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United Church of Christ to address immigration, environment at 31st General Synod in Baltimore

Author and speaker Glennon Doyle, Sierra Club President Aaron Mair, and social activist Rev. William Barber II to speak

CLEVELAND (June 21, 2017) — Immigration, the environment, and advocating for a just world for all people will be the focus of nearly 4,000 progressive Christians gathering in Baltimore at the end of this month. The United Church of Christ, a mainline Protestant denomination of nearly 900,000 members, will hold their biennial governance meeting, General Synod 2017, June 30-July 4 at the Baltimore Convention Center.

Among the highlights of General Synod 2017:

Glennon Doyle is a *New York Times* bestselling author of *Love Warrior*, chosen as one of Oprah's Book Club picks for 2016, as well as the inspiring and hilarious bestseller, *Carry On, Warrior*. Glennon is also the founder of Momastery, an online community where millions of readers meet weekly to experience her essays about faith, freedom, addiction, recovery, motherhood and serving the marginalized.

Glennon will address the General Synod the morning of Saturday, July 1.

Aaron Mair brings three-plus decades of environmental activism and 25 years as a Sierra Club volunteer leader to his position as the Sierra Club's first African American president. During his time with the Sierra Club, an environmental organization and one of the first large-scale preservations groups in the country, Aaron has shown a commitment to grassroots action, environmental justice, and transforming the culture of the Sierra Club to make it — in his words — "a more welcoming environment to all people, regardless of their race or socio-economic status."

Aaron will speak to the General Synod the morning of Monday, July 3.

Rev. William Barber II is a highly sought-after speaker, having keynoted hundreds of national and state conferences, including the 2016 Democratic National Convention. Rev. Barber, pastor of Greenleaf Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Goldsboro, N.C., is among the faith leaders helping progressive Christians reclaim the moral ground in setting the nation's agenda.

Rev. Barber founded the Forward Together Moral Movement that gained national acclaim with Moral Monday protests at the North Carolina General Assembly in 2013. These weekly actions drew tens of thousands of people to the state legislature.

Rev. Barber will deliver a keynote address at the General Synod Gala (a ticketed event) at 6 p.m. on Saturday, July 1.

During Community Service Projects General Synod attendees will offer justice and compassion to the homeless and marginalized people of Baltimore, and care for the planet by planting trees, pruning and mulching the city's greenery. Service Projects take place at 1:30 on Saturday, July 1:

- A "Faces of Homelessness" Injustice Walk will bring together groups of 12 to 15 people for an introduction to homelessness in Baltimore that offers insights into the reality of being homeless and a discussion around the solutions to the issue.
- Blue Water Baltimore offers the opportunity for volunteers to engage in the world of urban forestry. Volunteers will learn all about native tree species and urban ecosystems, along with all the best stewardship practices and unique challenges that face Baltimore's tree canopy.

General Synod Resolutions to be considered (a full list and the text of each resolution is available here: <http://synod.uccpages.org/resolutions/index.html>):

- A resolution urges the enactment of legislation authorizing medical aid in dying, which would make the UCC the first Christian denomination to advocate for nation-wide legislation, now on the books in five states and the District of Columbia.
- Another resolution calls the denomination to become an immigrant-welcoming church, by recognizing the ongoing struggles of refugees and migrants who come to the U.S. seeking safety, security, freedom and opportunity but instead experience injustice as they fear raids, deportation, and witness their families being torn apart.
- A recently-submitted resolution would denounce the withdrawal of the U.S. from the Paris Climate Accord, and call the church to devote its time, resources and prayers to heal the climate of the planet.

Media Availability: News conferences, as warranted, will be held on Monday and Tuesday after business sessions. UCC executives and clergy will be available to speak to the media at that time. Press advisories will be issued.

To arrange an interview or media opportunity, contact UCC News Director Connie Larkman, larkmanc@ucc.org or 216-496-5540.

All media members must preregister for General Synod access. Visit <http://www.generalsynod.org/press>. Media members should please have press credentials with them at all times. There will be a designated access area in the Plenary Hall, and reporters are requested to attend news briefings for information/questions on high-profile issues. Background information on UCC justice issues can be found here: http://www.ucc.org/press_center

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About the United Church of Christ The United Church of Christ is a mainline Protestant denomination comprised of nearly 900,000 members and 5,000 congregations nationwide. Headquartered in Cleveland, Ohio, the UCC is a church of many firsts, including the first mainline denomination to ordain a woman, the first to ordain an openly-gay man and the first predominantly white denomination to ordain an African American.

The UCC and its members are tireless advocates for social issues such as immigration reform, racial equality, LGBT rights, marriage equality, environmental protection and economic justice.