

Report of the General Presbyter September 2022

The Presbytery Roundtable is bringing a motion to the Presbytery for us to consider becoming a Matthew 25 Presbytery. As many of you know, Matthew 25 is the primary ministry leadership resource out of our national church offices in response to an overture to the 2016 General Assembly asking for the Assembly to declare that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is a Matthew 25 denomination. The text of that original overture is below. I have always loved the title of that overture, “On *Choosing* to Be a Church Committed to the Gospel of Matthew 25.”

Choice.

That’s the operative word which I am so grateful is in the title of this overture. We choose many things in life, and as disciples of Jesus, we believe that we *respond* to God’s actions in our life and God’s actions in the world around us. God is always seeking us out, but the response(s), well, they are up to us. This is the heart of discipleship - choice.

The Matthew 25 resources revolve around **three major foci** - Building Congregational Vitality, Dismantling Structural Racism and Eliminating Systemic Poverty. By the action of this year’s General Assembly, **three intersectional foci** were added which weave throughout the primary three: the climate crisis, militarism/peacemaking and gender discrimination/heteropatriarchy.

Full information on the Matthew 25 initiatives can be found at this link:

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/matthew-25/>

Our Synod, the Synod of the Northeast is a Matthew 25 Synod including the other two Presbyteries in New England - Boston and Northern New England.

Why would we consider this now as the Presbytery of Southern New England?

At the Presbytery meeting we will hear from two of our Matthew 25 congregations about their experience with this initiative and their feelings about the larger Presbytery signing on.

What does the Presbytery get out of this, is there a cost?

There is no budgetary impact to becoming a Matthew 25 Presbytery. What we will get is resourcing and connection with other Matthew 25 Presbyteries engaged in this ministry, and additional resources to bring and offer to our congregations and ministries. This is part of our larger connectional ministry in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

I look forward to seeing you either in person or virtually at the September Presbytery meeting and to the prayerful consideration of this motion from the Roundtable.

Blessings,



Rev. Shannan Vance-Ocampo, General Presbyter

Final text of **Overture 11-03, On Choosing to Be a Church Committed to the Gospel of Matthew 25** (from Cascades Presbytery with concurrences from Monmouth, Hudson River, Long Island, National Capital, and Sheperds and Lapsley)

Call on our churches to commit to a year of Bible study focused on issues of social justice, with particular attention to the matters of race proposed in Item 11-08 and the application of the Confession of Belhar to these concerns.

Recommend that the Presbyterian Mission Agency, through its Compassion, Peace, and Justice ministries area, implement a coordinated strategy or “cycle of social engagement” that will assure that concerns around confronting racism, environmental concerns, standing against violence and militarism, and advocating for the dispossessed come before the assembly on a regular and consistent basis, consulting on mission strategies and overtures with affected and engaged presbyteries before each General Assembly on topics of the most immediate concern.

Recommendation

The Presbytery of the Cascades overtures the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the PC(USA) to do the following:

1. Recommit ourselves at the congregational level, the mid council level, and the national levels of our church to locate ourselves with the poor, to advocate with all of our voice for the poor, and to seek opportunities to take risks for and with the poor (in the soup kitchens and catholic worker houses, among the immigrants, with those working to end mass incarceration, and with those who seek to protect all of us, especially the poorest of the poor around the world, from the vagaries of climate change).
2. Call on our churches to commit to a year of Bible study focused on issues of social justice.
3. Call on our presbyteries and synods to examine their own practice, placing these commitments at the center of their concerns, and to streamline the way that issues of immediate significance can be forwarded to the General Assembly by adopting procedures so that overtures and proposals on peacemaking and social justice concerns from sessions and committees may be considered quickly.
4. Facilitate the processes by which these concerns can be brought before us as a national body by resisting new barriers to overture submissions such as additional concurrences, tighter deadlines, or new overture topic restrictions at any General Assembly.
5. Commit to focusing a significant block of the time allotted for future General Assemblies on creating opportunities in consultation with the Committees on Local Arrangements to engage all of the commissioners, delegates, and observers in acts of service to and with communities at risk.
6. Assure that there are voices of those who are most at risk from within our church and outside of it (including interfaith voices), who are invited to share with and challenge the assembly, both in the plenary and committee sessions.
7. Create a “cycle of social engagement” that will assure that concerns around confronting racism, environmental concerns, standing against violence and militarism, and advocating

for the dispossessed come before the assembly on a regular and consistent basis, soliciting overtures from presbyteries before each General Assembly on topics of the most immediate concern.

Rationale

This is a moment of great opportunity for our church. Momentum is building within our denomination and throughout our society to courageously confront the challenges of our time. A new civil rights movement, a new peace movement, a new economic justice movement is on the rise and we are in a position to stand in solidarity with the poor in a uniquely powerful way. It is a time for us to define who we will be for decades to come. May we choose to be a church committed to the gospel of Matthew 25:

- In the Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids, Jesus tells a story about the church waiting for the moment of the Lord's arrival. Some of those who are waiting are prepared when the time comes, and some are not. The zeitgeist of our age is one of rapidly changing and endlessly creative activism exemplified by the Black Lives Matter movement. Let us be like the bridesmaids whose lamps are trimmed—ready to seize the moment.
- In the Parable of the Talents, Jesus tells a story about a bold slave who was punished for refusing to participate in the empire value of domination. Increasingly we see brave individuals and groups calling out the powerful and standing against the rampant exploitation in our marketplaces, in our prisons, and on our streets. Let us resist evil like that slave, and go stand on the margins of society—in the outer darkness.
- In the Parable of the Judgment of the Nations, Jesus tells a story about how he is encountered among “the least”—the poorest, the most isolated, the imprisoned, the sick, and the hungry. We hear with sober conviction Jesus declaring that a church which fails to serve with and for the poor does not know Him. We agree with Pope Francis who stated that a church that is not actively supporting and serving the needs of the poor has no right to call itself church at all and should be prepared to give up its tax-exempt status to operate as a church. Let us be counted among the sheep who met their King as a stranger.

We see the Spirit blowing through our society, bringing to fruition seeds of peace and justice long dormant. The harvest will be plentiful. Let us heed the call to service, and recommit ourselves to the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ in deeds as well as in words.