

Rock Stars & Prophets: Generations of Justice and Love
A Gathering Sponsored by That All May Freely Serve, April 2015
from Ray Bagnuolo, August 18, 2106

Overview:

Rock Stars & Prophets: Generations of Justice and Love was held April 8-11, 2015 at Stony Point Center, Stony Point, New York. Over ninety national leaders from the forty-plus years of the Progressive Movement within the PC(USA) gathered for 2 1/2 days.

This reunion brought together the early prophets and rock stars —many of whom had not seen each other for decades. It gathered old friends and stirred for memories and old tensions - both of which blended with grace. Perhaps it was being able to look back over the landscape of time together, seeing the outcomes of the struggle that created a climate where differences and disagreements had taken their place in the mosaic of what had been accomplished. There was an honoring of one another, a deep respect, affection and love — a camaraderie of those whose faith brought them to the cause and the future in which we now lived.

Additionally, the gathering was designed to honor those who helped to lay the foundation for where the movement in the PC(USA) is today, introducing current and future leadership to “their roots” in very personal and powerful ways. For almost everyone, there were folks there whom they knew of — but had never met. Especially for the newer leaders, names on paper came to life. The bridge between the generations was established and those connections and the myriad benefits continue today.

An important part of the time together included a chance to envision the future and what the collective highlighted as the challenges ahead. In that process, ideas were shared and resources and networks created to help move forward. One such outcome was an overture (11-05) that was brought to General Assembly in June of 2016. It called for the beginning of a process by the institution of the church to acknowledge the harms it had done over the many years of struggle in a full welcoming of queer folk. Further it called for the issuance of an apology and promise to live into the changes that have been made more faithfully.

Lastly, the gathering was assembled because we could. That is, many of our Rock Stars and Prophets are still with us but that will not always be so. Being in community in the presence of the Spirit in a free and open way has had a lasting impact beyond what we can measure. Since that time alone, we have lost two early members, who continue live in our hearts.

Some Logistics:

1. We planned, organized and pulled the conference together in 90 days.
2. A small planning group did all work by conference calls and document shares.
3. The agenda was designed to keep the flow open; the gathering was the agenda.
4. A campus setting was chosen to keep everyone together for “formal” and “informal” times.
5. We considered the agenda items and the private times equally important.
6. With a budget of \$35,000, we invited people regardless of their ability to pay. We asked folks to pay what they could and we would make up the difference, including the full expenses when needed. This included all travel and accommodations at the site. It worked.
7. All invitations were made through personal contacts starting with phone calls.
8. Since many of the early leaders were known only to a few, we added all the names that were suggested by the growing number of commitments along the way.
9. The conference was designed so that those who could only be there for part of the time would find that time well-spent. “Day trips” and local folk were welcome.
10. Individuals were invited to submit a picture of themselves and a bio that was distributed prior to the gathering via email/pdf - as well as at the gathering in print.
11. The conference was organized around timelines of decades from the 1970’s on. Folks could sign up for a decade (one or more) to share a story from that time, as part of a panel. In this way, we told the history/herstory of the movement through the involvement of the attendees and their remembrances.
12. There were many blocks of free time scheduled so that folks would have the time for conversations. We did not over schedule and that made some planners uncomfortable. :)
13. The venue provided online registration and flexibility in accommodating all the guests.
14. All sessions were live-streamed and video recorded.
15. Individual video recording sessions collected more than 60 videos (from 15 - 45 minutes).
16. The videos and all other data continues to be used in a variety of ways, most recently as a daily posting of videos during Pride Month.
17. The cost per room for up to double occupancy, all meals included, was \$220/day.
18. Transportation to and from airports was provided by the conference and organized by the conference center.
19. All meals were taken together during a two-hour break midday, to provide time for individual gathering.
20. A social hour each nite of soft drinks, wine and cheese, snacks was provided.
21. On the last night, in honor of the near passage of the marriage amendment in the PC(USA) and in the Supreme Court, a full-sized three tier wedding cake was wheeled in for desert, with “Going to the Chapel” playing in the background.
22. We came in under budget.