

Shammah Takop

Environmental Justice Sermon, Sunday July 17th, 2022 at EPC

First and foremost, I just want to thank the church, our very own Emmanuel Presbyterian Church, for helping me grow as a young man and making me represent our church as a YAAD. Secondly, I want to thank Ms. Terry Denton for nominating me, and Ms. Therese Howell for encouraging and supporting me because without them, I wouldn't know what to expect at GA. Many thanks to all of you for your continued prayers while we were at Louisville. Finally, I want to thank my dad for taking his time and spending three days with me. It was probably tough trying to keep up with me whether it was the food we ate, the workouts we did, taking more showers than you, or taking notes for me, I'm just glad we had a great father-son time.

Let me tell you a little about how the committees operated. The 225th General Assembly was one of the busiest weeks I've ever had. Whether it was in person or through zoom, it was really busy. The GA meetings for the committee in which I was participating in started on Thursday June 23rd to Saturday June 25th in person and later continued online via zoom on Tuesday July 5th - Saturday July 9th. Prior to these days, we had preparatory meetings via zoom several days before in person in Louisville.

Every day, the committee started with opening prayers, group building, followed by worship/short sermon. The deliberations each day started at 9 am till 5 pm for the in person meeting in Louisville and 10 am till 11 pm for the zoom online. Though there were breaks, sometimes it felt like a lot given that it was my first time attending. One thing to mention here is that the committee actually demonstrated true multiculturalism and different languages. Our Moderator was from Puerto Rico, only speaking Spanish, there were people that spoke either Korean, or Spanish and/ or English and the communication department did a great job in translating everything at the same time. It made me think of the Pentecost Sunday we had here at Emmanuel. The only difference was the fact that though we were in person, everyone had their own earbud with language selection of your choice.

Even though it was for 3 weeks, it felt like 3 months like Ms. Howell talked about last week. The 225th General Assembly took place in Louisville, Kentucky. I'm glad it took place in person rather than online because Louisville is one of the prettiest cities I've ever seen. Even though the last week was through zoom, I'm glad I got to experience ruling elders, teaching elders, and Young Adult Advisory Delegates (YAADs) argue back and forth at a high level. I experienced the power of the Holy Spirit as committee members argued, disagreed to agree, and in the final analysis, ended up voting unanimously on most of the key points. We will take short breaks when the argument is heated and then come back to vote on the proposal. We had people who wanted to talk a lot and others who never said anything. In all, it was a great experience that I will never forget.

Waking up seeing the sunrise in the morning, walking around taking pictures near the cruise ships and the bridges next to the river in the afternoon, seeing the pretty sunsets in the evening, and finally watching the fireworks in the night, the view really was astonishing. Every evening, us YAADs had group meetings. We got to know each other better, sang songs of praise, discussed our highlights, and what committee we were on. My favorite moment with the YAADs was eating dinner with all of them and alongside our group leaders. Each committee had about 4 YAADs. My committee was Environmental Justice. So what is Environmental Justice? It is a social movement to address the unfair exposure of poor and marginalized communities to harms associated with resource extraction, hazardous waste, and other land uses. It is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people

regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies. Environmental justice issues include inadequate access to healthy food, inadequate transportation, air and water pollution, and unsafe homes. Environmental justice confirms every worker's right to a healthy and safe working environment without having to choose between unemployment and an unsafe source of livelihood. It also confirms that those who work from home have a right to freedom from environmental hazards. Environmental and climate justice is a civil rights issue. We all depend on the physical environment and its bounty. Toxic facilities, like coal fired power plants and incinerators, emit mercury, arsenic, lead, and other contaminants into the water, food, and lungs of people in the communities. My takeaways were that I agree with the GA advocacy of getting companies to be involved in bringing up policies that will keep the environment more friendly because as a youth, keeping our environment very clean is important. We simply cannot continue to invest more in fossil fuels at the rate that we have been doing if we want to stop the damage already done to the environment and the millions of people already suffering the impacts of climate change. When we weigh the benefits of environmental justice such as natural resources and burdens such as pollution, responsibility is learned and solutions to attain sustainability are taken. Sure sustainability might be in the distant future but the actions we take in the present through environmental justice initiatives take us a step toward it. Environmental Justice demands the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision making including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement, and evaluation. Just distribution of resources revolves around how the people are involved with one another. Justice applies not when one has more resources than another, but if one person takes resources from another person's environment. It also applies when one has more resources than they need while another is suffering for lacking any.

The Presbyterian Church (USA) affirms its historic work of confronting the current climate crisis. The PCUSA also repents of our participation and growing complicity in the processes that have brought our planetary ecosystem to the tipping point of unsustainability for humans, most significantly marginalized people, and mass extinction of other species. We must continue towards a way of life divested from fossil fuels both monetarily and in our daily living. To that end, we recognize that products made from fossil fuels have been used by humans to create a world where they can lead healthy, safe, and abundant lives, that emissions from burning fossil fuels for transportation, electricity production, industrial activity, commercial and residential use, and agriculture, have significantly contributed to a climate emergency that necessitates adoption of alternative, sustainable sources of energy, that the use of selective divestment continues to engage the industry as a whole, and through partners, the companies from which we have divested. In addition, it maintains the most effective leverage to hold companies to corporate responsibility through active engagement. That, as a church, a people of faith, and a social organization embodying Christian values we should actively seek out and invest in securities of companies whose predominant focus is in renewable and/or energy efficiency. Before the last day of GA, the YAADs were asked to lead worship for our committee. We didn't have enough time to prepare because we had a group meeting that evening. Thankfully, after the meeting, we went to a nearby restaurant and discussed our plans for that day and it worked out beautifully. All the teaching elders, ruling elders, moderators praised us YAADs for what we did that day. I'm really grateful and truly blessed to have been part of this 225th GA. I pray God will continue to use each and everyone of us in such a way as to praise his name. May God use you today to be a blessing to someone or to your community, in Jesus name. AMEN!!