

Matthew 25 Summit Recap by Ruling Elder Jay Cummins Hudson Memorial Presbyterian Church

On January 15, six leaders of New Hope Presbytery set out from Western Boulevard Presbyterian Church for Atlanta and the Matthew 25 Summit (Bruce Grady, executive presbyter of the Presbytery of New Hope; Vanessa Hawkins, stated supply pastor at Davie Street; Amy Simes, candidate for ministry; Joe Burmester, executive director of Loaves and Fishes and member of Western Boulevard; Sarah McCracken Cobb, member of the Mission, Peace, and Justice Committee at West Raleigh, and me).

The Matthew 25 movement calls us to actively engage the world around us, and act boldly and compassionately to serve those marginalized and in need (those who are poor, hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, imprisoned, and strangers).

The summit was designed to bring together mid-councils, church leaders, and individuals to explore the vision of eradicating poverty, dismantling structural racism, and building vital congregations.

On January 16 we were joined by Joan Lester and eight other members of New Hope (including members of St. Andrews, Covenant Presbyterian Durham, and Fuqua Varina Presbyterian) at New Life Presbyterian in South Fulton, Georgia, a predominantly African American church, where the summit was held. There were over 350 participants from around the United States, including quite a large contingent from our Synod of the Mid-Atlantic.

Each day, spirit-filled worship and keynote speakers focused on one of the three key pillars of Matthew 25, workshops delved into foci and intersectional priorities, and dedicated participant feedback sessions (“fireside chats”) provided idea sharing.

These sermons, plenaries, and workshops were designed to raise awareness for issues of justice and fairness while providing clarity, context, and connectivity around the movement. The agenda can be found [here](#).

There is a summary report from the summit provided [here](#) that describes many of the summit’s presentations, including recordings from the sanctuary.

I participated in four workshops in addition to the plenaries, worship, and fireside chats:

- What does God have to do with inclusion?
- Strategic vision – casting for change.
- The role of white voices in anti-racism.
- What does it mean to be a vital congregation?

Some of the things that I learned or took away from the activities:

- The history and background of Overture 1103, which ultimately became Matthew 25 (I have a copy which can be shared), gives an excellent context for understanding the movement.
- Practice listening and patience when explaining Matthew 25.
- The movement is a marathon not a sprint.
- Understanding a church's context is the first step – defining the current state.
- The importance of understanding terminology to foster best communication in the context of inclusion.
- Letting go of an “us versus them” mentality when dealing with those of different gender, culture, or race.
- We should be fighting poverty, not the poor. Getting at and addressing the systems will help poor people the most.
- Radical welcome...when welcoming others that are marginalized, we are welcoming Christ.
- Raising awareness around the white supremacy concept is expected to produce anxiety and conflict. To give you a better understanding of the concept, Tema Okun's work on the white supremacy culture can be found at www.whitesupremacyculture.info.
- Vital congregations need to engage in the community.
- There are tools for assessment available through the PCUSA Office of Vital Congregations.
- Matthew 25 is a matter of the heart.
- We don't need to be exceptional, just faithful.
- Unity is not more important than the Gospel.
- Growth will happen through conflict and challenge.
- There is not one kind of Matthew 25 church.
- It's going to take hard work to figure things out.

- Most importantly, the work priority is Christ centered and faithful to the Gospel.

I met some extraordinary people from our presbytery, synod, and denomination. The work that is going on in our neighboring Presbyterian churches is outstanding. Some local things we may be interested in exploring at Hudson Memorial Presbyterian Church include:

- Benson Memorial United Methodist Church in Raleigh is hosting the Racial Equity Institute Phase I training for a very reduced rate at the beginning of February. Here's [a link](#) for more information.
- [Loaves and Fishes](#) used to have a closer relationship with Hudson Memorial. There are volunteer opportunities to work with the kids that could be of interest to youth or other interested groups.
- [ONE Wake](#) is a non-partisan, multi-ethnic, multi-issue group of religious congregations, associations, and other non-profits in Wake County working in groups to identify issues of concern to all sectors of the community to understand and affect local and regional political processes.

Our group left energized, enthused, and activated to work on positive change in our communities. We committed to reconvening as a leadership group within the presbytery to discuss best practices and next steps. The presbytery is working on a strategic plan which Matthew 25 will be a central part of. We can expect this to be addressed during the February presbytery meeting in Cary and a more focused and separate “mini-summit” at the July presbytery meeting in Durham.