

ITEM C.202
FOR INFORMATION

RACIAL ETHNIC & NEW IMMIGRANT SEMINARIANS CONFERENCE

Over a long weekend in October, 23 Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) seminarians from across the United States gathered together at the Children's Defense Fund Haley Farm in Clinton, TN, for the 37th annual Racial Ethnic & New Immigrant Seminarians Conference.

"We live and work in the third millennium where many generations have preceded our time," said the Rev. Hector Rodriguez, associate for Hispanic/Latino-a Congregational Support and presenter at the Seminarians Conference. "The writer of Ecclesiastes wrote, 'One generation passes away, and another generation comes.' In Christ's church, each succeeding generation must confront the challenges of the past, present and future. These challenges are part of the church's mission, which is active, prophetic and eschatological."

During their time together, the seminary students spent time in a spiritual environment engaging in vocational discernment, discussing issues they face as seminarians, learning about the connectional church and about preparation for ministry and the various paths to ordination. Attendees were also encouraged to deepen their relationships with one another, building a support system during seminary and in their vocations in ministry.

Worship has always been a highlight of the conference, and this year was no exception. Students prepared and led worship and were able to experience services in their native languages, customs and traditions through music and dance.

Over the years, the Racial Ethnic & New Immigrant Seminarians Conference has welcomed back conference alumni—many of whom now serve the church as pastors, educators, General Assembly staff, mid-council staff, etc. —as keynote speakers and workshop leaders.

Although this conference has been held for several years, many of the issues and concerns of racial ethnic seminarians remain the same. Studies show there are still very few racial ethnic and new immigrant students on campuses. In addition, there remains a lack of diversity among seminary faculty and staff, and more support for racial ethnic seminarians is needed.

The annual conference provides students from Presbyterian theological institutions and Presbyterian students from non-PC(USA) seminaries with an opportunity to build a support base, to learn how to meet the national and regional requirements of the preparation for ministry process, to share learnings and experiences about seminary life and to maintain an informed sensitivity to racial ethnic issues and concerns in the church. The event is sponsored by Racial Ethnic & Women's Ministries, which seeks to be proactive in providing leadership development opportunities and events to prepare racial ethnic and new immigrant individuals to serve fully in ministry for Christ's mission.

Jewel McRae, associate for Women's Leadership Development and Young Women's Ministries and one of the presenters for the event, said, "Our hope is that these students leave the conference informed and energized about their future in the church."