

The 14th Stated Meeting of The Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey

January 27, 2024

*(to be approved at the 15th 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 15th Stated Meeting on January 27th, 2024, on the ZOOM platform.

The Moderator, Ruling Elder Sue Cail (Ringwood Community), called the meeting to order at 10:00AM and led the opening prayer.

Introduction to Zoom Meeting and voting – *Vice-Moderator, Elder Sue Cail*

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>Congregation</u>	<u>Teaching Elder</u>		<u>Ruling Elder</u>	
Allamuchy, Panther Valley	Rev. James Vespoli	A		A
Alpha	Rev. Scott DeCaro	P		A
Andover	Vacant	V		A
Basking Ridge (3)	Rev. Dennis Jones	P	Joan Eichhorn	P
	Rev. Dr. Maureen Paterson	P	Roger Greenway	P
				A
Bedminster, Lamington	Rev. Caroline Jenkins	E		A
Belvidere	Rev. Dr. Pamela Szurek	E		A
Blairstown (2)	Rev. David Harvey	E	Mark Nelke	P
				A
Boonton (2)	Rev. Carie Morgan	P		A
				A
Bound Brook (3)	Rev. Linda Owens	P	Jamie Breeding	P
			Kathy Hobbs	P
			Betty Reimer	P
Branchville	Rev. Dr. Nancy Young	E	Kathleen Katzenstein	P
	Rev. David Young	E		
Califon, Fairmount	Rev. Mike Atzert	P	John Kratch	P
Califon, Lower Valley	Rev. Chad Rodgers	P		A
Cedar Knolls, Hildale Park	Rev. Ross Lang	E		A
Chatham Township (2)				A
	Rev. Thomas Brown	P		A
Chatham, Ogden Memorial	Rev. Kathi Heath	P		A
Chester	Rev. Christopher Scrivens	A		A
Clinton (2)	Rev. Tracey Henry	P		A
				A

Delaware	Vacant	V		A
Delaware, 1st Oxford	Vacant	V	Sue Marsh	P
Denville, Union Hill	Rev. Timothy Clarkson	P		A
Dover, First Memorial	Rev. Alan Schaefer (HR)	E		A
East Hanover	Vacant	V		A
East Hanover, Kitchell	Rev. Hannah Allred	P		A
Flanders (2)	Rev. Cliff Acklam	P	Lois Steward	P A
Flemington (3)	Rev. Amy Lincoln	P	Jamie Evans Eric Ruppel	P P A
Florham Park, Calvary	Rev. Ronald de Groot	P	Penny Sharp	P
Franklin (2)	Rev. Julie Raffety	E	Rich Simmons Beth Westerfield	P P
Frenchtown (2)	Rev. Merideth Mueller- Bolton	P		A A
Gillette, Meyersville	Rev. Stefanie Muntzel	P		A
Hackettstown	Rev. Erin Hayes-Cook	A	Michelle Cameron	P
Hampton, Musconetcong Valley	Stephanie Farley, CRE	P		A
Hillsborough, TAFPC	Vacant	V		A
Lambertville (2)	Vacant	V		A A
Lambertville, 2nd English	Rev. H. Bradford Morgan	A		A
Long Valley	Vacant	V	Daniel Knauer	P
Long Valley, Highlands	Rev. Robin Burton Palmer	P		A
Madison	Rev. Jacquelyn Van Vliet	P	Becky Moody	P
Mendham	Rev. Scot McCachren	A	Per Ralamb	P
Milford	Rev. Dr. Linda Erkert- Bullock	A		A
Milford, Alexandria (2)	Rev. Nicholas Hatch	A		A A
Milford, Holland Bible	Rev. Geoff Stanley	A		A
Mine Hill	Vacant	V	Debbie Hooper	P
Morris Plains	Rev. Donald Brown	A	Susan Vigilante	P
Morristown (3)	Rev. Daniel Vigilante Rev. Audrey Webber	A P	Craig Barth Betty Darcy	P P A
New Vernon	Rev. William Stone	P		A
Newton	Rev. Heather Morrison Yaden	A		A
Newton, Yellow Frame	Rev. Michael Nelms	A		A
Oak Ridge	Rev. Dr. Christopher Doyle	P	Dave McDonald	P
Ogdensburg	Rev. Alden Johnson	A		A
Parsippany	Rev. Donald Bragg	A		A
Phillipsburg, Harmony	Rev. Scott Bohr	P		A

Phillipsburg, Pilgrim	Rev. Richard Gelson	P		A
Pittstown, Bethlehem	Rev. Linda Gaden	A	Jane Weiss	P
Pluckemin (2)	Rev. Ian Rankine	A		A A
Port Murray, Rockport	Rev. Robert “Bronc” Radak	P		A
Ringoes, 1st Amwell	Vacant	V		A
Ringoes, Kirkpatrick (2)	Rev. Dr. Barbara Booth-Jarmon	P	Norma Zimmerman	P A
Ringwood	Rev. Fred Milligan	P		A
Rockaway (2)	Rev. Ryon Herin	P	Deborah Harrington Donna Van Duyne	P P
Somerset (2)	Rev. Nancy Nalepa-Skibo	P	Tom Hauck	P A
Sparta	Rev. Dr. Patrick Sileo	E	Jennifer Harmsen	P
Stanhope	Rev. Peter Magnan	P		A
Stewartsville	Rev. Stephen Choi	P	Denise DeMasi	P
Stewartsville, Old Greenwich	Rev. Mary Beth Mardis-Lecroy	P	Lisa Kolterjahn	P
Stirling	Rev. Stefanie Muntzel	P		A
Stockton	Rev. David Snyder	P	Iren McKnight	P
Succasunna (2)	Rev. Timothy Clarkson	P		A A
Sussex	Rev. Katherine Scott-Kirschner	P	Charles Bates	P
Titusville	Vacant	V	Kristine Schmidt	P
Wantage, Beemerville	Rev. Barry Young	A		A
Warren, Trinity United	Rev. Amy Sandlin	P	Kay Hurd	P
Washington	Rev. James Scovell	A		A
West Milford (2)	Rev. Dr. Christopher Doyle	P		A A
Wharton	Rev. Sarah Green	E		A
Wharton, Berkshire Valley	Rev. Dr. Kenneth Ngwa	P		A
Wharton, Hungarian	Vacant	V		A
Whippany	Rev. Sarah Cairatti	A		A

Teaching Elders Engaged in a Validated Ministry

Rev. Joanne Miller	E
Rev. Robin Miller Curras <i>(serving church out of bounds)</i>	A
Rev. Christine Davies	P
Rev. Jennifer Hrynyk	A
Rev. John C. Kile	A
Rev. Jeanne Radak <i>(Presbytery Leader – Highlands Presbytery)</i>	P
Rev. Beth Scibienski <i>(Serving RCA church)</i>	A
Rev. Salvatore Seirmarco <i>(Chaplain – United Methodist Communities)</i>	A
Rev. Dr. Steven Shussett, Stated Clerk <i>(Highlands Presbytery)</i>	P
Rev. Christopher Small <i>(Chaplain – Hunterdon Healthcare Systems)</i>	A
Rev. Angella Son <i>(Professor – Drew University)</i>	P

Rev. Caroline Unzaga	P
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Members at Large

Rev. Leslie Dobbs-Allsopp	A
Rev. M. Elizabeth Blythe	A
Rev. Justin Choi	A
Rev. Dr. Ellen Clemot	P
Rev. Courtney Cromie	A
Rev. Dan Dorrow	A
Rev. Jin Hee Han	A
Rev. Ryan Irmer	P
Rev. Donna McDaid	A
Rev. Hayley O'Connor	A
Rev. Gail Pendleton	A
Rev. Annie Tsai	A

Honorably Retired

Rev. Peter Amerman	E
Rev. Jeff Archer	E
Rev. Nancy Asbury	E
Rev. Barbara Aspinall	E
Rev. Charles Baier	E
Rev. Joicy Becker-Richards	E
Rev. Robert Beringer	E
Rev. George Blank	E
Rev. Sally Campbell	E
Rev. Robert Colman	E
Rev. Cynthia Cowner	E
Rev. William Culton	P
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. Benhardt Fraumann	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	E
Rev. Fred Milligan	E
Rev. James Morris	E
Rev. Elizabeth Morrison	E
Rev. Szabolcs Nagy	E
Rev. Chet Penza	E
Rev. Barbara Peters	E
Rev. John Potter	P
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. Charles Thompson	E
Rev. Alfred Tisdale	E
Rev. John Verser	E
Rev. Deirdre Greenwood White	E
Rev. David Young	E
Rev. Dr. Nancy Young	E

Ruling Elders by Virtue of Office

John Crozier, First Presbyterian Church of Boonton, COM Co-Moderator	P
Wendy Doidge, Presbyterian Church in Morristown, Past Moderator	P
Alan Ford, Bethlehem Presbyterian Church, Pittstown, Past Moderator	P
John Hellriegel, Community Presbyterian Church, Chester, ACT Member	P
Alec Jain, Presbyterian Church of Morris Plains, ACT Member	P
Joe Martinoni, First Presbyterian Church of Rockaway, Past Moderator	P
Pete Peterson, Clinton Presbyterian Church, ACT Co-Moderator	P
Mel Prestamo, Long Valley Presbyterian Church, Past Moderator	P
Donna Rahmann, Fairmount Presbyterian Church, Califon, CPM Co-Moderator	P

Others in Attendance

Sonja Gaertner, (Office Manager & Attendance Clerk) <i>Highlands Presbytery</i>	P
Lizabeth Hutchinson (Financial Administrator) <i>Highlands Presbytery</i>	P
Jeanne Perry, Community Presbyterian Church, Chester, Visitor	P
Phyllis Prestamo, Long Valley Presbyterian Church, Visitor	P
Elise Russell Bates, Long Valley Presbyterian Church & Johnsonburg Camp & Retreat Center	P

Total in Attendance – 96

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

WORDS OF GREETING

INTRODUCTION OF NEW RULING ELDER COMMISSIONERS

Ruling Elder Daniel Knauer, Long Valley Presbyterian, Long Valley

Ruling Elder Eric Ruppel, Flemington Presbyterian Church, Flemington

Ruling Elder John Kratch, Fairmount Presbyterian Church, Califon

Ruling Elder Norma Zimmerman, Kirkpatrick Memorial Church, Ringoes

Ruling Elder Penny Sharp, Calvary Presbyterian Church, Florham Park

Ruling Elder Michele Cameron, Hackettstown Presbyterian, Hackettstown

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY

Ruling Elder John Crozier (Boonton), Co-Moderator of the Committee on Ministry, made the following introductions:

Rev. Mike Atzert, Covenant Supply Pastor, Fairmount Presbyterian Church, Califon

Rev. Dr. Barbara Booth-Jarmon (Ret), Covenant Supply Pastor, Kirkpatrick Memorial Presbyterian Church, Ringoes

Rev. Timothy Clarkson, Covenant Supply Pastor First Presbyterian Church of Succasunna & Union Hill Presbyterian Church, Denville

EXPLANATION OF UNANIMOUS CONSENT

ITEMS FOR UNANIMOUS CONSENT:

CORRESPONDING MEMBERS AND GUESTS

Ruling Elder Elise Bates Russell, Long Valley Presbyterian Church and Executive Director, Johnsonburg Camp and Retreat Center

Ruling Elder Phyllis Prestamo, currently a Deacon at the Long Valley Presbyterian Church

These persons were seated by **UNANIMOUS CONSENT**.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

The agenda was placed before the Presbytery for action by unanimous consent. The Stated Clerk reported that an item of New Business was received, meeting the Guidelines for making such a request. Following those same guidelines, the Moderator, in consultation with the Stated Clerk, has determined that this item of business is more properly processed by the Committee on Ministry according to its traditional oversight, rather than placed before the Presbytery as a whole.

The Stated Clerk reported that Rev. Ryan Irmer (Member at Large) had been informed of this decision, and was told that upon his contacting the Co-Moderators of COM, he would have time at their February 6 meeting to discuss the matter. At that point the Committee would determine if bringing the issue before the entire Presbytery at its next stated meeting in March was appropriate.

Rev. Irmer objected to directing the matter to COM, and it was placed under New Business, per the Guidelines. The Agenda was then approved by **UNANIMOUS CONSENT**.

CONSENT AGENDA & STATED CLERK'S REPORT

Before placing the Consent Agenda and Stated Clerk's Report before the Presbytery for unanimous consent, the Stated Clerk highlighted SC-9, drawing attention to a Remedial Case that has been filed against the Presbytery. He further explained what a Remedial Case is, and the difference between an irregularity and a delinquency according to Church Discipline.

SC-1

Approve the minutes of the Presbytery meeting held November 14, 2023.

SC-2

Approve excuses for the Presbytery meeting of January 27, 2024.

SC-3

Receive the report of the Administration and Coordinating Team.

SC-4

Receive the report of the Committee on Ministry.

SC-5

Receive the report of the Nominating Committee.

SC-6

Receive the report of the Property and Insurance Team.

SC-7

Receive the report of the Young Leader Formation Team.

STATED CLERKS REPORT**Items to Report:****SC-8**

On December 6, 2023, pursuant to D-4.0207a "Effects of Jurisdiction," and the Decision and Order received, the Presbytery Stated Clerk communicated to the Synod Stated Clerk, Rev. Nancy Talbot, that the Presbytery of the Highlands was informed of the Synod Permanent Judicial Commission's denial of the appeal heard in SNE 2023-01 "Rev. Dr. Scott Foster (Appellant) V. The Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey (Appellee)"

SC-9

On November 29, 2023, Rev. Ryan Irmer filed a remedial complaint with the Synod of the Northeast against the Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey, which is his presbytery of membership. This action, which continues to this date, concerns the dissolution of his pastoral relationship with the Long Valley Presbyterian Church and the events leading up to it.

SC-10

The Presbytery is reminded that the Manual of Operations for the Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey is available on the website. It includes:

1. The Presbytery Bylaws and Guidelines, including:
 - a. Child and Youth Protection Policy (March 16, 2021)
 - b. Sexual Misconduct Policy (March 16, 2021)
 - c. Electronic Meeting Policy
 - d. Personnel Policy and Practices
2. Committee and Team Descriptions
3. Ethical Standards for Ministers
4. Committee on Ministry Policies and Terms of Call, including:
 - a. Family Leave Policy
 - b. Dissolution Agreements
 - c. Background Check Application

- d. Criminal Background Check
- e. Ethical Standards for Ordained Officers
- f. Commissioned Ruling Elder Policy
- 5. Property and Insurance Policies and Resources
- 6. Committee on Preparation for Ministry Handbook and Policies
- 7. Presbytery Staff and Volunteer Position Descriptions
- 8. Financial Management Policies and Guidelines

SC-11

D-3.0602 Quorum for a Permanent Judicial Commission

b. Roster of Former Members

“The stated clerk shall keep a current roster of those members of the permanent judicial commission whose terms have expired within the past six years. The names shall be arranged alphabetically within classes beginning with the most recent class. The stated clerk shall report the roster annually to the council or councils.”

Class of 2023

Rev. Dr. Jefferson Hatch (Ret)

Elder Alec Jain, Morris Plains/Presbyterian

Rev. Dennis Jones, Basking Ridge/Presbyterian

Elder Ray Smickle, Belvidere/United

The Consent Agenda, including the Stated Clerk’s Report, was placed before the Presbytery for unanimous consent.

Rev. Ryan Irmer objected, and asked that

SC-1 The November 2023 Stated Meeting Minutes

SC-9 Notice of Rev. Irmer’s Remedial Complaint against Highlands Presbytery be removed the Consent Agenda. These items were placed under New Business, per the Guidelines.

WORSHIP – Discerning our Gifts

Worship was led by Moderator Cail, Vice-Moderator Rev. Chad Rodgers (Lower Valley), and Ruling Elder Joe Martinoni (Rockaway) who preached. Music was provided by Rev. Rich Gelson (Pilgrim), and Ruling Elder Lisa Kolterjahn (Old Greenwich) led liturgy concerning the offering for the Clergy Care Fund.

INVITATION TO DIGITAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

Moderator Cail invited participants to place their announcements in the Chat Function, to be shared later in the meeting.

MISSION PRESENTATION #1

Phyllis Prestamo from Long Valley Presbyterian Church presented the Long Valley Community Assistance Program and Food Pantry.

PROPERTY & INSURANCE TEAM

Co-Moderator Lisa Kolterjahn spoke to the work of the Property & Insurance Team. She reported that work is still ongoing regarding the New Jersey Insurance Partnership, and Manse Grants are available for manses that have pastors living in them. She also highlighted programs available through Philadelphia Insurance including boundary training and water detection devices.

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY

Co-Moderator John Crozier presented the following:

The Committee on Ministry recommends approval of the Presbyterian Church of Morristown's request to change the status of the Rev. Audrey Webber from Covenant Supply Associate Pastor to Installed Associate Pastor. A 3/4th vote of presbytery is required. (G-2.0504c)

MOTION APPROVED BY 3/4 VOTE OF THE PRESBYTERY

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Rev. Amy Lincoln (Flemington) presented the following slate for nomination:

Committee on Ministry, Class of 2026

Rev. Cliff Acklam, United Presbyterian Church, Flanders

Committee on Preparation for Ministry, Class of 2025

Elder Craig Barth, Presbyterian Church in Morristown

Church Development Team, Class of 2026

Elder Betsy Engelhardt, West Milford Presbyterian Church

Rev. Sarah Green, Wharton United Community Church

SLATE APPROVED AS PRESENTED

MISSION PRESENTATION #1

Rev. Rich Gelson spoke to Pilgrim's partnership with NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) of Warren County.

YOUNG LEADER FORMATION TEAM

Rev. Katherine Scott-Kirschner (Sussex) presented the work of the Young Leader Formation Team, including their January 20th workshop for church leaders and volunteers who are involved in youth ministry.

On March 2, 2024, 9 am – 1 pm, the YLF Team will host *A Time Apart – A Family Spirituality Camp* at Johnsonburg Presbyterian Camp and Conference Center.

ADMINISTRATION AND COORDINATING TEAM

Pete Peterson introduced the following from ACT: That the Presbytery overture the 226th General Assembly for Review and Evaluation of the Preparation for Ministry process and the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates. Questions and conversations were moderated.

The motion in its entirety can be found under Reports, at the end of these minutes.

MOTION APPROVED

SHARING OF DIGITAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Highlands-Nairobi Partnership is planning a trip to Kenya this summer! July 18-Aug 1. Anyone interested can contact John Hellriegel at 973-513 5154 or johnnyhell@hotmail.com

DISCERNMENT TEAM

Rev. Hannah Faye Allred (Kitchell) led the Presbytery in a process meant to contribute to the work of the Discernment Team. “How can we equip ourselves for the journey ahead?” The idea of a Presbytery Scramble (pulpit swap) on or around Pentecost was introduced. This activity will be celebrated at the September Presbytery Meeting.

Breakout groups were formed to reflect on the following questions:

- What do you need for the journey that the Presbytery can provide?
- What do you have that you can share with the Presbytery?

Results will be published at a later date.

JOHNSONBURG CAMP AND RETREAT CENTER

Elise Bates Russell highlighted her sabbatical, which included walking the Camino de Santiago, an experience which she is prepared to share with interested churches and groups. She announced that registration is now open for Summer Camp 2024, and that many other functions and retreats have been scheduled.

The March for the Future Campaign continues, and the Highlands Pavilion almost complete. The pavilion will be dedicated at the May 14th Presbytery Meeting.

Other building improvements are underway.

NEW BUSINESS

The Moderator reminded the Presbytery that the three items that had been removed from the Agenda and Consent Agenda would be discussed under New Business. The Stated Clerk informed the Presbytery that these items would be addressed in the order in which they were removed. The Clerk confirmed that the person removing these items, Rev. Irmer, was present.

AGENDA

The Stated Clerk reminded Rev. Irmer that the present discussion was not to be an explanation of his complaint, as much as why the process of directing his concern to the appropriate committee was, in fact, inappropriate, and that this “irregularity be corrected.” Rev. Irmer agreed to the two minute speech limit.

Following his comments, the Moderator asked Rev. Irmer if he had a motion to put forward. MOTION: that this “irregularity be discussed at this time and place.”

The Presbytery Leader, Jeanne Radak, noted the lack of time given to prepare for the motion, and recounted that Guidelines were in place for this very reason.

The Moderator repeated her call for a second.

THE MOTION WAS NOT SECONDED.

SC-1

The motion to “Approve the minutes of the Presbytery meeting held November 14, 2023” had been removed from Consent Agenda. Rev. Irmer was told that he could comment on the minutes but could not move to change them, as he was not present. When given the opportunity, Rev. Irmer stated that he had incorrectly been listed as “Absent” from that meeting, when he had attempted to attend but was denied permission. The Stated Clerk agreed that “Absent” was incorrect, as at the time Rev. Irmer was told he could not attend, he was told that he would be marked as “Excused.” That correction was made, for approval at the March 2024 Presbytery meeting.

SC-9

The Stated Clerk informed the Presbytery of the following:

1. According to D-4.0207 Effects of Jurisdiction
“Jurisdiction in remedial process has the following particular effects:
a. Each council shall recognize and enforce the judgments, decisions, and orders of higher councils which have jurisdiction over them under the provisions of the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).”

He shared his understanding that one aspect of officially recognizing that a Remedial Case had been filed is to place it in the Presbytery’s reports so that all might be informed. He further noted that:

2. Remedial cases are not confidential in the same way that disciplinary cases are.
3. SC-9 is a report of the Stated Clerk, not an item under the Consent Agenda.
According to RONR 51.18, “consideration of a matter that was referred to a board or committee cannot be objected to (26) when it is reported on — regardless of whether the matter was referred as a pending question (13) or as a subject on which no question was pending.” In this case, as a report, no question was pending.

With that background, Rev. Irmer was invited to speak to his concern regarding SC-9, and after providing his explanation, MOVED the following addition (in **bold**):

SC-9 On November 29, 2023 Rev. Ryan Irmer filed a remedial complaint with the Synod of the Northeast against the Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey, which is his presbytery of membership. This action, which continues to this date, concerns the dissolution of his pastoral relationship with the Long Valley Presbyterian Church and the events leading up to it, **and the events which followed it.**

The Stated Clerk told the Presbytery that he could concur to that addition, if there was no objection from those assembled. No objection was raised.

Items SC-1 and SC-9 will be corrected or amended for the March 2024 minutes, and the January 2024 Consent Agenda will again be placed before the Presbytery for its approval or additional action.

The Moderator moved that the meeting be adjourned following the blessing. This **MOTION** was **SECONDED, AND CARRIED.**

ADJOURNMENT

Moderator Cail closed the meeting after prayer at 12:19pm.

Attested: _____
Steven H. Shussett Stated Clerk

REPORTS:

The Presbytery of the Highlands Overtures the General Assembly
Administrative & Coordinating Team Report
Property & Insurance Team Report
Young Leader Formation Team Report

OVERTURE TO THE 226th General Assembly (2024)

The Presbytery of the Highlands overtures the 226th General Assembly (2024) of the PC (USA) to appoint a committee to review the overall Preparation for Ministry process, and make recommendations for relevant and appropriate changes to the 227th General Assembly (2026).

The Committee will be responsible for the following:

- An overall review of the Preparation for Ministry process including an assessment, evaluation, and recommendations for changes to the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates (PCC):
 - revision of the handbook, including the process.
 - development of ordination exams
 - selection/nomination of the team responsible for overseeing exam writers.
- Make recommendations for next steps to bring the process in line with today's church and its needs, or to develop a new process.
- The committee shall consult with presbytery leaders and CPM moderators concerning the process including a discussion on their understanding and suggestions concerning G-2.0607d:

“examination materials, together with evaluations that declare those materials satisfactory in the areas covered by any standard ordination examination approved by the General Assembly. Such examinations shall be prepared and administered by a body created by the presbyteries.”
- The committee shall consult with the Unification Commission on issues and concerns about the Preparation for Ministry process.
- The committee shall consider the following questions in their report to the 226th General Assembly
 - Are ordination exams still necessary in the church today? Are the process and exams as they are now meeting the moment of the church and culture? Do they perpetuate white privilege culture and values?
 - Is the process helpful to form people who will be operating within this white privilege culture church or is the process missing the point at which the church is trying to move beyond?
 - What are ordination exams looking for and are they the best way method to find it? What is being examined that isn't already discovered through the CPM process and the requirement of a seminary education?
 - If the exams are still necessary, how might they examine what needs to be understood in the multicultural, racial, and power-imbalanced 21st century? Are these exams still serving their greater intended purpose?"
 - How can readers come to the process without their cultural bias and

perhaps “old school” view of the church, and provide an objective and impartial to test taker responses that may not reflect the reader’s cultural understanding? How does having evaluators who don’t know the test takers or anything about them improve the preparation for the ministry process?

- How do we improve the integrity and relevance of preparing people for ministry to benefit the church and culture in the post pandemic world?
- The General Assembly moderator(s) appoint a team of 12 which will include at least four mid council leaders and two moderators of Committee of Preparation. The moderators should also consider for the committee recently ordained clergy, ruling elders, men and women, and a diversity of ages, cultures, racial and gender identity. The team should be staffed and receive support from the Office for Ordered Ministry and Certification, The Office of Racial Equity and Women’s Intercultural Ministries, The Office of Theological Education

Rationale

In early 2023 the Exegesis examination, developed by the Presbyteries’ Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates (PCCEC) focused on Judges 19, the rape and dismemberment of a concubine. Many test takers, mid council leaders, CPM moderators and others have pushed back that this was an inappropriate passage to use for students to demonstrate their ability to exegete a passage. Many test takers and exam readers found this text hard to read, let alone useful for formulating a curriculum for college students; some acknowledged that it triggered trauma responses. The response of the PCCEC to the concerns expressed by mid council and CPM leaders was slow.

In the weeks and months following, The PCCEC slowly shared information on how they determined that this was an appropriate passage to use. What we learned from those exchanges and conversations is that the process for developing the examinations works on a three-year cycle. Within that cycle anyone on the PCCEC can flag exam passages, questions or scriptures as inappropriate or in need of revision or editing. This particular passage did raise flags but remained in the process. We also learned that the PCCEC process does not include any input from other OGA/PMA staff, other diverse voices, or feedback from outside the committee, (even those bodies created expressly for that purpose) thus forming a closed loop of conversation and information. The PCC’s funding model, unusual for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), was cited as a hindrance to a more open system.

The process for ongoing conversation about examining seminarians failed both the students and the presbyteries the PCCEC is meant to serve. A story about the rape,

abuse, and dismemberment of a woman was not appropriate for exegesis by candidates for ministry. Even well-seasoned pastors would approach this conversation with caution, if at all.

The test takers were told they could not consult or speak to anyone about the test while they were taking it. Many students became upset with the material but felt that they couldn't speak with anyone for fear it would cause them to fail the exam. The ordination exam is already stressful, and being faced with questions that causes trauma and not being able to discuss this with anyone is unconscionable. The exam instructions were silent on how to seek help if this passage triggered a trauma response or traumatized the exam taker. A recent pilot project initiated by the PCC seeks to remedy concerns about seeking support and counseling during the exam, but this was no doubt instigated by the volume of comments that came from outside the closed loop.

When the mid councils and CPM leaders sought explanations about the exam the response from the OGA and the PCCEC was inadequate, very slow, frustrating, and confusing.

What was learned from this experience is that the PCCEC and the ordination exam process no longer functions as a confidential process but as a secretive process. The ability to appropriately and nimbly respond to concerns is inadequate and confusing. Concerns raised even within the Committee went unheeded. The whole process, including the structure and funding of the PCCEC hasn't been thoroughly examined in a very long time. The Book of Order reference (G-2.0607d) that the process is developed by the presbyteries no longer applies.

The conversation concerning ordination exams this last year also prompted other conversations and questions concerning exams and the process of ordination.

- Are the exams still necessary and if so, how can they examine what needs to be examined in a multiracial, multicultural, power-imbalanced 21st century?
- Are the exams and the process in the present form meeting the moment of the church and culture? Or are they perpetuating a white privilege culture and values beyond their reasonable life in the church?
- Is the process as a whole helpful to form people who will be operating within this white privilege culture church or are they missing the point at which the church is trying to move beyond?
- Is the present process and ordination examinations out of touch with the reality of church life, culture and ministry?

These events and conversations have led to the overture asking for a full review of the process in light of the church today.

Administration and Coordinating Team Report

January 27, 2024

Items for Report:

The ACT reports the following from their November 28, 2023 meeting:

ACT-2

Approved the 2024 ACT meeting dates.

ACT-3

Assigned the Book of Order mandates as follows:

- Anti-racism policy – Committee on Representation
- Anti-harassment policy – ACT Personnel team

ACT-4

Agreed that the Presbytery meeting themes for 2024 will be “*Sharing Our Gifts*” with sub themes of “*Discerning Our Gifts*”, “*Using/Offering Our Gifts*” and “*Communicating Our Gifts*”.

ACT-5

Moderator Sue Cail reported she attended the PCUSA Moderators Conference in Louisville, KY.

ACT-6

The Stated Clerk reported we had been informed by the Synod Stated Clerk that a remedial complaint will be filed against presbytery.

ACT-7

The Presbytery Leader reported the part 2 of her sabbatical will be May 18 – July 10, 2024.

ACT-8

Approved the 2024 Terms of Call for the Presbytery Leader Jeanne Radak and Stated Clerk/Resource Staff Steven Shussett.

The ACT reports the following from the Special ACT meeting on January 10, 2024:

ACT-9

The ACT appointed the following to serve as the Committee of Counsel for the case of Ryan Irmer vs. The Presbytery of The Highlands of NJ:

- Elder Joe Martinoni – First Presbyterian Church of Rockaway
- Elder Becky Moody – Presbyterian Church of Madison
- Rev. Stefanie Muntzel – First Presbyterian Church, Stirling and Meyersville Presbyterian Church, Gillette

ACT-10

Reviewed the draft of an Overture to the General Assembly calling for the Review and Evaluation of the Preparation for Ministry process and the Presbyteries’ Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates.

ACT-11

Reviewed the draft of Guidelines for Presbytery Commissioners Participating in a Hybrid or Online Presbytery Meeting.

The ACT reports the following from the Special ACT meeting on January 18, 2024:

ACT-12

Approved recommending the Overture to the General Assembly for the Review and Evaluation of the Preparation for Ministry process and the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates.

ACT-13

Approved the Guidelines for Presbytery Commissioners Participating in a Hybrid or Online Presbytery Meeting.

ACT-14

Participated in a discussion of the ACT responsibilities, 2024 schedule, and upcoming work for the year.

Property and Insurance Team Report
January 27, 2024

Items for Report:

From the January 23, 2024 meeting:

P&I-1

Group of representatives from the New Jersey presbyteries are still working on the insurance program.

P&I-2

Manse Grant application is available on the Presbytery website. All applications are due by February 20, 2024.

P&I-3

For those churches who are covered by Philadelphia Insurance they offer a training session that could fit the needs for Session Boundary Training and PHLYSense which is a water and temperature sensing device which can help prevent damage.

Young Leader Formation Team Report

January 27, 2024

Items to Report:

The Young Leader Formation Team hosted a free virtual workshop on January 20th for church leaders and volunteers who are involved in youth ministry.

Megan DeWald, Director of the [Institute for Youth Ministry](#) at Princeton Theological Seminary, facilitated a conversation on the topic of ***Building Innovative Ministry With Young People***.

She provided information about the IYM's resources including the [Log College Project](#). Megan challenged youth leaders to shift and expand their thinking and approaches to Youth Ministry to build innovative, just, thoughtful and creative ministry with the young people in congregations and surrounding communities.

On March 2, 2024, 9 am – 1 pm, the YLF Team will host *A Time Apart – A Family Spirituality Camp* at Johnsonburg Presbyterian Camp and Conference Center.

[To register, click here](#)

In this morning of teaching, experience, fun, crafts, and music, those present will learn about what it means to live out a relationship with God in the daily moments of life.

Research in *The Spiritual Child* shows that “children who have a positive, active relationship to spirituality” are less likely to use and abuse substances, be depressed in their teenage years, or participate in dangerous activities. “The only thing that science has shown to reliably predict fulfillment, success, and thriving [is] a child’s spiritual development.” There is **no fee** for this event or lunch, but a freewill offering will be received. RSVPs are required to ensure we have enough supplies.

Save the Date: YLF Annual Summer Workshop for Youth Leaders: Sunday, August 25th.

To stay current on events and resources for youth ministry, check out the YLF webpage: <https://highlandspresbytery.org/young-leader-formation-team/>