

BGM Item 3- Theologians Commission Report

Theologians Commission Report

November 4, 2016

Chair: Jennifer W. Davidson, PhD

The Theologians Commission held its third pre-biennial conference and featured three keynote speakers around the theme of Beloved Community: Dr. Andrea White (Union Theological Seminary), Dr. Marvin McMickle (Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School), and Rev. Lauren Ng (Animal Welfare Advocate). We showcased fifteen scholars who presented in two simultaneous paper sessions on the topics: “Revelation of Divine Identity through Beloved Community;” “(Un)Chosen Encounters;” “Violence & the Sacred;” “Eco-Justice as Beloved Community;” “Critical Engagement with American Baptist Embodiments of Beloved Community;” and “Theological Methods for Engaging Communal Complexities.” The afternoon session closed with reflections offered by three emerging theologians: May May Latt, Horacio DaValle, and Chakravarthy Zadda. We had approximately 100 registrants for the event. Selected papers from the last conference will be published in an upcoming issue of *American Baptist Quarterly*.

The Commission is presently working to plan the June 2017 pre-biennial conference. We are considering a more open-ended theme this year, perhaps following an un-conference model. Or we may center our theme around the four objectives of the commission, inviting the wider theological and scholarly community to reflect with us about the best way to reach those objectives: (1) to place theological reflection at the heart of our denominational life; (2) to establish a stronger public theological voice from American Baptist perspectives; (3) to provide opportunities for self-identified American Baptist theologians and emerging theologians, pastor-theologians, and theological educators to network and collaborate together; (4) to re-establish stronger connections between the denomination and her seminaries and colleges.

We have started a Facebook group “American Baptist Theologians” which presently has 293 members. We will use this forum to communicate upcoming information about the 2017 conference.

In order to avoid confusion, we have decided to drop the word “Emerging” from our name. People didn’t know if they qualified to be emerging or not. And we decided that the term didn’t serve us well. However, we do remain committed to identifying and fostering younger and upcoming American Baptist theologians.

Our commission membership is preparing for transition. I have served as chair of the task force and commission since 2011, and have committed to remain in this role until the close of the commission’s next conference in 2017. We have begun discussing how to “institutionalize” our group while also seeking to maintain its collaborative, collegial, and organic nature. I would also like to write up a history of the commission before it’s forgotten.

Commission members: Leslie Bowling-Dyer, PhD Student; Don Brash, PhD; Amy Chilton-Thompson, PhD; Jennifer Davidson, PhD (chair); Priscilla Eppinger, PhD; Stephen Butler Murray, PhD; Chakravarthy Zadda, PhD.