

Report of the GRCC Delegates to the Central Atlantic Conference
Annual Meeting
Baltimore Maryland
November 17th and 18th 2017

Attendees were: Reverend Damien Lake (pastor), Sherry Brabham (lay delegate) and Jim O'Brien (commissioned minister and delegate).

The general purpose of the business of the annual meeting was to review and approve the budget for 2018 (\$1,333,785, with a projected @ \$5,000 surplus), elect the new Board of Directors for the Central Atlantic Conference, and discuss whatever other activities or matters of interest had transpired over the 18 months since the 2016 annual meeting. There are two New Jersey members of the CAC Board of Directors, elected to new terms: the Reverend Chuck Rush (Vice President), pastor of Christ Church, Summit; and the Reverend Debra Duke (member at large), the pastor of Community Church of Mountain Lakes. New Jersey was also represented by Mr. Frank Bolden, a member of Christ Church, Summit and the CAC, who is currently serving as the President of the Board of Directors of the United Church of Christ. In total, there were 155 delegates in attendance, as well as 16 visitors, for a total of 171.

In addition to the business portions of the meeting, there were several hearings, including a discussion of the changes to staffing and the reorganization of the Central Atlantic Conference administrative and ministry structure; a presentation on the budget; and a discussion of ministerial salary guidelines.

Other highlights over the day-and-a-half included:

- services of worship, including communion and moving and insightful sermons by a variety of Conference ministers;
- a commissioning service for the new CAC board, and thanks given to the departing board members, all of whom had supported each other through the difficult times following the loss of John Deckenback;
- multiple workshops around topics such as planned giving, mental health ministry, the ABCs of the UCC, repurposing your building for revitalized ministry, and responding to community challenges and innovative ministry; and
- an awards dinner to acknowledge all those responsible for the successful completion of General Synod 2017 which was coordinated and hosted by the Central Atlantic Conference.

Late Saturday evening there was a snack-fest with a baseball theme in honor of our departed conference minister John Deckenback.

Joining the conference was the General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ John Dorhauer. The Reverend Dr. Dorhauer provided a keynote address in three parts over the course of the two days: *New Horizons for the CAC; New Hopes for the*

UCC; and *Real Justice for All*. Dr. Dorhauer summed up the vision of the United Church of Christ: “United in spirit, inspired by grace, we strive to love one another, welcome everyone and work for a just world for all.”

In order to live this vision, Dr. Dorhauer reminded us that Jesus is not enough – that, in fact, Jesus told his disciples that he had to leave so that the Spirit would come to carry them forward in continuing the work that Jesus began. Therefore, we must rely on God’s continuing Revelation through the still speaking voice of the Holy Spirit and be a welcoming community to everyone no matter what!

Reverend Dohauer reminded us that Revelation insists that we meet the demands of our times and not be tied to our institutions of the past. This will prove challenging, but there is hunger in the world for the gospel message of God’s love and we must speak to the world where it is, not where it was or, worse, not where we imagine it to be.

Over the three installments of his keynote address, Dr. Dorhauer spoke movingly and with conviction. The CAC is expecting to be able to make the audio of the sessions available on their website.

During the hearing on staff reorganization, we were able to ask the interim conference minister, the Reverend Denise Bullitt, about the effect of the short notice of termination on the New Jersey office and its impact particularly on its staff member. Reverend Bullitt assured us that the New Jersey Association Council had also made their concerns known about this and that the CAC Board of Directors is reevaluating the severance package for the New Jersey staff. She told the hearing that the short notice was a result of inattention to the need to make the layoff notices known earlier, and that it was previously planned to be announced in September.

This year’s annual meeting was slightly off schedule and the next annual meeting will be held June 8-10, 2018. This will put us back on our regular schedule. The proposed agenda for the next meeting will be UCC bylaws review.

Respectfully submitted

Jim O'Brien and Sherry Bralham