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The Presbyterian
OUTLOOK

OPEN THE DOORS AND LOOK OUT.

by Leslie Scanlon,
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The 2018
General
Assembly will
meet June 16-23
in St. Louis, where the
police shooting of unarmed
black teenager Michael Brown
in nearby Ferguson, Missouri,
in 2014 ignited a season of fierce
community activism on matters of racism,
poverty and systemic injustice.

The 538 commissioners and more than 180 advisory delegates will take on matters of concern inside the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), including a proposal to significantly raise General Assembly per capita and concerns about #MeToo in the church.

But J. Herbert Nelson, the PC(USA)'s stated clerk, is encouraging Presbyterians to also look out at the world — particularly at a faith-based response to structural inequity. The assembly's theme is "Renewing the Vision: Kindom Building for the 21st Century," from Matthew 6:25-33 — and the business will range from addressing climate change to hopes for peace in Korea.

Here's some of what this assembly will take on.

The Way Forward. A committee with this name will begin meeting a day early (on June 15) to consider recommendations from the Way Forward Commission and All Agency Review Committee, and an interim report from the 2020 Vision Team. This committee will discuss recommendations ranging from improving translation services to the role of the stated clerk. It also will try to sort through a complex disagreement involving a proposed restructuring of the PC(USA), A Corporation — a matter in which the Way Forward Commission and All Agency Review disagree with the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board in a dispute that involves power, differing visions and control of more than \$560 million of A Corporation net assets.

Per capita. The Committee on the Office of the General Assembly and the Presbyterian Mission Agency Board are proposing a substantial increase in per capita: from \$7.73 per member in 2018, to \$10.71 in 2019, and to \$11.45 in 2020. Nelson contends the increase is needed for the PC(USA) to do the work God is calling it to do; some mid council leaders have raised concerns about the impact on congregations and presbyteries. An overture from the Presbytery of Newton calls for initiating a review of the per capita funding system.

Climate change. As happened in 2016, the assembly is being asked to consider competing proposals for responding to global warming — including an overture from Hudson River Presbytery (with 39 concurrences) that the PC(USA) divest from fossil fuel companies. Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI) is recommending a continued process of corporate engagement, using a new set of metrics for measuring progress. Other overtures focus on support for alternative energy sources and reducing Presbyterians' carbon footprints.

Leadership. Two teams are standing to serve as co-moderators of the 2018 assembly: Bertram Johnson from the Presbytery of New York City and Eliana Maxim from the Presbytery of Seattle, both ministers; and Vilmarie Cintrón-Olivieri, a ruling elder from the Presbytery of Tropical Florida, with Cindy Kohlmann, a minister from the Presbytery of Boston. A third choice: Chantal Atnip, a ruling elder from the Presbytery of Carlisle, standing for moderator with vice moderator candidate Ken Hockenberry, a minister from the Presbytery of Chicago. The assembly also will be asked to confirm the election of Diane Givens Moffett as the new president and executive director of the Presbyterian Mission Agency.

Racial and economic injustice. This assembly will have a clear focus on racism and poverty — including times to learn about and even participate in community activism. The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy is presenting a set of recommendations called “A Gospel from St. Louis: Lessons from Congregations Seeking Racial and Economic Justice.” Also coming up: recommendations regarding racist nationalism, the language the PC(USA) uses to refer to people of color and disparities experienced by black women and girls.

Middle East. Presbyteries have sent overtures addressing the ongoing disputes in Israel-Palestine and the humanitarian crisis in Syria. Overtures call for truthful dialogue with Israel, affirming the human rights of all and an examination of a call for ecumenical solidarity for justice for Palestinians.

Public policy. Overtures address a breadth of contemporary issues — including immigration policy, the death penalty, gun violence, drug policy, nuclear disarmament, a call to affirm the dignity of people of all gender identities and concerns in South Sudan, Central America, Madagascar and Yemen.

Church matters. The assembly also will consider issues affecting the church — including parental and family leave policies, a call for confession regarding sexual misconduct in the church and a report from a special committee on Christian education. Also of interest: an overture seeking to amend the PC(USA) constitution to provide more flexibility for new worshipping communities and immigrant fellowships to designate as leaders ruling elders who have been individually commissioned.