Preaching and Public Life
By Ruling Elder Janet Rainey, Katy, New Hope PC—Postlude Reporter

Keynote speaker, the Rev. Dr. Carolyn Helsel (Assistant Professor of Homiletics at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary) began her presentation by asking us to guess what she was going to tell us that we already knew! That is, “God loves everyone, and everyone in the world needs to hear it.” She reminded us that telling people we encounter that they are loved by God is an act of preaching in the public realm, and that this work of the church is reflected in how we live in the world, the leaders we elect, the laws we pass, and how we speak truth to power.

Carolyn discussed how, over the centuries and recent decades, people have suffered because of terrible theology preached from the pulpit. We have only to think of the Crusades, the genocide of indigenous peoples, human chattel enslavement (“slaves must obey their masters”), and the pulpit messages that declare natural disasters and epidemics to be God’s punishment. We must share the good news of God’s love with those who doubt that God really loves everyone. Like Esther, we must have the courage to stand up to political power, ask for policy change, and use whatever influence we have to make a difference for others.

Carolyn reminded us that, as Christians, we have a moral responsibility to respond to the current political climate. We must choose not to be silent. God invites us into the public realm to speak on behalf of LGBT children and youth and on behalf of immigrants. God calls us to actively protest, be responsible for educating ourselves and finding opportunities to educate others, listen compassionately to fears and concerns, and assist. Now is not the time for silence. As followers of Jesus, we must pray for courage to be in dialog with each other even when the conversations are hard. We must pray that our work joins with the work of God already in our midst. Preaching prophetically is more about being able to declare that God has spoken and is speaking in our midst, in such a time as this. We must claim the personal nature of the political, and the political nature of the personal.

Dr. Helsel read a portion of the introduction to a book she is writing to help congregations confront and discuss race. “Healing White Anxiety: Helping White Christians Talk About Race” (from Chalice Press) is written out of her own anxieties, experiences, and sense of gratitude, and will be available in February 2018; it is suited for use in small groups or as a Lenten study. It is her hope that in reading it people will feel honored and cared for and will be encouraged to stay on the journey of education about the deeply problematic issue of race and the greater unity of humanity. “God loves us and the whole world.”

Clerk’s Report
Rev. Lynn Hargrove, Stated Clerk, gave her report, which included a motion to form an Administrative Commission to act to correct the difficulties at Formosan PC in Houston. The Commission will be given the full power of the session, assuming original jurisdiction of the existing session, which shall cease to act until such time as the presbytery shall otherwise direct. The motion passed.

The clerk’s report also included recognizing the congregation of First PC in Jasper for their 55 years of ministry. The congregation dissolved effective January 31, and the church property has been listed for sale. Rev. David Green, Moderator, led the assembled body in prayer for the congregation. Both the recognition and the presbytery meeting were closed in way that Jasper PC traditionally ended their services: by standing, joining hands, and singing “Amen.”
Moderator’s Theme for 2017

Rev. David Green, 2017 Moderator of the Presbytery of New Covenant and Pastor at First PC in Conroe, rolled out the theme for the year:

**THE WORK OF THE CHURCH**

-- PREACHING, TEACHING, PASTORAL CARE

Consistent with the theme, the keynote was presented by Rev. Carolyn Helsel, Assistant Professor of Homiletics at Austin Seminary, who spoke on “Preaching and Public Life.”

Also in line with the theme, David asked attendees to write down stories about something good happening in the life of their congregations. The stories were available to pick up after the meeting. A compilation of them may be found on the presbytery’s website.

Worship

Worship on Saturday morning was led by Revs. Steve Oglesbee, Katrina Pennington, and Rachel Young of Clear Lake PC, and the sermon was preached by Rev. Dr. Rose Niles, Houston Development Officer for Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

The Contemporary Worship Band provided music for the service and communion was officiated by Revs. Steve Oglesbee and Rachel Young. Rev. Rose Niles gave a sermon on the story of sowing and reaping within the story of the Samaritan woman found in John 4:19-42. We need to come to “the well” like the Samaritan woman did to look for hope. We need to stop turning inward but look outward and be ready. We are to be barrier breakers and be willing to go where God calls us to go, carrying with us the harvest of the Everlasting Lord.

A total of $2,260 was collected in offerings to support need-based scholarships at Austin Seminary.

Upcoming Events

Several upcoming events were presented at the meeting and included in the packet:

- **Being and Becoming a Multigenerational Church**: Friday, March 31 and Saturday, April 1 at the Presbytery Center.
- **Presbyterian Women Spring Gathering**: Saturday, April 29 from 9:30 a.m. to 2:15 p.m. at Webster PC. Information and registration forms are available at bit.ly/2017PWSpring.
- **Mental Health 101**: Thursday, June 8 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Presbytery Center. Information and registration details are available at bit.ly/2017MentalHealth101.
Welcome to New Covenant

**Rev. Barbara Johnson:** Barbara is Honorably Retired and has transferred from Shenandoah Presbytery. She received her M.Div. in 2004 from Columbia Seminary in Georgia and was ordained in 2005. She has moved to the Houston area to be near her grandchildren.

**Rev. John Purcell:** John is Honorably Retired and has transferred from Grace Presbytery. He received his M.Div. at Austin Seminary and was ordained in 1965. This is his third time to be a member of New Covenant. Welcome back!

**Rev. David Puig-Jordan:** David has accepted a call as Associate Pastor at Northwoods PC in Houston. He has a Doctorate of Theology from the University of Hamburg, Germany and was ordained in 2002 at the Baptist Church “William Carey” in Havana, Cuba.

Candidates Complete Examination Process

During the afternoon session, two candidates preached sermons as part of their examination for ministry.

Chad Lawson preached on Jesus as our Bread of Life (John 6:24-35). Chad reminded us that we miss the opportunity to be the body of Christ if we give from a distance. Jesus goes to prepare the way, and it is a life-long journey of salvation and service. Chad has a M.Div. from Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary and is being called to serve as the Designated Pastor at First PC in Crockett.

Omar Rouchon preached on Genesis 18 and how Abraham rushed to welcome the three strangers at his tent. Like Abraham, we are called to the habit of hospitality. We can welcome the Lord as we welcome our neighbors. Omar has a M.Div. from Harvard Divinity School and is being called to serve as a Designated Associate Pastor at St. Philip in Houston.

The assembly approved a motion to sustain both examinations in full. Congratulations, Chad and Omar!

Committee Reports

There were several committee reports that were very short or only given in the meeting packet and addendum. Some of the items highlighted at the meeting included the following:

**Transitional General Presbyter Search Committee:** Ruling Elder Shelley Hernandez reported that they are in serious conversation with a candidate and hope to wrap up soon.

**Finance Committee:** The 2017 budget of $1,090,593 total revenues less $922,359 in total expenses was approved by the commissioners. Of note: the proposed income for 2017 from church and individual benevolences is approximately 15% less than 2016’s actual. First PC in Houston made a $175,000 income payment in 2016 and will make a $350,000 payment in 2017. These will not be recurring. Without those payments, we would have finished 2016 in the red and would have an approximately $182,000 deficit for 2017.

**Committee on Preparation for Ministry:** The commissioners elected the following individuals to serve as Ordination Exam Readers for 2017-2018:

- Teaching Elder Principles: Kevin Boyd, Laureen Suba, and Kirsty Vits (Mary Currie - Alternate)
- Ruling Elder Principles: Julie Wells of St. Philip PC in Houston, Jim Allison of Pines PC in Houston, and Greg Feigh of Pathways Church of Houston (Kate Burkart of St. Philip PC, Houston – Alternate)

**Nominating Committee:** The commissioners elected the proposed slate of seven nominees to various committees.

**Personnel Committee:**

- The committee has accepted the resignation of Theodora Pounds, Editor at the presbytery, effective April 26.
- Mary Marcotte, Associate General Presbyter, will work half-time starting April 1 and will retire effective December 31.
- Scott Young, Web Developer, will be moving from part-time salary to an hourly rate for web site maintenance.
- Lynn Hargrove, Stated Clerk, will receive a 5% salary increase, effective April 1.

Next Stated Meeting of the Presbytery of New Covenant is Saturday, July 15, 2017, at First PC in Sugar Land
Celebrations of Ministry

There were several ministries celebrated at the meeting.

Rev. Dr. Paul Hooker, Associate Dean for Ministerial Formation and Advanced Studies at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, shared information about the seminary. 85% of student tuition is paid for from the school’s endowment, and 75% of applicants need financial assistance. It was appropriate that the morning’s worship offering was donated to need-based scholarships at Austin Seminary.

Rita Odom, Church Relations Specialist for Schreiner University, talked about the small liberal arts college in Kerrville as “a place to find your way to.”

The almost 200-year old journal, The Presbyterian Outlook, was represented by Rev. Tom Currie, Member of the Board of Directors. This independent weekly publication can be yours for $30/year electronically or $59/year in print.

The Center for Youth Ministry Training offers a masters in youth ministry through a new partnership with Austin Seminary. Teresa Kingsbury, Texas Regional Director, provided an overview of the three-year program.

Thank you to Clear Lake PC for being such wonderful hosts for the day’s events! There was laughter, food, fellowship, good companionship, and good business.

CODA

The following announcements and additional business were also accomplished:

- The minutes of the November 19, 2016 Stated Presbytery meeting were approved.
- Rev. Andrew “Andy” Gans is transferring from Saint Augustine Presbytery and has been nominated to serve as Pastor of Pines PC in Houston.
- Rev. Leigh Holder Bobo is transferring from Newton Presbytery and has been nominated to serve as Pastor of Alden Bridge PC in The Woodlands.
- Social Justice and Vision Initiative Grant applications are being accepted through April 30. Peacemaking and Outreach Grants may be applied for year round: bit.ly/PbyNCGrants.
- If your church is planning a mission trip, please send details including if there are additional spaces available to Rev. Kristi Click Blankman, Chair of Outreach, at kristi@springbranchpres.org.
- Disaster planning resources for congregations are available on the presbytery’s website under the filing cabinet. Carol Davis is a Certified Disaster Trainer: 281-778-9654 home; 281-725-7830 mobile; caroldavis@entouch.net. Val Aldred is a local resource for the Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA) National Response Team: 281-451-1827 mobile; valred1@aol.com.
- Display tables were available for the Clergy Retreat, Center for Youth Ministry Training, The Presbyterian Historical Society of the Southwest, Schreiner University, and New Worshipping Communities at Clear Lake PC.
- Heights PC will be back in their sanctuary the week of Easter after a fire.
- First PC in Tomball will dedicate their new Fellowship Hall on April 1.

Postlude is published after each Stated Presbytery Meeting.

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Circulation: Patricia Brantley