirit,” which included lyrics penned by Susan McChesney Jensen.

Celebrating that God's people are diverse in countless ways but united as Christ's people in the world, the 2015 Churchwide Gathering's theme and subsequent programming were based on “One Body, One Spirit,” from 2 Corinthians 12:12—22. Plenary sessions lifted up the challenge of scripture—to create unity out of diversity, while celebrating the church's unique qualities—by focusing on oneness: “One Body, One Spirit”; “Oneness in the Community of Faith”; “Oneness in Creation”; “Oneness in the Community of Women”; and “Oneness in the Global Community.”

Participants experienced deep joy and deep sorrow. In response to the massacre of nine congregants of Emmanuel A.M.E. Church in Charleston that transpired the day before opening plenary, Linda Valentine, executive director of the Presbyterian Mission Agency, and Rhashell Hunter, director of Racial Ethnic & Women's Ministries, brought greetings, affirmed PW's central role in the life of the church, and asked for women to continue their work to break down barriers of privilege and racism. Gathering participants prayed, “May we who have been brought here from across the globe declare that we are called by you, O God, to be united together as One Body, One Spirit. And may the God who is above us, the Christ who is in front of us and the Holy Spirit who is within us show us the way.”

Just prior to the Gathering, PW held its triennial Business Meeting. The 234 voting representatives from the presbyteries and synods of the PC(USA) approved a new slate of moderators (Carol Winkler, moderator; Wanda Beauman, vice moderator for justice and peace; and Judy Persons, vice moderator for mission relationships) and several national board members (Churchwide Coordinating Team). They also amended the bylaws to reflect a reduction in the number of synods (voted by the 214th General Assembly); clarified membership requirements for PW leadership; approved the 2015—2018 budget; and removed the requirement that the Business Meeting be held in conjunction with a Churchwide Gathering. One of the highlights of the 2015 Business Meeting was the signing of a memoranda of understanding with three African women's groups—the Christian Women's Fellowships in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (Cameroon), the Women's Fellowship of the Conference of Ghanaian Presbyterian Churches in North America and the Kenyan Women's Groups in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Thirty-two mission partners from sixteen countries (Brazil, Canada Curaçao, Czech Republic, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Guyana, India, Indonesia, Jamaica, Kenya, Nigeria, South Korea, Suriname), five U.S. ecumenical partners (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Reformed Church of America, and two attendees from the 2013 PW USA Mission Experience), and two Presbyterian Church in Canada representatives were present at the Gathering. They enjoyed an orientation and mentoring program, and participated in all aspects of the Gathering, including worship.

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Mission and advocacy are major emphases of the Gathering because they are important to Presbyterian women. For example, 115 women came together to march for justice and peace, while raising more than \$1,200 in support of CARE and the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations. And just before Saturday evening's plenary, several participants stood in silent witness to raise awareness of discrimination.

Gathering participants contributed nearly \$40,000 in Target gift cards to support the American Indian Family Center in St. Paul and gave more than \$32,500 to two offering recipients: *Instituto Prevocacional e Industrial de Puerto Rico*, the only domestic violence shelter in Puerto Rico, and ECPAT-USA (Ending Child Slavery at the Source), to deal with issues of human trafficking. A silent auction raised \$6,100 for the PW Mission Pledge, the primary financial support of PW.

Just prior to the start of the Gathering, the Native American Presbyterian Women's Gathering met in Minneapolis to explore the theme "One Body, One Spirit, One Sisterhood." Keynote speaker and executive of the Synod of Lakes and Prairies Elona Street-Stewart invited attendees to reflect on the power of their relationships and to consider how their combined power could improve their communities. The African American Presbyterian Clergywomen's Retreat also met before the Gathering for a time of spiritual renewal, development and support; Veronica Goines, pastor of St. Andrews Presbyterian Church in Marin City, California, provided the keynote presentation.

For more information, visit www.presbyterianwomen.org/gathering, or see the September/October 2015 issue of *Horizons*.