

# The 20<sup>th</sup> Stated Meeting of The Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey

May 13, 2025

*(to be approved at the 21<sup>st</sup> Stated Meeting of  
The Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey)*

## **The Body of Christ, A Call to Gather**

The Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey of the Presbyterian Church (USA) held its 20<sup>th</sup> Stated Meeting on May 13, 2025, at Johnsonburg Camp & Retreat Center and on the ZOOM platform.

*A pastor's gathering was held in-person at the Camp Johnsonburg beginning at noon, with lunch and a recognition of those recently retired.*

The Moderator, Rev. Chad Rodgers called the meeting to order at 4:00 PM with an opening prayer.

The Moderator introduced the Hybrid Meeting and Voting Process.

## **FORMATION OF THE ROLL**

The roll was formed as Commissioners signed the registration forms. Resource Staff/Stated Clerk, Rev. Dr. Steve H. Shussett, certified that a quorum was present.

<u><b>Congregation</b></u>	<u><b>Teaching Elder</b></u>		<u><b>Ruling Elder</b></u>	
<b>Allamuchy, Panther Valley</b>				A
<b>Alpha</b>	Rev. Scott DeCaro	P		A
<b>Andover</b>	Rev. Pamela Osborne	P	Sandra Wozniak	P
<b>Basking Ridge (3)</b>	Rev. Dennis Jones	E	Brett Lakefield	P
	Rev. Dr. Maureen Paterson	A		A
				A
<b>Bedminster, Lamington</b>	Vacant	V	Bisham Singh	P
<b>Belvidere</b>	Rev. Dr. Pamela Szurek	A		A
<b>Blairstown</b>	Rev. David Harvey	P	Bill Oliver	P
<b>Boonton</b>	Rev. Carie Morgan	E	Meg Meyer	P
<b>Bound Brook (2)</b>	Rev. Linda Owens	P	John O'Melia	P
			Jamie Breeding	P
<b>Branchville</b>	Rev. Dr. Nancy Young	E	Mike Lutz	P
	Rev. David Young	P		
<b>Califon, Fairmount</b>	Rev. Mike Atzert	P	Joyce Martin	P
<b>Califon, Lower Valley</b>	Rev. Tex Culton	E	Warren Newman	P
<b>Cedar Knolls, Hildale Park</b>	Rev. Ross Lang	P		A
<b>Chatham Township (3)</b>	Rev. Thomas Brown	P		A
				A

				A
<b>Chatham, Ogden Memorial</b>	Rev. Kathi Heath	E	Nancy Kent	P
<b>Chester</b>	Rev. Christopher Scrivens	P		A
<b>Clinton</b>	Rev. Tracey Henry	P		A
<b>Delaware</b>	Vacant	V		A
<b>Delaware, 1<sup>st</sup> Oxford</b>	Vacant	V		A
<b>Denville, Union Hill</b>	Rev. Timothy Clarkson	P		A
<b>Dover, First Memorial</b>	Rev. Alan Schaefer (HR)	E		E
<b>East Hanover, Kitchell</b>	Rev. Hannah Allred	P		A
<b>Flanders (2)</b>	Rev. Cliff Acklam	P	Lois Steward	P A
<b>Flemington (3)</b>	Rev. Amy Lincoln	E	Jamie Evans Rob Sheneman	P P A
<b>Florham Park, Calvary</b>	Rev. Ronald de Groot	A		A
<b>Franklin (2)</b>	Rev. Julie Raffety	P		A A
<b>Frenchtown (2)</b>	Rev. Emily McCachren	A		A A
<b>Gillette, Meyersville</b>	Rev. Stefanie Muntzel	A		A
<b>Hackettstown (2)</b>	Rev. Erin Hayes-Cook	P	William Cors	P A
<b>Hampton, Musconetcong Valley</b>	Stephanie Farley, CRE	A		A
<b>Hillsborough, TAFPC</b>	Rev. Eric Lai	P		A
<b>Lambertville</b>	Vacant	V	Phil McCloughan	P
<b>Lambertville, 2<sup>nd</sup> English</b>	Vacant	V		A
<b>Long Valley</b>	Rev. Heather Morrison Yaden	P	Tricia Hayes	P
<b>Long Valley, Highlands</b>	Rev. Robin Burton Palmer	P	Ruth Babula	P
<b>Madison (2)</b>	Rev. Carol Howard	P	Becky Moody	P A
<b>Martinsville, Seed &amp; Sanctuary</b>	Rev. Lissette Gonzalez-Sosa	E		A
<b>Mendham</b>	Rev. Scot McCachren	A	Van Buchanan	P
<b>Milford</b>	Rev. Dr. Linda Erkert-Bullock	A		A
<b>Milford, Alexandria</b>	Rev. Nicholas Hatch	P		A
<b>Milford, Holland Bible</b>	Rev. Geoff Stanley	A	Virginia Derbyshire	P
<b>Mine Hill</b>	Vacant	V	Randy Hooper	P
<b>Morris Plains</b>	Rev. Donald Brown	P	Susan Spidell McManus	P
<b>Morristown (3)</b>	Rev. Daniel Vigilante Rev. Audrey Webber	P P		A A A

<b>New Vernon</b>	Rev. William Stone	A	Donna Miller	P
<b>Newton</b>	Rev. Michael Cuppett	P	Thomas McNulty	P
<b>Newton, Yellow Frame</b>	Rev. Michael Nelms	P		A
<b>Oak Ridge (2)</b>	Rev. Dr. Christopher Doyle	P		A
<b>Ogdensburg</b>	Rev. Alden Johnson	A		A
<b>Parsippany</b>	Rev. Donald Bragg	P		A
<b>Phillipsburg, Harmony</b>	Rev. Scott Bohr	P		A
<b>Phillipsburg, Pilgrim</b>	Vacant	V	Debra McGuinness	P
<b>Pittstown, Bethlehem</b>	Rev. Linda Gaden	E		A
<b>Pluckemin</b>	Rev. Ian Rankine	E		A
<b>Port Murray, Rockport</b>	Vacant	V		A
<b>Ringoes, 1<sup>st</sup> Amwell</b>	Vacant	V		A
<b>Ringoes, Kirkpatrick</b>	Rev. Dr. Barbara Booth-Jarmon	P	Debra Neri	A
<b>Ringwood (2)</b>	Rev. Arlene Romaine	P		A A
<b>Rockaway (2)</b>	Rev. Ryon Herin	P	Dan Cassidy Andrea Brassard	P P
<b>Somerset</b>	Rev. Nancy Nalepa-Skibo	A		A
<b>Sparta (2)</b>	Rev. Dr. Patrick Sileo	P	Don Kecl	P A
<b>Stanhope</b>	Rev. Pamela Osborne	P	Carol Barry	P
<b>Stewartsville (2)</b>	Rev. Stephen Choi	P	Denise DeMasi	P A
<b>Stewartsville, Old Greenwich</b>	Rev. Mary Beth Mardis-Lecroy	P	Hope Duncan	P
<b>Stirling</b>	Rev. Stefanie Muntzel	A		A
<b>Stockton</b>	Rev. David Snyder	P		A
<b>Succasunna (2)</b>	Rev. Timothy Clarkson	P		A A
<b>Sussex</b>	Vacant	V	Mike Kosco	P
<b>Titusville</b>	Vacant	V	Kris Schmidt	P
<b>Wantage, Beemerville</b>	Rev. Barry Young	P		A
<b>Warren, Trinity United</b>	Rev. Amy Sandlin	E		A
<b>Washington</b>	Rev. James Scovell	P	Dorothy Decker	P
<b>West Milford</b>	Rev. Dr. Christopher Doyle	P	Betsy Englehardt	P
<b>Wharton</b>	Rev. Sarah Green	P		A
<b>Wharton, Berkshire Valley</b>	Vacant	V	Andy Vogel	P
<b>Wharton, Hungarian</b>	Vacant	V	Stephen Lance	P
<b>Whippany</b>	Rev. Sarah Cairatti	A	Josh Willans	P

***Teaching Elders Engaged in a Validated Ministry***

Rev. Joanne Miller	E
Rev. Robin Miller Curras ( <i>serving church out of bounds</i> )	P
Rev. Christine Davies	P

Rev. Lissette Gonzalez Sosa	E
Rev. John C. Kile	E
Rev. Jeanne Radak ( <i>Presbytery Leader – Highlands Presbytery</i> )	P
Rev. Chad Rodgers ( <i>Director of Activities - Johnsonburg Camp &amp; Retreat Center</i> )	P
Rev. Dr. Steven Shussett, Stated Clerk ( <i>Highlands Presbytery</i> )	P
Rev. Angella Son ( <i>Professor – Drew University</i> )	P
Rev. Caroline Unzaga	P

**Members at Large**

Rev. Peter Billings	A
Rev. M. Elizabeth Blythe	E
Rev. Justin Choi	A
Rev. Courtney Cromie	A
Rev. Dan Dorrow	A
Rev. Jin Hee Han	E
Rev. Merideth Mueller-Bolton	P
Rev. Hayley O'Connor	A
Rev. Gail Pendleton	P
Rev. Annie Tsai	A

**Honorably Retired**

Rev. Peter Amerman	E
Rev. Janice Ammon	E
Rev. Jeff Archer	E
Rev. Nancy Asbury	E
Rev. Barbara Aspinall	P
Rev. Charles Baier	E
Rev. Joicy Becker-Richards	E
Rev. Robert Beringer	E
Rev. George Blank	E
Rev. Sally Campbell	E
Rev. Cynthia Crowner	E
Rev. William Culton	E
Rev. James D'Angelo	E
Rev. William Davis	E
Rev. Judith Dean	E
Rev. Richard Dole	E
Rev. Birda Ferguson	E
Rev. Guy Ferguson	E
Rev. Dr. Janet Fishburn	E
Rev. Mervin Fry	E
Rev. Peter Gregory	E
Rev. Dr. Elizabeth Hall	E
Rev. Dr. Edward Halldorson	E
Rev. David Hengerer	E

Rev. Dr. Jefferson Hatch	E
Rev. Kathryn Henry	E
Rev. Jean Holmes	E
Rev. Herbert Huffmon	E
Rev. Harold Johnson	E
Rev. Eugenia Johnston	E
Rev. Philip Jones	E
Rev. Steven Kengeter	E
Rev. Heup Young Kim	E
Rev. Dr. David Lawrence	E
Rev. Unzu Lee	E
Rev. Tony MacNaughton	P
Rev. Peter Magnan	P
Rev. Donna McDaid	E
Rev. Fred Milligan	P
Rev. James Morris	E
Rev. Elizabeth Morrison	E
Rev. Szabolcs Nagy	E
Rev. Barbara Peters	E
Rev. John Potter	E
Rev. Donald Prytherch	E
Rev. Bronc Radak ( <i>serving Rockport</i> )	P
Rev. Jack Roan	E
Rev. Stephen Ross	E
Rev. Lorrie Rowland-Skinner	E
Rev. Diane Ruffle	E
Rev. Alan Schaefer ( <i>serving Dover</i> )	E
Rev. Bruce Schundler	E
Rev. Donald Scott	E
Rev. Sherman Skinner	E
Rev. Sarah Taylor	E
Rev. Alfred Tisdale	E
Rev. Jacquelynn Van Vliet	P
Rev. John Verser	E
Rev. Deirdre Greenwood White	E
Rev. David Young	P
Rev. Dr. Nancy Young	E

**Ruling Elders by Virtue of Office**

Sue Cail, Community Presbyterian Church of Ringwood, Past Moderator	P
Pete Peterson, Clinton Presbyterian Church, Co-Moderator of ACT	P
Mel Prestamo, Long Valley Presbyterian Church, Past Moderator	P
Donna Rahmann, Fairmount Presbyterian Church, Califon, Co-Moderator of CPM	P
Wendy Doidge, Presbyterian Church in Morristown, Past Moderator	P
Alan Ford, Bethlehem Presbyterian Church, Pittstown, Past Moderator	P

Joe Martinoni, First Presbyterian Church of Rockaway, Past Moderator	P
Rich Rubin, Presbyterian Church in Morristown, Member of ACT	P
Jane MacDonald, First Presbyterian Church of Newton, Presbyterian Women	P

**Others in Attendance**

Sonja Gaertner, Office Manager & Attendance Clerk, Presbytery of the Highlands	P
Susan Vigilante, Presbyterian Church of Morris Plains	P
Norma Zimmerman, Kirkpatrick Memorial Presbyterian Church, Ringoes	P
Sharon Bates, First Presbyterian Church of Berkshire Valley	P
Krista Sweer, First Presbyterian Church of Rockaway	P
Doris Haring, Pilgrim Presbyterian Church, Phillipsburg	P
Sharon Smith, Old Greenwich Presbyterian Church, Stewartsville	P
Rev. Dr. SanDawna Ashley, Synod of the Northeast of NJ	P
Debbie Hooper, Mine Hill Presbyterian Church	P
Hildy Benjamin, Presbyterian Church of Morris Plains	P
Noah Rodgers, Johnsonburg Camp & Retreat Center	P

**Total in Attendance – 114**

~ Sonja Gaertner, Attendance Clerk – The Presbytery of the Highlands of NJ

**CORRESPONDING MEMBERS AND GUESTS**

Corresponding Member:

Rev. Dr. SanDawna Gaulman Ashley, Transitional Leader for the Synod of the Northeast and a member of the Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys

Guests:

Ruling Elder Elise Bates Russell, Executive Director, Johnsonburg Camp and Retreat Center.

Ruling Elder Hope Duncan, Old Greenwich Presbyterian Church

Ruling Elder Sharon Smith, Old Greenwich Presbyterian Church

The seating was **MOVED, SECONDED, AND CARRIED.**

**EXPLANATION OF UNANIMOUS CONSENT**

**ITEMS FOR UNANIMOUS CONSENT:**

**ADOPTION OF AGENDA**

The Agenda was adopted by **UNANIMOUS CONSENT.**

**ADOPTION OF THE CONSENT AGENDA**

**SC-1**

Approve the minutes of the Presbytery meeting held November 12, 2024.

**SC-2**

Approve excuses for the Presbytery meeting of March 11, 2025.

**SC-3**

Receive the report of the Administration and Coordinating Team.

**SC-4**

Receive the report of the Church Development Team.

**SC-5**

Receive the report of the Commission on Ministry.

**SC-6**

Receive the report of the Committee on Preparation for Ministry.

**SC-7**

Receive the report of the Nominating Committee.

**SC-8**

Receive the report of the Property and Insurance Team.

**SC-9**

Receive the report of the Young Leader Formation Team.

**SC-10**

Receive the final report of the Administrative Commission for the Westminster Presbyterian Church.

**ACT-1**

The ACT recommends to the Presbytery:  
The Presbytery's Discernment Team Report be received.

**Items for Action:**

None.

**Items to Report:**

**SC-11**

On March 19, 2025, the Stated Clerk filed the Presbytery's March 11 votes on proposed amendments to the Book of Order with the General Assembly.

**SC-12**

On March 21, Ryan Irmer sent the following to the Stated Clerk: "I am writing to formally notify you, as the Stated Clerk of Highlands Presbytery, of my decision to renounce the jurisdiction of the Presbyterian Church USA."

According to G-2.0509 Renunciation of Jurisdiction:

When a minister of the Word and Sacrament (or authorized representative) submits to the stated clerk of the presbytery of membership a written statement renouncing the jurisdiction

of this church, the renunciation shall be effective upon receipt.

...Renunciation of jurisdiction shall remove the minister of the Word and Sacrament from membership and ordered ministry and shall terminate the exercise of that ministry. The renunciation shall be reported by the stated clerk at the next meeting of the presbytery, which shall record the renunciation, delete her or his name from the appropriate roll, and take such other administrative actions as may be required by this Constitution, including public communication of such a renunciation.

....Any former minister of the Word and Sacrament (teaching elder) who has renounced jurisdiction and later wants to be restored to office can be restored only through application to the presbytery in which he or she renounced jurisdiction for restoration to office....

The Consent Agenda was adopted by **UNANIMOUS CONSENT**.

Vice-Moderator Ryon Herin (Rockaway) assumed the gavel.

### **REPORT OF THE STATED CLERK — PART I**

The report of the stated clerk was received as part of the Consent Agenda.

### **GREETINGS FROM JOHNSONBURG CAMP AND RETREAT CENTER**

Elise Bates Russell, Executive Director shared news from Camp Johnsonburg.

### **GREETINGS FROM THE SYNOD OF THE NORTHEAST**

The Rev. Dr. Sandawna Gaulman Ashley, Transitional Leader of the Synod of the Northeast brought greetings and updated the Presbytery on the Synod's discernment process..

### **SHARING OUR STORIES**

Ruling Elders Hope Duncan and Sharon Smith (Old Greenwich), shared the story of the church's relationship with Family Promise.

### **DISCERNMENT TEAM REPORT**

Members of the Discernment Team presented its final report.

### **WORSHIP**

Worship was led by the following members of the Committee on Preparation for Ministry: Rev. Chris Doyle (Oak Ridge/West Milford) and Ruling Elders Craig Barth (Morristown) and Susan Vigilante-Williams (Morris Plains). Music was provided by Rev. Ryon Herin (Rockaway) and Ms. Krista Sweer. Rev. Doyle preached on Ephesians 4:11-16 on the theme, "To Nurture, Equip, and Enable," and presided at the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

### **DINNER AND FELLOWSHIP**

The meeting resumed following dinner, with Moderator Chad Rodgers assuming the gavel.

### **INTRODUCTION OF NEW RULING ELDER COMMISSIONERS**

### **INVITATION TO HYBRID ANNOUNCEMENTS**

## **REPORT OF THE ADMINISTRATION AND COORDINATING TEAM**

Ruling Elder Pete Peterson (Clinton), Co-Moderator of the ACT, placed the Discernment Team's Final Report before the Presbytery. The Report was **MOVED AND CARRIED**.

## **FINAL REPORT OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE COMMISSION FOR THE WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

Ruling Elder Pete Peterson, Moderator of the Administrative Commission for the Westminster Presbyterian Church, moved approval of the final report, including the following recommendations:

- The Presbytery of the Highlands asserts all claims to any property of the Westminster Presbyterian Church of Phillipsburg not known at this time, or to property or funds which may be received by reason of the congregation being named as the beneficiary of will or trust not known at this time.
- That \$10,000 of the \$292,330.71 remaining from settlement funds be distributed to Family Promise of Warren County as a memorial to the Westminster Presbyterian Church's active participation in the that program, and that the remaining \$282,330.71 be deposited into the Presbytery's Special Resourcing and Assistance Account.
- That the congregation of Westminster Presbyterian Church of Phillipsburg, NJ be formally dissolved and, that the corporate entity of the Westminster Presbyterian Church of Phillipsburg, NJ be legally dissolved.
- That the Administrative Commission for the Westminster Presbyterian Church of Phillipsburg, NJ be dismissed with gratitude .

The Final Report and its recommendations were **MOVED AND CARRIED**.

## **NOMINATING COMMITTEE**

Rev. Barbara Aspinall (HR), Moderator of the Nominating Committee placed the following persons into nomination:

Administration and Coordinating Team Class of 2027

Rev. Michael Cuppett (A), Newton/First

Blair Academy Consultation Team Class of 2027

Susan Johnson (A), Chester/Community

Blair Academy Trustees Class of 2027

Rev. Jeanne Radak, Presbytery

Nominations from the floor were requested.

The slate was elected by **UNANIMOUS CONSENT**.

## **REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON MINISTRY**

Rev. Jacqui Van Vliet, Co-Moderator of the Commission on Ministry, introduced the following persons and moved that the Presbytery confer the status of "Honorably Retired" upon them:

- Rev. Jacqui Van Vliet

- Rev. Fred Milligan
- Rev. Peter Magnan
- Rev. Donna McDaid
- Rev. Alden Johnson (retired as of June 30, 2025)
- Rev. Ron de Groot (retired as of June 30, 2025)

This was **MOVED AND CARRIED**.

Rev. Van Vliet moved that the “Policy and Process Regarding a Psychological Evaluation for a Pastor Where There are Concerns for Fitness for Ministry” be approved.

This was **MOVED AND CARRIED**.

### **SHARING OF HYBRID ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Vice-Moderator Ryon Herin shared and solicited announcements from the Presbytery.

### **VOTING ON PROPOSED GENERAL ASSEMBLY AMENDMENTS**

Proposed Amendments 24-A and 24-C, were presented and opened for discussion and vote.

A motion was made and seconded to postpone the vote to a special meeting. The motion **FAILED TO CARRY**.

The final outcome was as follows (May meeting results in **bold**):

### **HIGHLANDS PRESBYTERY’S VOTING ON BOOK OF ORDER AMENDMENTS RECOMMENDED BY THE 226TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

AMENDMENT NUMBER	TO BE AMENDED	DATE OF VOTING	VOTING OUTCOME
<b>24-A</b>	<b>F-1.0403</b>	<b>May 13, 2025</b>	<b>IN FAVOR</b>
24-B	G-1.0104	March 11, 2025	IN FAVOR
<b>24-C</b>	<b>G-2.0104b</b>	<b>May 13, 2025</b>	<b>IN FAVOR</b>
24-D	G-2.0504b	March 11, 2025	IN FAVOR
24-E	G-2.0504b	March 11, 2025	IN FAVOR
24-F	G-2.0610	March 11, 2025	IN FAVOR
24-G	G-2.0901	March 11, 2025	IN FAVOR
24-H	G-3-0106	March 11, 2025	IN FAVOR
24-I	G-3.0302d	March 11, 2025	IN FAVOR
24-J	G-3.0501	March 11, 2025	IN FAVOR
24-K	D-7.0501	March 11, 2025	IN FAVOR
24-L	D-7.0902b	March 11, 2025	AGAINST
24-M	G-5.0203	March 11, 2025	IN FAVOR

### **NEW BUSINESS**

No new business was presented.

## **REPORT OF THE STATED CLERK — PART 2**

Stated Clerk Steve Shussett reported that prior to March 21, 2025, Presbytery representatives from the Commission on Ministry were in dialogue with Ryan Irmer and his counsel regarding mediation between the two parties. The outcome of this dialogue was to be reported at this presbytery meeting.

On March 21, 2025, Mr. Irmer sent the following to the Stated Clerk: "I am writing to formally notify you, as the Stated Clerk of Highlands Presbytery, of my decision to renounce the jurisdiction of the Presbyterian Church USA."

The Clerk reported that, according to G-2.0509 Renunciation of Jurisdiction, "When a minister of the Word and Sacrament (or authorized representative) submits to the stated clerk of the presbytery of membership a written statement renouncing the jurisdiction of this church, the renunciation shall be effective upon receipt," *and therefore as of March 21, 2025.*

"...Renunciation of jurisdiction shall remove the minister of the Word and Sacrament from membership and ordered ministry and shall terminate the exercise of that ministry. The renunciation shall be reported by the stated clerk at the next meeting of the presbytery, which shall record the renunciation, delete her or his name from the appropriate roll, and take such other administrative actions as may be required by this Constitution, including public communication of such a renunciation," *reporting that this public communication completes those requirements.*

"....Any former minister of the Word and Sacrament (teaching elder) who has renounced jurisdiction and later wants to be restored to office can be restored only through application to the presbytery in which he or she renounced jurisdiction for restoration to office...." *meaning any restoration to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) must be through the Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey.*

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Moderator Chad Rodgers requested and received a motion to adjourn. It was **MOVED, SECONDED, AND CARRIED**. He closed the meeting with prayer at 7:47 PM.

Attested: \_\_\_\_\_  
Steven H. Shussett Stated Clerk

## **REPORTS:**

## **CONSENT AGENDA**

**May 13, 2025**

### **SC-1**

Approve the minutes of the Presbytery meeting held March 11, 2024.

### **SC-2**

Approve excuses for the Presbytery meeting of May 13, 2025.

**SC-3**

Receive the report of the Administration and Coordinating Team.

**SC-4**

Receive the report of the Church Development Team.

**SC-5**

Receive the report of the Commission on Ministry.

**SC-6**

Receive the report of the Committee on Preparation for Ministry.

**SC-7**

Receive the report of the Nominating Committee.

**SC-8**

Receive the report of the Property and Insurance Team.

**SC-9**

Receive the report of the Young Leader Formation Team.

**SC-10**

Receive the final report of the Administrative Commission for the Westminster Presbyterian Church.

**ACT-1**

The ACT recommends to the Presbytery:

- The Presbytery Discernment Team Report be approved.

## **Stated Clerk's Report May 13, 2025**

### **Items for Consent Agenda:**

#### **SC-1**

Approve the minutes of the Presbytery meeting held November 12, 2024.

#### **SC-2**

Approve excuses for the Presbytery meeting of March 11, 2025.

#### **SC-3**

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#### **SC-8**

Receive the report of the Property and Insurance Team.

#### **SC-9**

Receive the report of the Young Leader Formation Team.

#### **SC-10**

Receive the final report of the Administrative Commission for the Westminster Presbyterian Church.

### **Items for Action:**

None.

### **Items to Report:**

#### **SC-11**

On March 19, 2025, the Stated Clerk filed the Presbytery's March 11 votes on proposed amendments to the Book of Order with the General Assembly.

## **SC-12**

On March 21, Ryan Irmer sent the following to the Stated Clerk: "I am writing to formally notify you, as the Stated Clerk of Highlands Presbytery, of my decision to renounce the jurisdiction of the Presbyterian Church USA."

According to G-2.0509 Renunciation of Jurisdiction:

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....Any former minister of the Word and Sacrament (teaching elder) who has renounced jurisdiction and later wants to be restored to office can be restored only through application to the presbytery in which he or she renounced jurisdiction for restoration to office....

## **May 13, 2025 Administration and Coordinating Team Report**

### **Items for Consent Agenda:**

#### **ACT-1**

The ACT recommends to the Presbytery:

- The Presbytery Discernment Team Report be approved.

### **Items for Action:**

None.

### **Items for Report:**

*The ACT reports the following from their March 25, 2025 meeting:*

#### **ACT-2**

Reviewed the March 11 Presbytery meeting.

#### **ACT-3**

Discussed the Draft Discernment Report.

#### **ACT-4**

Approved the sale of the Westminster Presbyterian Church, Phillipsburg property, \$350,000 and the Corporate Resolution authorizing Elder Pete Peterson to sign on behalf of the Presbytery.

#### **ACT-5**

Approved the sale of First Presbyterian Church of Hanover, East Hanover property for \$2,500,000 and the approved the Corporate Resolution authorizing Rev. Sarah Cairatti to sign on behalf of the Presbytery.

#### **ACT-6**

Reviewed the May 13<sup>th</sup> Presbytery Meeting Agenda.

#### **ACT-7**

Approved a letter of support for Sanctuary + Seed's application for A Flourishing in Communities Grant through Cornell University.

#### **ACT-8**

Received the YTD Financial Report.

#### **ACT-9**

Personnel Committee reported that they had completed their annual reviews of the Presbytery Staff.

### **ACT-10**

The ACT recognized the Budget and Finance Team reported that the 2026 Budget planning will begin after the approval of the Discernment Process Report.

### **ACT-11**

Funds Development Team reported that they are in the midst of the Financial Sustainability Project. Several workshops have been scheduled and are in the planning stages.

### **ACT-12**

Moderator Chad Rodgers reported that he officiated at the installation of Rev. Michael Cuppett at First Presbyterian Church in Newton and at the Ordination of Rev. Lissette González Sosa to the New Church Development – Sanctuary + Seed. The Ordination took place at Bound Brook Presbyterian Church.

### **ACT-13**

Ratified the bylaw changes for Blair Academy.

### **ACT-14**

The Presbytery Leader reported that the Stated Clerk received a letter on March 21, 2025 from Ryan Irmer renouncing Jurisdiction of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Receipt of the letter was confirmed. In the future if Mr. Irmer wishes to return to the PCUSA he will have to reapply through the Presbytery of the Highlands.

*The ACT reports the following from their April 23, 2025 Special meeting:*

### **ACT-15**

Approved the revised Beattystown/Skylands Mortgage Renewal.

### **ACT-16**

Approved the Fairmount Presbyterian Church, Califon session request for an additional five years be added to the current lease with Good New Home for Women.

### **ACT-17**

Approved updating the authority already granted to the Property and Insurance Team to approve the final terms of the sale of the Sparta manse and include the authority to approve the final terms of the purchase of new manse.

### **ACT-18**

Approved the position description for a Presbytery meeting Recording Clerk.

**Discernment Report**  
**May 13, 2025**

## **Final Report of the Administrative Commission for the Westminster Presbyterian Church, Phillipsburg, NJ May 13, 2025**

The Administrative Commission (AC) for the Westminster Presbyterian Church of Phillipsburg was formed in May 2023. Members of the AC are Ruling Elder (RE) Cathy Ahart, Rev. Nicholas Natch, Rev. Ryon Herin, RE Pete Peterson (Moderator), staff liaison Lizabeth Hutchinson, Resource Staff/Stated Clerk Steve Shussett, and Presbytery Leader Jeanne Radak.

The commission for the AC is, after many years of ministry, to work with the Session to conclude the affairs of the Westminster Presbyterian Church, dissolve the Westminster Presbyterian Church, provide for the spiritual and pastoral care of any remaining members and assist in their transition to new church homes, take possession of the church property, all funds, all records, and to oversee the disposal of the property on behalf of the Presbytery.

The Westminster Presbyterian Church was formed by members of the First Presbyterian Church in April 1886. The first pastor of the church was Rev. E. C. Cline, who served until 1903. During its years of ministry, the church was active in community missions including supporting Family Promise of Warren County, Norwescap Summer Lunch Program feeding kids lunch Monday- Friday, Christmas Tree for the Needy, and Operation Christmas Child. The church was certified to respond in local community emergency events as a comfort center as part of the Community Emergency Response Team. Over the years, the church conducted countless worship services and conducted Sunday School for all ages. The final worship service was held in April 2023, led by Rev. Scott DeCaro.

The AC held its first meeting on site at the church on May 10, 2023 along with the outgoing pastor Rev. Scott DeCaro, his wife Kim, Shaun Souders (Clerk of Session), and Kevin Cochrane (Treasurer). The AC was given a tour of the church facility. Rev. DeCaro reported that the facility was no longer used apart from the storage of items. Records of the church had been turned over to Liz Hutchinson, the Presbytery's Financial Administrator. After touring the facility and discussing the general condition of the property, the AC agreed to meet with the Session for their final Session meeting on May 23 via Zoom. On May 22, 2023, the Westminster AC entered into an agreement with Coldwell Banker Realty in Clinton, NJ to list the property for sale for \$850,000. The Westminster AC met with the Session on May 23 for its final meeting. During the meeting, it was noted that the listing agreement had been made, that all records had been transferred to Presbytery Financial Administrator Liz Hutchinson and that Liz would take responsibility for the property management in coordination with the AC. Rev. DeCaro

agreed to pass along any membership issues that may arise, although none were noted at the time. The AC thanked the Session for the church's years of ministry and dismissed the Session.

During the intervening time, the Financial Administrator continued paying all the utility bills, insurance payments, and arranging for minor repairs to the facility as circumstances required. Every six months, the AC made interim reports to the Presbytery. Over the course of the past two years, the Coldwell Banker Realty agents recommended a couple of reductions in pricing and even a delisting in order to allow the property to be relisted with renewed attention to its availability.

In the fall of 2024, the Moderator of the AC was informed that a former member of the Westminster Presbyterian Church, a Florence Dominico, had passed away in 2023 and that her Last Will and Testament had left the church a bequest of \$10,000. As the successor to the Westminster Presbyterian Church, the Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey was to receive those funds. The executrix of the estate was Ms. Dominico's niece and she requested that, if at all possible, the proceeds from Ms. Dominico's bequest be given to the Norwescap organization in Phillipsburg. Ms. Dominico during her lifetime had been active in the church ministry helping to provide lunches to kids. The Westminster AC considered the matter and consulted with the Presbytery's Administration and Coordinating Team (ACT) and approved transferring the \$10,000 bequest to Norwescap once the check was received. The check was received and the money transferred to the Norwescap organization.

At the time the Westminster AC dismissed the Session of Westminster Presbyterian Church and all records were transferred to Presbytery Financial Administrator Liz Hutchinson, there was about \$4,000 remaining in the church's bank accounts and there were 22 members on the roll of the church. Since that time, one member was transferred to Stewartsville Presbyterian Church. There are reports that several other members became members of Old Greenwich Presbyterian Church, but we have no documentation. In February 2025, the Westminster AC was notified by Coldwell Banker agents of receipt of an offer to purchase the Westminster Presbyterian Church property for \$350,000 in "as is" condition. The purchaser was a church moving from New York called "Congregation of St Pius V." The Westminster AC approved the purchase agreement on February 12, 2025. Settlement took place on April 14, 2025 and the Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey received a check for \$327,789.54. From the receipts received at closing, the Presbytery was paid \$2252.50 for unpaid per capita for 2024 and 2025. The Presbytery was reimbursed \$33,206.33 for expenses incurred during the oversight of the property (after spending the \$4,000 that remained in the church's accounts). That leaves a total of \$292,330.71 to be distributed as recommended by the Westminster Administrative Commission after consulting with the ACT.

**Recommendations of the Westminster Administrative Commission made by the AC  
by vote on May 1, 2025:**

- The Presbytery of the Highlands asserts all claims to any property of the Westminster Presbyterian Church of Phillipsburg not known at this time, or to property or funds which may be received by reason of the congregation being named as the beneficiary of will or trust not known at this time.
- That \$10,000 of the \$292,330.71 remaining from settlement funds be distributed to Family Promise of Warren County as a memorial to the Westminster Presbyterian Church's active participation in the that program, and that the remaining \$282,330.71 be deposited into the Presbytery's Special Resourcing and Assistance Account.
- That the congregation of Westminster Presbyterian Church of Phillipsburg, NJ be formally dissolved and, that the corporate entity of the Westminster Presbyterian Church of Phillipsburg, NJ be legally dissolved.
- That the Administrative Commission for the Westminster Presbyterian Church of Phillipsburg, NJ be dismissed with gratitude .

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Pete Peterson', written in a cursive style.

Pete Peterson, Moderator

## **Commission on Ministry Report – Part 1**

### **May 13, 2025**

#### **Items for Consent Agenda:**

None.

#### **Items for Action:**

None.

#### **Items to Report:**

*From the April 1, 2025 meeting:*

#### **COM-1**

Approved Rev. Shelley Gardner, Chaplain to officiate at church officer ordination/installation services in Highlands Presbytery for 2025.

#### **COM-2**

Appointed the following moderators:

- Rev. Nancy Asbury as moderator for United First Presbyterian Church of Amwell, Ringoes (Larison's Corner)
- Rev. Jacquelynn Van Vliet as moderator for Second English Presbyterian Church of Amwell, Lambertville (Mount Airy)
- Rev. Tex Culton as moderator for First Presbyterian Church of Lambertville

#### **COM-3**

Received from the Stated Clerk the report that Ryan Irmer renounced jurisdiction of the church on March 21, 2025 (G-2.0509).

#### **COM-4**

Approved the following Terms of Call between:

- Rev. Linda Owens and the Bound Brook Presbyterian Church
- Rev. Timothy Clarkson, Union Hill Presbyterian Church, Denville and the First Presbyterian Church of Succasunna
- Rev. Julie Raffety and the First Presbyterian Church of Franklin
- Rev. Robin Palmer Burton and Highlands Presbyterian Church, Long Valley
- Rev. Heather Morrison Yaden and Long Valley Presbyterian Church
- Rev. Don Brown and the Presbyterian Church of Morris Plains

#### **COM-5**

Approved the Policy and Guidelines for Ruling Elders on the Pulpit Supply List.

#### **COM-6**

Approved the renewal of the Commissioned Ruling Elder position between Elder Stephanie Farley and Musconetcong Valley Presbyterian Church, Hampton for a period of two years 2025-

2027.

## **Commission on Ministry Report – Part 2 May 13, 2025**

### **Items for Consent Agenda:**

None.

### **Items for Action:**

*The COM recommends the following:*

#### **COM-7**

Policy and Process regarding a psychological evaluation for a pastor where there are concerns for fitness for ministry.

#### **COM-8**

Recommend that the presbytery confer Honorably Retired for the following pastors:

- Rev. Jacqui Van Vliet
- Rev. Fred Milligan
- Rev. Peter Magnan
- Rev. Donna McDaid
- Rev. Alden Johnson (retired as of June 30, 2025)
- Rev. Ron de Groot (retired as of June 30, 2025)

### **Items to Report:**

*From the May 6, 2025 meeting:*

#### **COM-9**

The COM is training COM members and others in Conflict Management.

#### **COM-10**

Approved the Terms of call between Rev. Dr. Barbara Booth-Jarmon and the Kirkpatrick Memorial Presbyterian Church.

#### **COM-11**

Approved the Covenant Supply Pastor position for Second English Presbyterian Church of Amwell (Mount Airy).

#### **COM-12**

Approved the Covenant Supply Pastor position for Calvary Presbyterian Church, Florham Park.

#### **COM-13**

Approved the session exemption request from Hungarian Presbyterian Church of Wharton.

## **Policy and Process for Psychological Evaluation for Fitness for Ministry of Pastor in the Presbytery of the Highlands**

The presbytery's duty to care for the health and well-being of its pastors and congregations (G-3.0303) includes the important responsibility of developing policies and procedures that are both effective and compassionate, thoughtfully addressing the needs of all involved.

The presbytery holds a sacred responsibility to care for the well-being of pastors, ensuring they are prepared and equipped for faithful ministry. In times following conflict, an involuntary dissolution, a disciplinary matter, or a significant mental or physical health concern, the presbytery's role is to offer guidance and support in discerning the pastor's readiness to continue serving. As part of this compassionate process, the presbytery may request a professional Psychological Evaluation for fitness, providing both the pastor and the faith community with clarity and confidence for the path forward.

In fulfilling its responsibility to provide care and oversight for its pastors and congregations, the Highlands presbytery, through the Commission on Ministry (COM), has a process in place to help assess a pastor's fitness for ministry in a manner that is both fair and compassionate, confidential and comprehensive.

This process is designed to support the pastor, providing care and guidance to promote their well-being and success as they move forward in faith and ministry.

### **Discernment<sup>1</sup>**

The Presbytery, through observation, conversation, and other means, will determine if there is a need to assess a pastor's fitness for ministry. This process will be approached with sensitivity and care. If, in carrying out such responsibilities, the Commission on Ministry becomes convinced that some psychological or psychiatric problem afflicting the minister is decreasing their effectiveness and affecting their relationship with the congregation or other relationships within the presbytery, the COM can inform the minister of that determination and request that the minister undergo a psychological or psychiatric evaluation. If the COM has determined that the problem is one that is so dramatically affecting the suitability for the call of the minister that the word imperatively demands that the COM take action, the presbytery's obligation, responsibility, and accountability for oversight remains and the presbytery may require a psychological examination.

### **Scheduling and Communication**

If an assessment is deemed necessary, the COM will arrange an appointment with Physis Associates for the pastor. The Presbytery will provide the necessary information outlining the reasons for the evaluation in a clear and respectful manner.

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<sup>1</sup> This section originates in "Commissioners' Resolution 97-1. On Requesting a Study of Use of Psychological and Psychiatric Evaluations (12.013-.019). Although it was approved in 1999 and is based upon the language in the former Form of Government, the General Assembly has affirmed that it continues to apply to the current Form of Government.

### **Financial Responsibility**

In most cases, if the Presbytery requires the assessment, the presbytery will cover the costs of the evaluation, including travel expenses.

### **Consent and Confidentiality**

The pastor will be asked to sign a waiver allowing a summary report of the assessment with recommendations to be shared with both the pastor and the appointed COM Care Team. All information will remain confidential and will be shared only with the pastor and the Care Team.

### **Care Team Appointment**

Before the scheduled assessment, the COM will appoint a Care Team, which will include up to three members of the COM, the Presbytery Leader, and if the pastor desires, another individual of the pastor's choosing from the presbytery who is not part of the COM. This team will provide ongoing support throughout the process.

### **Psychological Evaluation**

The evaluation may include the following assessments, along with additional tools recommended by the therapist as needed:

- Two clinical interviews
- MMPI-3 (Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory)
- Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory
- Rorschach Inkblot Test
- Thematic Apperception Test
- Physis Profile Questionnaire

### **Report and Findings**

Following the evaluation, the therapist will provide a report that addresses agreed-upon concerns. This report will summarize the outcomes of the testing and observations without disclosing unnecessary personal details. The report may include:

- The pastor's emotional and psychological well-being
- Identified issues or concerns that need to be addressed for the pastor's overall health
- Insights on how the pastor reached this point in their ministry and strategies to prevent similar challenges
- An assessment of the pastor's readiness to succeed in parish or other ministry, along with recommendations for achieving the necessary preparedness.

### **Follow-Up and Care Plan**

The report will be shared with both the pastor and the COM Care Team in hard copy only. After the process is complete, the report will be sealed and placed in the pastor's confidential file. The Care Team's role includes:

- Reviewing the report with the pastor in a supportive manner
- Collaborating with the pastor to develop a plan for moving forward
- Providing encouragement, guidance, and monitoring progress as needed

### **Pastor's Responsibilities**

The pastor's role throughout this process is to:

- Engage in the assessment with openness and good faith
- Avoid actions that might intentionally skew or disrupt the process
- Work collaboratively with the COM Care Team in a spirit of trust and transparency

### **Completion of the Process**

The COM Care Team and the pastor will work together to determine when the process is complete. The COM will be responsible for dismissing the COM Care Team.

The COM Care Team will report to the full COM on the nature of the completed process.

# **Church Development Team Report**

## **May 13, 2025**

### **Items for Consent Agenda:**

None.

### **Items for Action:**

None.

### **Items to Report:**

#### **CDT-1**

**New Grant Program:** Who is my Neighbor? Who is My Neighbor is a process of using your congregation's demographics to learn about the people in your neighborhood and ministry opportunities. Complete the Who is My Neighbor program and your session can apply for a \$1000 grant to reach out in mission and ministry to your neighbors.

#### **CDT-2**

CDT has approved a grant request from Alexandria First Presbyterian Church as they seek creative ways to engage the families in their local community.

#### **CDT-3**

CDT provides Liaisons to congregations in transition and helps support them with their discernment studies (Turn the Page). This discernment study and additional resources can be found on the Presbytery webpage.

#### **CDT-4**

CDT is currently supporting five congregations that are in transition.

#### **CDT-5**

CDT is responsible for providing support for New Church Developments. A liaison from our team is involved with the NCD: Sanctuary and Seed.

#### **CDT-6**

CDT is discussing possible speakers for 2025. More information to come.

## **Committee on Preparation for Ministry Report May 13, 2025**

### **Items for Consent Agenda**

None.

### **Items for Action**

None.

### **Items for Report**

*From the February 10, 2025 meeting:*

#### **CPM-1**

CRE Aspirant, Tricia Hayes, will do her Field Ed at Community Presbyterian Church, Chester. Tricia is a member of the Long Valley Presbyterian Church.

#### **CPM-2**

CRE Form 3 was edited to address information unique to the CRE process.

*From the March 10, 2025 meeting:*

#### **CPM-3**

Jessica Fisher (Certified Ready) requested, and CPM approved, that her status be paused until such time she feels ready to continue. Jessica is a member of Presbyterian Church of Morris Plains.

#### **CPM-4**

Candidate Benjamin Willans was authorized to take the Worship & Sacrament ordination exam in April. Benjamin is a member of the First Presbyterian Church of Whippany.

#### **CPM-5**

CRE Aspirant, Tricia Hayes, met with CPM for her annual review. CPM voted to continue with Tricia in this process. Tricia is a member of the Long Valley Presbyterian Church.

#### **CPM-6**

Rev. Tim Clarkson (Denville/Succasunna) and RE Dan Mullen (West Milford) were approved as 2025 exam readers.

*From the April 14, 2025 meeting:*

#### **CPM-7**

Form 4 was amended to include CRE aspirants; the Financial Policy was revised in order to clarify the terms of the policy.

**CPM-8**

CPM agreed to lead worship at the May Presbytery meeting. Rev. Chris Doyle will preach and preside at Communion, and REs Susan Vigilante-Williams and Craig Barth will assist.

**CPM-9**

CRE aspirant, Tricia Hayes, requested a \$1,000 grant. This request was approved on motion.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathi Heath and Chris Doyle, CPM Co-Moderators

**Nominating Committee**

**May 13, 2025**

**Administration and Coordinating Team**

**Class of 2027**

Rev. Michael Cuppett (A), Newton/First

**Blair Academy Consultation Team**

**Class of 2027**

Susan Johnson (A), Chester/Community

**Blair Academy Trustees**

**Class of 2027**

Rev. Jeanne Radak, Presbytery

## **Property and Insurance Team Report May 13, 2025**

### **Items for Consent Agenda:**

None.

### **Items for Action:**

None.

### **Items to Report:**

*From the April 28, 2025, meeting:*

#### **P&I-1**

##### **Sparta Manse Sale**

The Property & Insurance Team accepted the authority delegated to it from ACT to approve the final terms of the Sparta manse property, contingent upon a favorable vote of the congregation.

#### **P&I-2**

##### **Franklin Manse Sale**

The Property and Insurance Team approved for the Franklin Church to continue the process of selling its manse based on the contract for sale received from the church.

#### **P&I-3**

##### **Insurance Update**

Renewal quotes and accompanying information will be sent imminently. There will be no rate increase this year. Coverage and limits of liability for our GL and executive lines are staying the same as well as our deductibles. However, premiums will be impacted by a 5% automatic increase on the property values due to the continued inflation of building materials and labor.

## **Youth Leader Formation Team Report May 13, 2025**

### Triennium 2025 Updates:

Mae Martella, Children's Ministry Coordinator at The Presbyterian Church of Morris Plains, has been serving as the Triennium Registrar and coordinator for the Presbytery of the Highlands. Steve Gaden and Craig Barth will also be serving as chaperones. 10 youth and 1 college student from the Presbytery of the Highlands will be attending. The Highlands Presbytery is sharing a bus with the Presbytery of Northeast New Jersey and Hudson River Presbytery (NY). The group will have an opportunity to meet and get to know one another on Saturday, June 7<sup>th</sup> from 12 – 1:30 pm at the Morris Plains Presbyterian Church. Please pray for the youth and chaperones who will be attending Triennium, departing from Morris Plains Presbyterian Church on July 27<sup>th</sup> and returning early Friday morning, August 1<sup>st</sup>.

To find out more about Presbyterian Youth Triennium, visit their website.

<https://presbyterianyouthtriennium.org/>

Youth Ministry Workshop: Sunday, August 24, 2025; 2 pm – 6:30 pm

Save the Date – We will again be sponsoring a workshop this summer to provide resources, ideas and connection for all those who support youth learning, growth and programs within your churches and communities. Watch for more details about this event coming very soon!

We would love to hear about your summer youth ministry programs and mission trips.

To share news and to stay current on events and resources for youth ministry, check out the YLF webpage:

<https://highlandspresbytery.org/young-leader-formation-team/> If you are interested in joining the team, contact Steve Shussett at [steves@highlandspresbytery.org](mailto:steves@highlandspresbytery.org)

Submitted by:

Amy Clarkson, coordinator of the Young Leader Formation Team

**ATTACHMENTS:**