



An Invitation to the Presbytery of Baltimore's 869th Gathering featuring a Leadership Conference on Race, Class and Poverty

11/2/2015



I want to invite every ruling or teaching elder, deacon or church member to come to the 869th stated meeting of the Baltimore Presbytery on November 14 at First Presbyterian of Howard County. If you have never been to a presbytery meeting, or if you don't expect to come to another one, please make this one the exception. Register here for the gathering. The deadline is November 6.

One of my favorite Biblical passages is James 1: 22, 27: *But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves...Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.*

I believe this is an exceptional opportunity for us to be doers of the word. God is calling us to make a faithful prophetic witness after the April riots. The world is watching to see what the faith community is doing to heal our city. And more importantly, God is watching.

At this gathering, we will focus on the issues of race, poverty and class to learn, discern and act. First we will learn from people who are on the ground what is really happening in our communities. Our keynote speakers from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Medicine will share their recently released global study--"The Well-Being of Adolescents in Vulnerable Environments"—which surveyed the underlying structures and social factors that affect the health and well-being among young people living in disadvantaged urban communities in five cities around the world, including Baltimore. You will be shocked to find out how Baltimore stacks up against these other cities.

In worship, Rev. Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas, a renowned author and director of religion at Goucher College, will help us discern God's word as she reflects upon questions of justice and faith in response to God's call.

Then, in workshops, we will have the options of finding out about our blind spots to institutional racism, or how to pair urban and suburban churches to help each become a more thriving congregation. I, for one, will be attending the workshop on how people of faith are working to overcome poverty and homelessness in Western Maryland. The Baltimore Police will talk about how they hope to engage youth in the city. You could also learn about unexpected ways that the Presbyterian Women and the Guatemala Partnership are serving those in need.

But we will not only discuss problems. Each workshop leader will talk about actions faith communities can take to help solve the problems. We will have the opportunity to hear about concrete examples of faith in action from the co-chairs of BUILD, organizers of the McCabe neighborhood project and the leaders of the unique urban ministry in the Sandtown area where Freddy Gray lived.

God is calling us. Will we answer the call? Or will we simply be hearers and not doers? Come to First of Howard County on Nov. 14 to learn, discern and begin to act to spread God's love to all His creation.