

The Columns *Online*

March 16, 2022 | Waynesboro, Virginia | *a newsletter supplement*

Breaking Historic Ground - Again

by J. Herbert Nelson, II

(PNS) In 2020, the global pandemic changed the world and everything in it. As the virus worked its way across the country, conference centers and hotels were converted into makeshift hospitals, bracing for the worst. Faced with the loss of hotel and meeting space, coupled with the health risks of holding an in-person gathering, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) hosted its first fully online General Assembly.

The digital learning curve was fast and furious. Most business was put on hold and the Church conducted a basic four-day virtual meeting, dealing with only critical business. Commissioners, advisory delegates and hundreds of corresponding members participated from their own homes. The Louisville-based tech crew, surrounded by wires, monitors and laptops, orchestrated a complete virtual Assembly with only key personnel at the Presbyterian Center on Witherspoon Street in

Louisville, Kentucky. While it wasn't the General Assembly they had envisioned on the historic waterfront in Baltimore, the online Assembly "exceeded expectations," said Ruling Elder Julia Henderson. Henderson, a leader for planning and business in the Office of the General Assembly (OGA), said that while a few "hiccups" were expected, there was "rejoicing" in the work of the team and "how we were able to seamlessly pull this thing off."

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"Protocols will be put into place following the advice of our COVID advisory team made up of physicians and scientists," said Henderson. "There's no way we could have come up with the ideas we are implementing now had it not been for individuals sitting around a table thinking and learning how to work together in a different way, accepting the fact that some of the things we have been doing we just can't do the same anymore. The world has changed around us, and for us to be relevant, we have to continue to change with it."

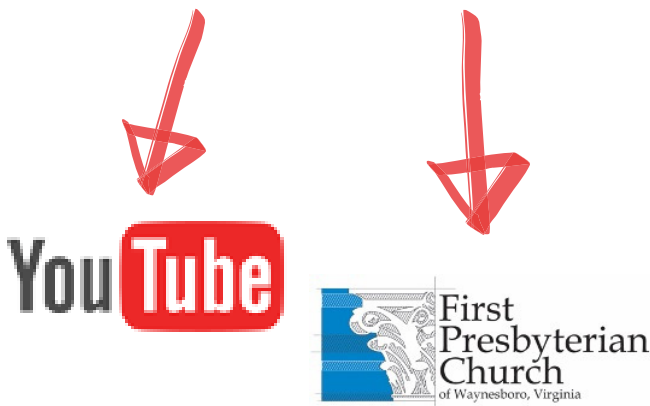
There will be no exhibit hall, lunches, dinners or other events, reducing opportunities for agencies and entities of the Church to engage with commissioners and advisory delegates in person. To adequately provide for in-person committee meetings, the first floor of the Presbyterian Center is undergoing a major facelift to host committees. The \$2.4 million project not only opens the door for the hybrid Assembly, but future meetings as well.

"We need this renovation for all meetings we host. The world of hybrid meetings is something we would not be equipped to deal with were it not for this project. We will be in good shape to meet the future," said Kerry Rice, deputy Stated Clerk with OGA.

But the 225th gathering is more than just providing a safe environment for commissioners, advisory delegates and other participants. It's about changing how the Church looks at the Assembly and the way Assembly business takes place. The Church's vision for 2022 focuses on the need to include and hear from everyone about

Our Worship Channels

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Breaking Historic Ground - Again

continued

the future direction of the PC(USA):

- Exploring revisions to the Book of Order and Standing Rules
- Seeking community partners across the denomination
- Offering easily accessible and effective resources to all Presbyterians
- Upholding a faithful theology and practice of stewardship: care for the Earth, health and safety of all in light of the COVID-19 virus
- Providing space and freeing funds for innovative ministry rather than funding convention-style gatherings.

Logistics aside, the real hope of this year's General Assembly is to see real issues of inclusion being addressed, not just by overture, but through the creation of an Assembly that demonstrates love and openness for everyone.

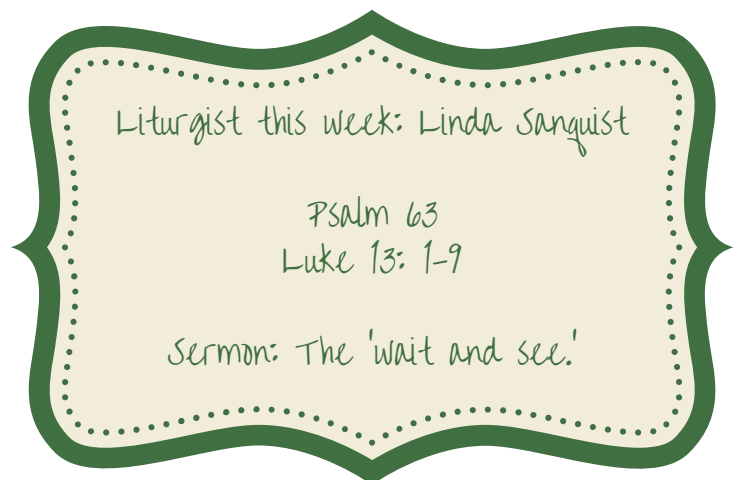
The upcoming Assembly affords an opportunity to build inclusiveness into the business of the Church through the introduction of moments of pause to reflect further on the options available before voting.

“After a while, people get into a habit of either approving or disapproving motions. Folks don't always think about the different options that are present. It could be approved with comment or disapproved with comment,” said the Rev. Jihyun Oh, OGA's director of Mid Council Ministries. “It would be good to present the different motions that can be made about an overture beforehand. Sometimes people get stuck in that approve/disapprove mindset. This can help give a brief pause to remember what the options are.”

Commissioners and advisory delegates who identify as Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) will have opportunities to meet as a group, both personally and virtually during Assembly. “We did this at the last Assembly and found it to be

incredibly helpful,” said Ruling Elder Elona Street-Stewart, Co-Moderator of the 224th General Assembly. “Not only were we able to provide each other with emotional support, it was an opportunity to address process and policy questions.” Street-Stewart adds that the move is not meant to offend white siblings. “This can be incredibly life-giving, creating a space where people can be authentic to who they are and be able to be nurtured in their courage to go back as a commissioner and serve, equipping them with what they need to be a good commissioner,” she said.

OGA and COGA have taken some major steps to try and be as innovative as possible. Technology has helped pave the way for that innovation. “It not only helped us address the inability to gather in person but allowed us to find more efficient ways to make decisions and get things done,” said Henderson, adding that “the discussions for what the 21st century is calling the Church to be will continue long after this Assembly ends, as will the openness to being inventive and creative. It's a challenge not just for OGA, but for all of God's children.”



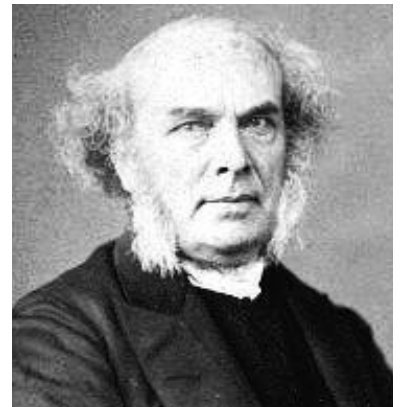
Music Notes.

The opening hymn for the third Sunday of Lent will be *Just As I Am*. The text was penned by Charlotte Elliot (1789-1871), one of about 150 hymns by the native of Clapham, England. Maine native William Bradbury (1816-1868) composed the music. He devoted his life to teaching music, particularly singing, composing and editing fifty-nine books of sacred and secular music.



Elliot.

The anthem will be a hymn that has been around for half a millennium! The text and melody for the hymn *Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir* (Out of the depths I cry to you) was penned in 1524 by Martin Luther. It was one of eight songs published that same year in the very first Lutheran hymnal, four of which were by Luther. The hymns were written while Luther was translating the Bible into German, a task which sustained him from 1521 to 1534.



Bonar.

The closing hymn will be *I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say*. The text is by Horatius Bonar (1808-1889), a Scottish clergyman who wrote the words for more than 140 hymns. The music was originally a folk tune, popular in both England and Ireland. When Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958) heard the tune in Sussex, England, he included it in The English Hymnal of 1906. He named it Kingsfold, after the village in England where he first heard the music.

Lent 2022

Ash Wednesday Service

March 2, Noon

Book Study- and Lunch

Being Presbyterian in the Bible Belt

Wednesdays at Noon

March 9 March 16

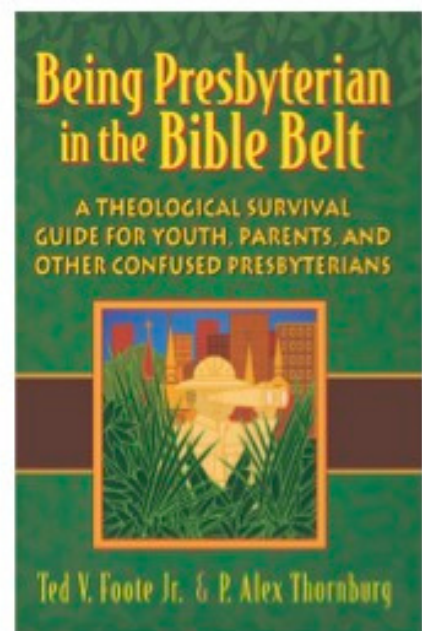
March 23 March 30

April 6

Maundy Thursday Simple meal

with the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

April 14, Noon



Please register at

ccash@firstpresway.com

(540) 949-8366

to receive a copy of the book

Session Digest

March 2022

- A meeting of representatives from the PC(USA) congregations in and around Waynesboro will take place on Sunday, March 27. The Rev. David Witt will lead a discussion on collaboration, partnerships and cooperative endeavors, particularly in mission. Bruce Bosselman and Betsy Ruehl will attend on behalf of FPC.
- FPC is invited to join the downtown churches for a community service on Palm Sunday to recall Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and to prepare for the Holy Week to come. This outside service will begin at 10:00 a.m. at Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church, and will conclude in time for participants to gather in their own churches for worship.
- Custodian Caroleia Strandberg resigned on March 27. Efforts are underway to secure a replacement.
- COVID-19 mask mandates at FPC have been removed.
- Session acknowledged letter sent to congregation by Danny Leech, and discussed the next steps in the process of discernment.
- Of primary concern is identifying church leaders.
 - The Nominating Committee must find one Ruling Elder immediately to fill an unexpired term, and three Ruling Elders to take office in June.
- In the interest of identifying and building our legacy in the community, the session is exploring the following:
 - Preschool incorporation as a 501c3 not for profit
 - Consolidation of community Hunger Ministries
 - Partnerships with Music & Arts organizations
 - Development of senior housing on the property
- With respect to the building and grounds:
 - Session is conducting an assessment of the Buildings/Grounds
 - Based on the assessment, session will create a repair schedule
 - Session will seek an appraisal/valuation of the property.
- Finally, with respect to Pastoral Leadership, the Session, in consultation with the presbytery Committee on Pastoral Transition, will determine if and when to elect a Pastor Nominating Committee.

This Week in History.

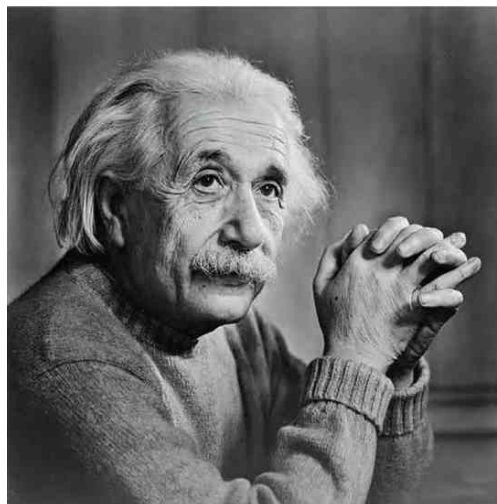


Joseph Priestley born
in Birstall, Yorkshire
March 13, 1733.

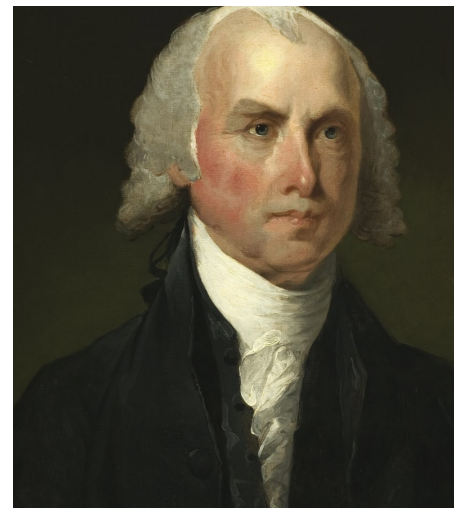
Chemist & Theologian;
discovered Oxygen,
created carbonated water
and founded Unitarianism



Julius Caesar assassinated
March 15, 44 BCE



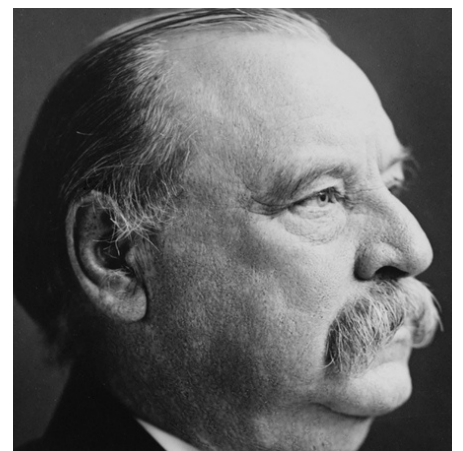
Albert Einstein born in Ulm, Germany
March 14, 1879



James Madison born
in Port Conway, Virginia
March 16, 1751



The Feast of St. Patrick observed
March 17



Grover Cleveland born
in Caldwell, Jew Jersey
March 18, 1837