

SYNOD OF THE COVENANT COMMISSIONERS REPORT April 2019

The Synod of the Covenant Commissioners gathered for our annual retreat at the Weber Conference Center, March 21-23, 2019. The focus of the retreat was discerning God's call to the church regarding current realities and challenges impacting refugees and new immigrants in the United States and related Gospel mandate and context of ministry.

Commissioners continued discussing the Doctrine of Discovery (AKA Doctrine of Christian Discovery). The following guest speakers made effective and compelling presentations. The Rev. John Fife, former GA Moderator, who reflected on the history and relevance of the ministry of Sanctuary and a faithful response and an option for resistance by congregations and faith communities. Sister Attracta Kelly, OP, JD, Immigration Attorney, explained basic definitions and challenges regarding immigration law given today's realities. Mrs. Amanda Craft, Manager for Advocacy with PCUSA Office of Immigration Issues, presented an overview of the current realities and resources for the church. Rev. Dr. Nicklaus Schillack and Ms. Kayla Park represented and discussed the ministry of Samaritas and ways for Presbyterians to partner and serve in Michigan. Presenters also participated in a panel discussion. In attendance were also invited church leaders including a young adult Presbyterian from South Sudan, Rev. Cathy Johnson, Chaplain, Rev. James Hegedus, and Ruling Elder Johanna Jozwiak, previous Synod Moderator.

The Commissioners Retreat also included orientation by Synod Staff and Committee Moderators, and boundaries training by the Synod Vice-Moderator, Rev. Dr. Pat Megregian, and an ecumenical worship "Compline" by Sister Attracta Kelly.

Commissioners Retreat also welcomed new synod staff. Mrs. Lisa Florez is the new Mobile Health Fair Ministry Coordinator, and is currently finalizing the 2019 summer fairs schedule. You may contact Lisa at MHF@synodofthecovenant.org – [Read about the MHF Ministry here.](#)

Rev. Dr. Steve Gorman, Coordinator for the Mission to the USA, reported the synod is preparing to host five or six International Mission Partners in the Fall. This is the third of 3-year focus on Christian-Muslim Relations, and the region is Africa. Countries represented this year will include Kenya, Ghana, Niger, Nigeria, and Rwanda. For more information contact Steve at MUSA@synodofthecovenant.org (also see below)

Following the retreat, the Synod Assembly convened on March 23, 2019 also at the Weber Center in Adrian, Michigan. The Assembly received various reports from committees and staff, and approved a five-year Covenant Agreement with Samaritas (formerly called Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service). Some PCUSA congregations and leaders have already begun connecting and partnering with Samaritas. [Read the Covenant Agreement here.](#)

The Peacemaking and Justice Committee reported that the Welcome All Refugees program has made a financial contribution to help with the tuition for a recent asylee from South Sudan and

has established a pass-through fund to continue the support and help support the immigration and refugee needs of other applicants within the bounds of the synod.

The Synod is upgrading the website and updating relevant information to be accessible in a couple of weeks. The update will also include a giving portal to help support the mission and ministry of the Synod.

Ruling Elder Pat McBride reported that the Presbyterian Women in the Synod of the Covenant 2019 Gathering will be held on July 12-13, 2019 at the Covenant Presbyterian Church in Columbus, Ohio.

The next Synod Assembly is scheduled for August 2, 2019, at First Presbyterian Church, Maumee, Ohio, and will focus on receiving reports by presbytery moderators regarding the ministry of our eleven presbyteries.

Mobile Health Fairs

The purpose of the Mobile Fair program is to partner with PCUSA presbyteries and congregations, ecumenical and community agencies in order to provide free basic health screenings, referrals, and awareness within the bounds of the Synod.

This summer program in partnership with congregations and presbyteries, is administered by six trained young adults.

Mission to the USA (MUSA)

The Mission to the USA program links churches in the Synod of the Covenant (Michigan and Ohio) with international church leaders, both clergy and lay leaders. Each Mission Partner is hosted by a congregation in the synod, joining in the life of church. As the Mission Partners and the congregations spend three weeks together, they share worship, Bible Study, pastoral care, many meals, and much more, they break down cultural barriers and truly become brothers and sisters in Christ.

The focus of the Synod's Mission to the USA program for the years 2017-2019 is Christian-Muslim relations. The Synod invites and itineraries Christian leaders who are hosted by participating congregations for the duration of three weeks. In 2017 welcomed five visiting church leaders from Indonesia, and in 2018 the synod welcomed three church leaders from Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. In 2019, Africa will be the region, and we are preparing to invite seven or eight leaders. For more information and to register your congregation to participate in the program, please send an email to: musa@synodofthecovenant.org or contact the Synod office.

2019 Program Dates:

- October 11, 2019 to November 1, 2019.

A Covenant Agreement Synod of the Covenant and Samaritas

March 23, 2019

The Synod of the Covenant has been involved in ministry with refugees, asylum seekers, and others escaping persecution and terror since 2016 in partnership with PCUSA congregations, and continues to practice hospitality and to discern by reaching out in various ways to demonstrate the love and teachings of Jesus Christ. In Michigan, when possible, we continue this ministry with refugees in partnership and mutual agreement with Samaritas. This covenant offers an understanding of the ongoing relationship between the Synod of the Covenant and Samaritas as agents of Christ's body engaged in mutual mission partnerships to serve vulnerable neighbors in our society and neighborhoods within Michigan in particular.

Synod of the Covenant Mission Statement

“We, the Synod of the Covenant, in partnership with our presbyteries, congregations, the General Assembly, and other faith communions, are called and sent by God to be a living, active, and inclusive witness to the love of Christ.”

Samaritas Mission Statement

“Serving people as an expression of the love of Christ.”

Our History

The rich history of *Samaritas* is one of growing and diverse service to our neighbors in need. The story began with immigrants from Germany and Scandinavia making their way to Detroit at the end of the 19th Century. They followed the Scriptural imperative to help others in need, especially fellow immigrants, by providing food, clothing, and jobs. Congregational outreach efforts came together in 1909, and then in 1934, *Lutheran Inner Mission League of Greater Detroit* was incorporated, changing its name soon afterward to *Lutheran Charities*. In 1959, the organization merged with a similar group in Saginaw and was renamed *Lutheran Social Services of Michigan*.

We were founded by Lutheran congregations, but our ecumenical strive to serve and partner with a diverse group of people has grown Samaritas into one of the largest faith-based nonprofits in Michigan. This passion also inspired us on April 5, 2016, to rename ourselves after the Good Samaritan, since this person helped and healed the other one beside the road despite the difference between them. We serve through foster care, adoption, resettlement, services for person with disabilities, senior services, home health, and support for homeless families, survivors of human trafficking, formerly incarcerated women prison, impoverished children, and many others. Today, Samaritas spans Michigan's Lower Peninsula with more than 70 program sites in 40 cities. Samaritas's diverse staff shares a dedication to serving their fellow human beings by doing the right thing, for the right reasons, every day.

Samaritas's work in formerly serving refugees began in 1949 as a result of our heritage as immigrants. It has been estimated that at the end of World War II, one quarter of all Lutherans in the world were refugees. Our value of hospitality and a desire to reach out to our displaced neighbors, and in many cases family, propelled our service in this area. Today, Samaritas has grown to be the largest refugee resettlement agency in Michigan and fourth largest in the nation. We have resettled thousands of people from dozens of countries in Europe, Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Central America, and South America. Samaritas has been the Michigan affiliate of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service since the 1950s. In 2002, Samaritas became the Michigan affiliate of Episcopal Migration Ministries as well. We now serve refugees through three general ways: resettlement, post-resettlement, and refugee foster care.

Samaritas began offering refugee foster care in 1979 as a response to the thousands of refugee children from Southeast Asia without a parent to care for them. Since then, Samaritas has continued to develop and expand this Unaccompanied Refugee Minors (URM) program, and in 2001, began serving unaccompanied migrant youth as well. In 2017, Samaritas provided 150 unaccompanied minors with safe and loving foster, group, and independent living homes, case management, mental and emotional health services, educational and cultural support, and independence skills. We are currently one of only two agencies in Michigan, and one of only a couple dozen in the nation, that provides these specialized services.

Partnering with Presbyterian congregations and individuals began far before our renaming as Samaritas in 2016, but since being clearer that we are a diverse organization dedicated to serving the beautiful mosaic of fellow children of God no matter who they are, no matter how they got in their challenging circumstances, the number of relationships has blossomed. Moving into a more formalized relationship as two aspects of the same Body of Christ will serve to strengthen the foundation that already exists, and will expand the number of people we serve in mutual mission.

Commitments of Samaritas

1. Cooperate with Synod of the Covenant and leaders of congregations, committees, and other organizational structures within the Synod concerning common issues of concern that are related to refugees (i.e. refugee resettlement, post-resettlement, refugee foster care, and other related matters).
2. Serve as a resource for the Synod of the Covenant and its various constituents on issues and concerns for refugees through providing presentations, seminars, up-to-date public policy information, and other helpful data for pastors, church leaders, and other church members.
3. Communicate with the Synod of the Covenant the work of Samaritas in general and serving refugees specifically through Samaritas's multiple forms of print and electronic media.
4. Provide a space for at least one person, recommended in conversation between the Synod of the Covenant Executive and Samaritas's CEO and CAO, on the Samaritas Foundation Board.

Commitments of the Synod of the Covenant

1. Encourage presbyteries and congregations within the Synod of the Covenant to pray regularly and publicly for the people served by Samaritas, especially refugees, as well as for the many team members delivering that support.
2. Encourage presbyteries and congregations within the Synod of the Covenant to assist the ministry of Samaritas and refugees within their communities, develop mutually supportive relationships, and consider shared projects, programs, and partnerships.
3. Encourage presbyteries and congregations within the Synod of the Covenant to partner with Samaritas in its ministries and services to support refugees and to support financially Samaritas's various refugee services through congregational budgets and special appeals.
4. Assist Samaritas in communicating with presbyteries and congregations within the Synod of the Covenant by periodically providing Samaritas with up-to-date contact information.
5. Assist in finding at least one person to serve on the Samaritas Foundation Board in conversation with the Samaritas CEO and CAO.

This Covenant requires approval by the Chief Executive Officer of Samaritas, the Board of Directors of Samaritas, and the Synod of the Covenant Assembly. It will be reviewed every five years or earlier if requested by either party.

Respectfully submitted,

Lois Aroian

Clergy Commissioner

Presbytery of Mackinac