

Black Caucus Cultivates Conversations on Racial Reconciliation

Encouraging diverse groups to exist together in Christ is the objective of a series of virtual dialogues hosted by the presbytery's Black Caucus.

At the first session on September 24, more than 40 participants came together to explore America's racial divide by sharing

stated, is acknowledging the "embers of this fire [that] have burned our nation for a long time."

To address racism, she continued, we must understand how systemic bias subtly influences the way one thinks about people of other races.

was killed by police in March.

Dr. Shirl Leverett, who attends Antioch Baptist Church in Henrico, agreed that it can be difficult for people to be compassionate when their lives or experiences are not the same.

To illustrate some of these differences, she shared lessons that African American parents teach their children: Keep your hands on the steering wheel if you get pulled over. Don't argue with the police officer. Make it home.

She also required her sons to get a receipt and a bag for every purchase, even when they were buying something as insignificant as a candy bar.

"We did this to protect them because African American youth are more likely to be accused of theft."

However, she said, "It is important for African Americans to also teach our children to forgive others as Christ did. And how to recognize love when they see it and reciprocate."

For Rev. Robert Johnson, pastor at New Hanover Church, serving as a missionary in Pakistan helped him empathize with the "tension and minimization" black and brown people face in the United States.



Peggy Fox



Dr. Shirl Leverett



Rev. Dr. Robert Johnson



Rev. Bronwen Boswell



There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:28

their experiences and learning from each other. Participants represented churches within our presbytery as well as ones in neighboring presbyteries and other denominations.

In the opening prayer, Rev. Darren Utley, associate pastor at Fairfield Church in Hanover, acknowledged that, through Jesus's death, God has already built a bridge of unity. Utley asked, "Fill us with your spirit [to] remake us into a new humanity, united in your one true holy name."

Peggy Fox, moderator of the Black Caucus and an elder at Woodville Church in Richmond, shared an overview of racism in America today and outlined steps we can take to come together.

The first step in eliminating racism, she

"[To some people,] a white teenager wearing a hooded sweatshirt is viewed as just a teenager," she explained, "while a black teenager in the same clothes is seen as a suspect, a thief, or a threat."

A particularly poignant moment in the evening came when Rev. Ulysses Payne, pastor at Westminster Church in Petersburg, shared a conversation he had earlier that day with students at the school where he works.

"They asked me, 'Do people care about us?' It hurt my heart. That's the tough conversation that [the Black] community is dealing with," Payne acknowledged.

The students' concern was prompted by news that a grand jury declined to charge officers in the death of Breonna Taylor, who

STATED MEETING: October 17, 2020**Presbytery Business,
Including Examinations of
Candidates for Ministry,
Continues in Online Format**

When I was a child, we sang a sweet song:

The more we get together,
together, together
The more we get together,
the happier we'll be
'Cause your friends are my friends
And my friends are your friends.
The more we get together,
The happier we'll be.

In our "zooming" from one meeting to another, getting together has taken on new meaning. Yet, Presbyterians are a resilient people and we did "get together" on October 17, 2020.

The 106th stated meeting of the Presbytery of the James was to have been at Orange Church where they are celebrating their 175th anniversary. They have invited us to come "in person" to a future meeting.

Ruling Elder Leigh Anne Ring (Salisbury), moderator, called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m. and led the presbytery in prayer. She also welcomed first-time ruling elder commissioners and guests.

Some of the highlights of the meeting included:

Rev. Karen Witt (Providence Gum Spring), moderator of the Committee on Ministry's subcommittee on Examinations, welcomed new ministers to the presbytery: Rev. Joseph Taber (Western North Carolina) to serve as pastor of Culpeper Church, Culpeper; Rev. Kate Fiedler (New Hope) to serve as associate pastor of Second Church, Richmond; Rev. Nancy Strapp (Mid-Kentucky) as honorably retired; Rev. Frances Taylor Gench (National Capital), in validated ministry at Union Presbyterian Seminary; and Rev. Roger Gench (National Capital) as honorably retired.

Morning worship was led by members of the Youth Council of the POJ: Jessica Davis, Dillion Ford, and Paige Ford (Brandermill); Hannah Reasor (Fairfield); Katie Fiddler, Barbara Nance, and Bailey Nance (Fredericksburg); Cledonia Brown, Anna Mauritsen, and Laura Mauritsen (Ginter Park); Adam Morgan (Westminster Richmond); and Susan Pilc (St. Paul's Episcopal). Special thanks to Colleen Earp, associate for youth ministry, whose gifts in helping develop youth leaders is a blessing.

The sermon was delivered by Rev. Roger Gench, honorably retired member of the POJ and resident theologian at Second Church, Richmond. The necrology of deceased ruling elders and a minister of the Word and Sacrament was read. The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was administered by Rev. Patrick Dennis (Tuckahoe) and celebrated by each participant in their home or alternate location.

The agenda was approved. Rev. Fred Holbrook, stated clerk, reminded commissioners to review the Synod of the Mid-Atlantic report from commissioner Rev. Walter Canter and to find the reports of the General Assembly commissioners on the POJ website.

The stated clerk announced a called meeting of the POJ on November 21, 2020 for the purpose of participating in a process led by the Dismantling Racism Ministry; receiving a report from the Committee on Nominations; examining a candidate for ministry and commissioning a commissioned pastor; and receiving as a first reading the report from the POJ Strategic Planning Team.

The business of the day was comprised of the following:

- Approved the consent agenda including the balancing of commissioners for 2021.
- Approved including in the 2021-2025 annual budgets the Southwood Project of Habitat for Humanity of Greater Charlottesville (\$43,000 annually). This model of replacing mobile homes with condominium units is a "first" in the nation and a remarkable way to provide accessible and affordable housing. See a 4-minute video about the Southwood Trailer Park Redevelopment at cvillehabitat.org/what-we-do/southwood.html.
- Received as a first reading the budget for 2021.
- Ratified two actions taken by the Trustees (e.g., the Inspire Gifts and the Patty Withrow Estate given to Camp Hanover) upon discovery that the POJ is the only entity that can approve major financial requests or distributions.
- During the Mission and Service Team report, received an invitation from Dismantling Racism, heard from mission co-workers Cindy Corell (Haiti) and Ruth Brown (Ghana), and was led in prayer by Rev. Lindsey Williams (The PC Fredericksburg).
- Received a report from the Committee on Preparation for Ministry, Ruling Elder Linda Coye (St. Andrews), moderator.
- Approved a number of nominees to POJ leadership from Teaching Elder Denise Hall, honorably retired member and moderator of the Committee on Nominations. Included was the election of Rev. Patrick Dennis to serve as POJ moderator for 2021 and Ruling Elder Dan Jordanger (Providence Gum Spring) to serve as POJ vice-moderator for 2021.
- Received the Leadership Connection Team report from Rev. George Whipple, honorably retired member.
- Received the Strategic Planning Team report from Rev. Patrick Dennis, vice-moderator.
- Viewed a video from Camp Hanover Executive Director Doug Walters including the "Great Camp Give" where the goal of \$30,000 has been eclipsed by a total of \$116,000 to date!!
- Granted honorably retired status to Rev. George Whipple effective September 30, 2020 (a tribute was presented by Ruling Elder Nancy Echols of Hawkins Memorial Church) and to Rev. James Goodloe IV effective December 31, 2020 (a ruling elder will speak on his behalf at the February meeting).
- Examined and approved for ordination candidates Nancy Coleman (Presbytery of East Tennessee; interim pastor, Providence Forge Church); Sam Shields (Flint River Presbytery, 2nd year chaplaincy resident at UVA Health System); and Nate Taylor (Presbytery of Southern New England; associate pastor for youth and families, Salisbury Church).

With the business of the meeting having been completed, Moderator Ring exclaimed, "We did it... again!" She expressed thanks to the planning team for the virtual

**UPCOMING
PRESBYTERY
MEETINGS**

November 21, 2020 Called meeting, online via Zoom
February 20, 2021 Second (Richmond)

CAMP HANOVER

Volunteers Build New Bridge and Boardwalk at Camp

Fourteen volunteers worked two days a week over a three-month period to build two new structures at Camp Hanover. The first, a 960-square foot boardwalk along the lake waterfront, complements the floating dock built last year. The second project is a 74-foot bridge to complete Pearson’s Trail, an accessible path connecting the lake and Wise Lodge. The bridge required six steel beams, each weighing 1,100 pounds.

The boardwalk and bridge complete the connection of Pearson’s Trail to Hadder Way, the access road to the lake built early this year. The two projects were led by Brown Pearson, moderator of the presbytery’s Disaster Relief Ministry and a member at Southminster Church.



Raises \$116,000 in One Day

To all who participated in Camp Hanover’s Great Camp Give on September 30, we say “thank you.”

Camp Hanover received gifts, pledges, and matching funds online and in the mail totaling over \$116,000, an amount well beyond our wildest hopes. Your outpouring of kindness and generosity in this moment, after a period where Camp Hanover has been unable to host campers or retreat guests since mid-March, is truly amazing!

The photos and memories you shared told a vivid story of how Camp Hanover is a place where all of us can come and experience God’s presence in our lives. How, through the years, we are all part of a community where each person is welcomed as a child of God. And how the camp experience and the bonds of God’s love stay strong in our hearts, even when we are apart.

Your investment in this ministry will reach and transform the lives of so many well beyond today and into tomorrow.

Witness our community’s love for Camp Hanover through the photos, videos, and stories shared during the Great Camp Give. Find them on Facebook at facebook.com/CampHanover.

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STATED MEETING

meeting. A word of thanks was also extended to Tuckahoe Church and Westminster Church Richmond for hosting two small groups of people whose safe proximity to one another made the meeting run more smoothly.

The moderator reminded commissioners of the called meeting of the POJ on November 21, 2020. She announced: “Depending on the conditions of the Commonwealth of Virginia, our February 20, 2021 meeting is to be hosted by Second Church

Richmond. The leadership will alert you well in advance of that meeting about whether we will meet in person or virtually.”

The 106th stated meeting was declared adjourned and Moderator Ring closed in prayer.

In Christ’s Service,

Fred A. Holbrook
Interim General Presbyter
and Stated Clerk

Brett-Reed Church Revitalizes Century-Old Community Gathering Place

A 90-year-old recreation building at Brett-Reed Memorial Church in West Point was brought back to life thanks to the commitment of the session and congregation.

Opened in January 1930, the building features a basketball court, one-lane duck pin bowling alley, and basement with locker rooms. Over the years, it has been the site of many church and community events, including volleyball games, roller skating, and social gatherings.

As the building aged, the session debated its future. Lack of accessibility, insulation, and temperature control systems limited its use. In 2019, the session decided to explore renovation to rehabilitate and modernize the structure.

“[The architect we hired] was surprised and excited to discover that the original gym was built to withstand the years of wear,” noted renovation committee member Mel Hughes. “It was rock-solid.”

By unanimous vote last fall, the congregation supported the session’s decision to renovate the 90-year-old gymnasium. Funding for the \$700,000 project came from the Brett-Reed Foundation which was established when the church received a beneficiary distribution from the estate of Pleasant L. Reed, who built the gym in 1929.

Renovations included installing heating and air-conditioning systems, updating electrical wiring, and adding a catering kitchen and bathrooms. These additions are handicapped-accessible so that all are welcomed. Refinished floors feature markings for shuffleboard, basketball, and volleyball.

The renovation was completed in spring 2020. Plans for a dedication in March were scrapped due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, the church held a special service inside the gym on October 11.

The first group to benefit from the renewed facility is a regional volleyball organization.



Members of the session and gym renovation committee stand in front of the renovated gymnasium. From left to right: Pat Carlton, Lois Woodring, Mel Hughes, Covenant Pastor Karen Stanley, Julie Thomas, Adele Smith, Bob Smith, and Allen Hunter.

“The church is filled with joy and anticipation waiting to see the ways the gym will come alive once more to serve both the church and the community,” said renovation committee member Adele Smith.

Brett-Reed Church got its start in 1906, originally meeting in a schoolhouse. Learn about the congregation and their ministry at brett-reedpc.org.



On October 11, Ron Hauser (left), project manager for the firm who completed the renovation, presented a cross made of wood and pressed tin salvaged from the building. Tory Dunn and Bob Smith, members of the gym renovation committee, accepted the gift on behalf of the congregation.



Elder Tory Dunn, member of the renovation committee, stands beside a beam that was signed by members and friends of the church. The contractors covered the beam with plexiglass so that the signatures are visible.

Haiti Ministry Funds Launch of Home Garden Program

The presbytery’s Haiti Ministry has given a grant of \$10,000 to FONDAMA, our mission partner in Haiti, to launch a home gardening program to combat hunger and poverty.

The funds were originally budgeted to support the ministry’s annual mission trip to Haiti. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the trip is on hold.

When members of the ministry realized that they would not be able to organize a visit to the country for the second consecutive year—2019’s trip was cancelled due to political unrest—they looked for another avenue to help.

The ministry worked with mission co-worker Cindy Corell and FONDAMA coordinator Fabienne Jean to identify a need in Haiti and arrange funding.

Announcing the grant at the presbytery meeting, Corell professed, “We have a plan that will bring God’s love directly to our friends in Haiti.”

With the grant, FONDAMA will purchase seeds and provide training, transportation, and tools for participants to grow food at home.



Photo by Cindy Corell

Herve Delisma (right), an agricultural technician, explains the yard garden process to residents of Bayonnais, Haiti, in 2014. These outreach meetings begin with a short Bible study and prayer before participants learn about growing food quickly and conveniently. Delisma was recently hired to lead FONDAMA’s new garden program.



Photo by Love a Child, Inc.

“These gardens, often in old automobile tires but sometimes on small plots of land,” Jean explains, “require little start-up funding and less water than traditional gardens.”

Raised garden beds can withstand flooding and wind, some of the biggest problems for Haitian farmers due to climate change. Raising the gardens also keeps the crops out of reach of the families’ goats.

Hunger affects many of the 11 million people in Haiti.

According to the United Nations Environment Programme, nearly 59 percent of the Haitian population was

living in poverty prior to the pandemic. Almost 24 percent live in extreme poverty. Restrictions on public gatherings to limit spread of COVID-19 cause further economic stress by affecting Haitians’ abilities to work and earn income.

Despite this, Corell notes, “There is hope in Haiti. Hope lies in the people who live there, and hope lies in you, the members of this presbytery.”

Rev. Mary Jane Winter, Haiti Ministry co-moderator, reiterated the value of hope, stating, “While our friends in Haiti are in great need, they believe in the hope of Jesus Christ. In this we also live and anticipate the day when we can again be together, sharing in God’s love that holds us, always.”

Support This Ministry by Purchasing Haitian-Made Art

In May, POJ’s Haiti Ministry accepted a donation of art made by Haitian craftspeople from a fair-trade organization that was dissolving. The ministry is selling this art and using the proceeds to benefit their work in Haiti. Prices range from \$5 for ornaments to \$30 for larger pieces. Sara Johnson, a member of the Haiti ministry who attends Salisbury Presbyterian Church, is heading up this new initiative. Email Johnson at sarafgrier@yahoo.com to coordinate an art sale at your church.



Since an earthquake devastated Haiti in 2010, the country has been in the hearts of those in the Presbytery of the James. In 2013, hope had a human face with the call of Cindy Corell to serve as a mission co-worker. To make this new appointment possible, the churches in the presbytery promised to provide her full support. Through our partnership with Cindy, individuals and churches have come to know and love the people of Haiti. Travel to Haiti and Cindy’s visits to churches here have deepened our understanding and strengthened our ties. Learn more at presbyteryofthejames.com/haiti.

First Richmond: Virtual Can Still Be Personal

For two years, teams at First Presbyterian Church (Richmond) discussed a more personalized approach to their annual stewardship campaign. At the beginning of 2020, with a new pastor, Amy Starr Redwine, installed and well-established in the church, they prepared to make it happen this fall.

When it became clear that visiting homes or meeting over coffee would not be feasible due to COVID-19, the committee sought the help of Deborah Rexrode, the presbytery's associate for Stewardship, and began to lay out a plan to conduct virtual small group gatherings through Zoom.

The new plan began with Psalm 31:23-24, "Love the Lord, all you his saints, the Lord preserves the faithful...Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the Lord." Psalm 31 encourages the faithful to trust in the Lord and not lose heart.

Stewardship chair David Gray explained, "This scripture lead the team to the theme "Loving and Giving" and to focus on connecting with the congregation when we have not been able to be together."

A large number of volunteers from the congregation serve as ambassadors for small virtual groups. Meeting sessions are available daily across a variety of times, so that each member can choose the opportunity most convenient to them.

In the groups, members are encouraged to connect, share, explore, and give. Ambassadors help participants talk about how they are finding strength and courage in the challenging days of 2020.

They also share how the ministries of First Presbyterian Church continue to thrive because the people have remained faithful in their prayers and their giving of themselves and their finances. Pastor Amy Starr Redwine echoes this message on Sundays in a segment on ministries of the church.

Instead of a pledge card, the program encourages members to enter into a covenant with the church.

"A covenant is such a beautiful, Biblical understanding of the relationship we have with God and with one another," noted Rexrode.



The covenant includes the following:

- A commitment to pray for the ministries of the church
- An option to request prayer
- A request to engage in ministry
- An invitation to make a financial covenant

While many may be struggling to give during these uncertain circumstances, all are encouraged to be in covenant together.

For those who were engaged in the program, the Stewardship team believes that hearts are strengthened and courage found in the relationships we have with one another.

See First Church's stewardship covenant at fpcrichmond.org/stewardship.

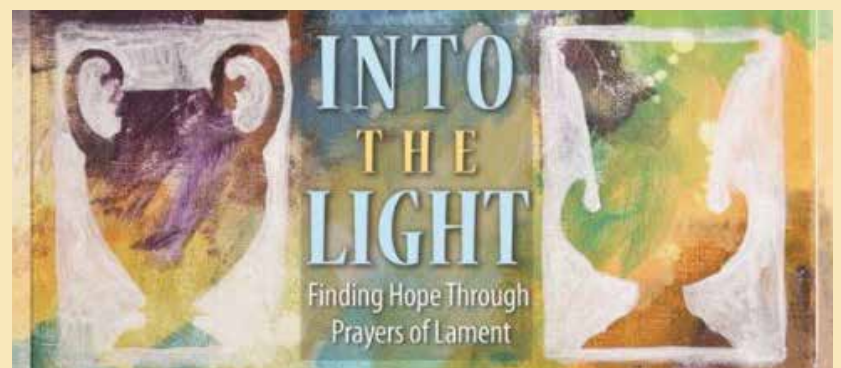
For assistance with your stewardship campaign, contact Deborah Rexrode, associate for stewardship, at (434) 996-6032 or deborah@presbyteryofthejames.org.

Presbyterian Women Invite You to Virtual Bible Study

The 2020-2021 Horizons Bible Study, *Into the Light: Finding Hope Through Prayers of Lament* by Rev. Dr. Lynn Miller, is especially apt in today's trying times. Presbyterian Women of the James is offering a virtual opportunity to gather and discuss the lessons of the study with leadership by Rev. Kelly Kaufman, parish associate at Olivet Church. Join live beginning November 10 or watch recorded sessions at your convenience. Register at presbyteryofthejames.com/pw.



Rev. Kelly Kaufman



Bible Study Schedule

November 10, 2 p.m.	Lesson 1
December 8, noon	Lesson 2
January 12, noon	Lesson 3
February 9, noon	Lessons 4 & 5
March 9, noon	Lesson 6
April 13, noon	Lesson 7
May 11, noon	Lesson 8
June 8, noon	Lesson 9

Swift Creek Church Hosts Students for Online School

As a new school year approached and area schools announced plans to operate in a virtual mode due to the pandemic, Swift Creek Church felt God's prompting to start a learning pod for their community.

J21 Hub, as it is called, was born out of Swift Creek's vision to worship and serve as a John 21 Church.

Every Tuesday and Thursday from 7:25 a.m. to 4:15 p.m., almost 70 public school and homeschool students do school together at the church. Current and former teachers shepherd each classroom, aiding students with their virtual education.

However, the learning is not confined to reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Speaking about the program, Pastor David Frost remarked, "We are thrilled God is giving us the opportunity to nurture and grow the whole person, not just the mind."

After their academic work is done, students socialize, exercise, create art, and study the Bible. They also have opportunities to learn life skills, ranging from setting the dinner table to changing tires and raising chickens.

Swift Creek's director of children's ministry, Wendy Hicks, developed the program after God placed it on her heart one night.

"Watching students play with their friends and share in each day's activities is a blessing," shared Hicks. "Having elementary and middle school students in our church two days each week has brought joy to the kids, as well as the teachers and church staff."

While 2020 has presented many challenges, Swift Creek feels God's anointing over this new ministry and praises the Lord for its thriving success.

Swift Creek Church, in western Chesterfield County, began in 1991 with two small Bible studies. Learn more about their ministry at swiftcreekpresbyterian.org.



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RECONCILIATION

"We were on the outside and were stared at. It changed our family in the way we looked at things," he shared.

The experience of being in the minority is one he feels could benefit more white Americans.

Becoming a Bridgebuilder for Racial Reconciliation

1. Acknowledge reality – racism exists
2. Recognize the spirit of evil behind racism
3. Understand concepts like systemic racism and Black Lives Matter
4. Move from sympathy to compassion
5. Have uncomfortable conversations
6. Get to know people of other races
7. Don't just see color, celebrate it
8. Be in it for the long haul – transformation takes time

To move forward as a bridgebuilder, Fox encouraged participants to shift from sympathy to compassion.

"Whenever Jesus had compassion for somebody in the Bible, it moved him to do something," she noted.

Taking action can be through having uncomfortable conversations about race and getting to know people of other backgrounds, both facilitated by the night's conversation.

Rev. Bronwen Boswell, general presbyter of Presbytery of the Shenandoah, plans "to be intentional" in developing relationships with folks who don't look like her.

As a Presbyterian leader, she concluded, "I'm [also] hearing a call to help others find opportunities to make those connections."

Develop your skills as a bridgebuilder for racial reconciliation by joining in the two remaining events in the series. On February 24, Rev. Ulysses Payne hosts Finding God in Moments of Crisis. The final event, What Would Jesus Say to Society Desiring to Heal Racism, will be held April 14. Learn more at presbyteryofthejames.com/reconciliation.



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Chester Church's Grace Café Marks Fifth Anniversary

When members of Chester Church learned that the magisterial district in which they were located had the highest concentration of poverty in Chesterfield County, they saw a new opportunity to be God's stewards.

"We recognized we had a lot of folks that loved the kitchen, liked to cook, and we knew of older adults that often were eating alone," shared Pastor Gordon Mapes, "Out of that we created Grace Café."

The café launched in October 2015, with church members and community members joining in fellowship and food on Tuesday evenings. Six teams of cooks rotating weeks

of service have prepared 29,000 meals. The café's patrons are about 70 percent non-church members.

In March, the café team pivoted to a drive-through delivery due to COVID-19. They have served an average 90 meals per week throughout the pandemic.

This project is dependent solely on donations, which fund the food and kitchen equipment.

"We look forward to continuing [our to-go meal] service," concluded Mapes, "but also to returning indoors where we might again enjoy [meals] in community."

**Declare his glory
among the nations,
his marvelous
works among all the
peoples.**

Psalm 96:3

What Good News Can Your Congregation Share?

Spread word of your church's ministry, milestones, and happenings throughout the presbytery. We welcome your story ideas or articles, photos, videos, and links. Send to editor Kelley Hope at khope@presbyteryofthejames.org.

Information may be published in the Vine (produced three times a year in March, July, and November), our weekly email newsletter FYI for church leadership, or on Facebook at facebook.com/presofthejames.



God's call to Chester Church is to deliver God's word, grow in faith, and serve all people. View a video about Grace Café at youtube.com/watch?v=cl1GCKASCOA.