

The 16th Stated Meeting of The Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey

May 14th, 2024

*(to be approved at the 17th Stated Meeting of
The Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey)*

Prior to the business meeting, the following took place:

Rev. Dr. Carrie Mitchell, Regional Representative, Board of Pensions, updated invited persons on changes occurring to the medical coverage;

Worship was led by Rev. Ruth Santana-Grace, Moderator of the General Assembly and Executive Presbyter, Presbytery of Philadelphia. She preached and presided at the Lord's Supper.

Elise Bates Russell, Executive Director, Johnsonburg Camp and Retreat Center, and Presbytery Leader Jeanne Radak led a service of dedication for the new Highlands Pavilion, made possible by the generosity 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 May 14th, 2024, at Johnsonburg Camp & Retreat Center and on the ZOOM platform.

The Moderator, Ruling Elder Sue Cail (Ringwood Community), called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM and led the opening prayer.

Introduction to the Hybrid Meeting Process and voting – *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		A
				A
Bedminster, Lamington	Vacant	V	Fred Paine	P
Belvidere	Rev. Dr. Pamela Szurek	A		A
Blairstown (2)	Rev. David Harvey	P	Lisa Besser	P
				A
Boonton (2)	Rev. Carie Morgan	P	Meg Meyer	P
				A
Bound Brook (3)	Rev. Linda Owens	P	Douglas Boleyn	P
			Jamie Breeding	P
			Tom Blazek	P
Branchville	Rev. Dr. Nancy Young	P	Buzz Alden	P
	Rev. David Young	P		
Califon, Fairmount	Rev. Mike Atzert	P		A
Califon, Lower Valley	Vacant	V		A
Cedar Knolls, Hildale Park	Rev. Ross Lang	P		A

Chatham Township (2)	Vacant Rev. Thomas Brown	V P		A A
Chatham, Ogden Memorial	Rev. Kathi Heath	P	Allan Paradise	A
Chester	Rev. Christopher Scrivens	P	Jeanne Perry	A
Clinton (2)	Rev. Tracey Henry	P		A A
Delaware	Vacant	V		A
Delaware, 1st Oxford	Vacant	V		A
Denville, Union Hill	Rev. Timothy Clarkson	P		A
Dover, First Memorial	Rev. Alan Schaefer (HR)	P	Jeanette Felch	P
East Hanover	Vacant	V		A
East Hanover, Kitchell	Rev. Hannah Allred	A		A
Flanders (2)	Rev. Cliff Acklam	P	Lois Steward	P A
Flemington (3)	Rev. Amy Lincoln	E	Ann Engberg Jamie Evans Dale Perry	P P P
Florham Park, Calvary	Rev. Ronald de Groot	P	Penny Sharp	P
Franklin (2)	Rev. Julie Raffety	P		A A
Frenchtown (2)	Rev. Merideth Mueller-Bolton	P	Kathy Skerbenz	P A
Gillette, Meyersville	Rev. Stefanie Muntzel	P	Loura Zijdel-Eelkema	P
Hackettstown	Rev. Erin Hayes-Cook	P	Donna Erickson	P
Hampton, Musconetcong Valley	Stephanie Farley, CRE	A		A
Hillsborough, TAFPC	Vacant	V		A
Lambertville (2)	Vacant	V	Phillip McCloughan	P A
Lambertville, 2nd English	Vacant	V		A
Long Valley	Vacant	V	Tricia Hayes	P
Long Valley, Highlands	Rev. Robin Burton Palmer	P	Ruth Babula	P
Madison	Vacant	V	Becky Moody	P
Mendham	Rev. Scot McCachren	A		A
Milford	Rev. Dr. Linda Erkert-Bullock	A		A
Milford, Alexandria (2)	Rev. Nicholas Hatch	E		A A
Milford, Holland Bible	Rev. Geoff Stanley	A	Virginia Derbyshire	P
Mine Hill	Vacant	V	Randy Hooper	P
Morris Plains	Rev. Donald Brown	P	Sue Spidell	P
Morristown (3)	Rev. Daniel Vigilante Rev. Audrey Webber	A A	Craig Barth Linda Schober	P P A
New Vernon	Rev. William Stone	P	Donna Miller	P
Newton	Rev. Heather Morrison Yaden	P	Judy Prendergast	P
Newton, Yellow Frame	Rev. Michael Nelms	A		A
Oak Ridge	Rev. Dr. Christopher Doyle	P		A
Ogdensburg	Rev. Alden Johnson	A		A
Parsippany	Rev. Donald Bragg	P		A
Phillipsburg, Harmony	Rev. Scott Bohr	A		A
Phillipsburg, Pilgrim	Rev. Richard Gelson	P	Deb McGuiness	P
Pittstown, Bethlehem	Rev. Linda Gaden	P	Chip Kalfaian	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	Linda Hults	P A
Ringwood	Rev. Fred Milligan	P		A
Rockaway (2)	Rev. Ryon Herin	P	Vivian Santos	P A
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	Carol Barry	P
Stewartsville	Rev. Stephen Choi	P	Judy Melchore	P
Stewartsville, Old Greenwich	Rev. Mary Beth Mardis-Lecroy	E		A
Stirling	Rev. Stefanie Muntzel	P		A
Stockton	Rev. David Snyder	A		A
Succasunna (2)	Rev. Timothy Clarkson	P		A A
Sussex	Rev. Katherine Scott-Kirschner	P	Richard Hayzler	P
Titusville	Vacant	V	Kristine Schmidt	P
Wantage, Beemerville	Rev. Barry Young	P		A
Warren, Trinity United	Rev. Amy Sandlin	P		A
Washington	Rev. James Scovell	A		A
West Milford (2)	Rev. Dr. Christopher Doyle	P		A A
Wharton	Rev. Sarah Green	P		A
Wharton, Berkshire Valley	Rev. Dr. Kenneth Ngwa	A		A
Wharton, Hungarian	Vacant	V	Steve Lance	P
Whippany	Rev. Sarah Cairatti	A	Tim Lee	P

Teaching Elders Engaged in a Validated Ministry

Rev. Joanne Miller	A
Rev. Robin Miller Curras (<i>serving church out of bounds</i>)	P
Rev. Christine Davies	P
Rev. Jennifer Hrynyk	A
Rev. John C. Kile	P
Rev. Jeanne Radak (<i>Presbytery Leader – Highlands Presbytery</i>)	P
Rev. Chad Rodgers (<i>Director of Activities - Johnsonburg Camp & Retreat Center</i>)	P
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>)	A
Rev. Caroline Unzaga	A

Members at Large

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

Rev. Annie Tsai	A
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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. Robert Colman	E
Rev. Cynthia Crouner	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. Dr. Jefferson Hatch	P
Rev. David Hengerer	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. Fred Milligan	P
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	P
Rev. Bronc Radak (<i>serving Rockport</i>)	P
Rev. Jack Roan	P
Rev. Stephen Ross	E
Rev. Lorrie Rowland-Skinner	E
Rev. Diane Ruffle	E
Rev. Alan Schaefer (<i>serving Dover</i>)	P
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. Jacquelyn Van Vliet	E
Rev. John Verser	E
Rev. Deirdre Greenwood White	E
Rev. David Young	P
Rev. Dr. Nancy Young	P

Ruling Elders by Virtue of Office

Matt Allen, Calvary Presbyterian Church, Florham Park, Past Moderator	P
Sue Cail, Community Presbyterian Church of Ringwood, Moderator	P
John Crozier, First Presbyterian Church of Boonton, Co-Moderator COM	P
Wendy Doidge, Presbyterian Church in Morristown, Past Moderator	P
Alan Ford, Bethlehem Presbyterian Church, Pittstown, Past Moderator	P
Lisa Gray, Old Greenwich Presbyterian Church, Stewartsville, Past Moderator	P
Alec Jain, Presbyterian Church of Morris Plains, Member of ACT	P
Joe Martinoni, First Presbyterian Church of Rockaway, Past Moderator	P
Ken Nickel, First Presbyterian Church of Boonton, Past Moderator	P
Pete Peterson, Clinton Presbyterian Church, Co-Moderator ACT	P
Mel Prestamo, Long Valley Presbyterian Church, Past Moderator	P
Donna Rahmann, Fairmount Presbyterian Church, Califon, Co-Moderator CPM	P

Others in Attendance

Sonja Gaertner, Office Manager & Attendance Clerk, Presbytery of the Highlands	P
Lizabeth Hutchinson, Financial Administrator, Presbytery of the Highlands	P
Rev. Ruth Santana-Grace, Moderator of the General Assembly and Executive Presbyter, Presbytery of Philadelphia	P
Elise Bates Russell, Executive Director, Johnsonburg Camp and Retreat Center, and Ruling Elder, Long Valley Presbyterian Church	P
Rev. Dr. Carrie Mitchell, Regional Representative, Board of Pensions, and Member of Coastlands Presbytery	P
Rick Freidl, Ruling Elder, First Presbyterian Church of Ridgewood, Presbytery of Northeast New Jersey	P
Doris Haring, Pilgrim Presbyterian Church, Phillipsburg	P
Don Keck, First Presbyterian Church of Sparta	P
Scott Riker, Highlands Presbyterian Church, Long Valley	P

Total in Attendance – 118

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

WORDS OF GREETING

INTRODUCTION OF NEW RULING ELDER COMMISSIONERS

Ruling Elder Deb McGuinness, Pilgrim Presbyterian Church, Phillipsburg

Ruling Elder Lisa Besser, First Presbyterian Church of Blairstown

Ruling Elder Thomas Blazek, Bound Brook Presbyterian Church

Ruling Elder Dale Perry, Flemington Presbyterian Church

Ruling Elder Chip Kalfaian, Bethlehem Presbyterian Church, Pittstown

EXPLANATION OF UNANIMOUS CONSENT

ITEMS FOR UNANIMOUS CONSENT:

CORRESPONDING MEMBERS AND GUESTS

Rev. Ruth Santana-Grace, Moderator of the General Assembly and Executive Presbyter, Presbytery of Philadelphia
Elise Bates Russell, Executive Director, Johnsonburg Camp and Retreat Center, and Ruling Elder, Long Valley Presbyterian Church
Rev. Dr. Carrie Mitchell, Regional Representative, Board of Pensions, and Member of Coastlands Presbytery
Rick Freidl, Ruling Elder, First Presbyterian Church of Ridgewood, Presbytery of Northeast New Jersey

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

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

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

ADOPTION OF THE CONSENT AGENDA

Consent Agenda

SC-1

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

SC-2

Approve excuses for the Presbytery meeting of May 14, 2024.

SC-3

Receive the 2023 Session Minutes Review Report – Part 1.

SC-4

Receive the Interim Report of the Administrative Commission for the Westminster Presbyterian Church, Phillipsburg.

SC-5

Receive the report of the Administration and Coordinating Team – Part 1.

SC-6

Receive the report of the Administration and Coordinating Team – Part 2.

SC-7

Receive the report of the Committee on Ministry – Part 1.

SC-8

Receive the report of the Committee on Preparation for Ministry.

SC-9

Receive the report of the Church Development Team.

SC-10

Receive the report of the Nominating Committee.

SC-11

Receive the report of the Property and Insurance Team.

SC-12

Receive the report of the Young Leader Formation Team.

STATED CLERK'S REPORT

A Written Report was submitted, and as a separate, attached, item, the complete Decision and Order of SNE 2023-04, Rev. Ryan Irmer v. the Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey. In addition to the written document, the Stated Clerk gave an oral summary of the written decision.

According to Roberts Rules of Order (48:2), "In an ordinary society, the minutes should contain mainly a record of what was *done* at the meeting, not what was said by the members."

Following the Stated Clerk's oral summary, Rev. Irmer asked for time to comment, and as previously agreed upon by Moderator and Clerk, he was granted three minutes to do so. At the conclusion of three minutes, he was instructed that his time was up. At his request, the Moderator and Clerk conferred, observing that if a motion were made, he could be afforded additional time. A motion for an additional two minutes was **MOVED, SECONDED, AND CARRIED.**

At the conclusion of the additional two minutes, Rev. Irmer was instructed by the Moderator that his time had come to a close, at which time Rev. Irmer continued his comments. The Clerk, speaking in support of the Moderator, noted that Rev. Irmer was at that time out of order, having exceeded his time limit and the Moderator's instruction. Rev. Irmer continued making his comments, in excess of the two minutes allocated, until ending at a time of his choosing.

PROPERTY & INSURANCE TEAM

Rick Freidl, Ruling Elder, First Presbyterian Church of Ridgewood, Presbytery of Northeast New Jersey gave an update of the NJ Partnership Insurance Program.

SHARING OUR STORIES

Rev. Ross Lang, Hildale Park Presbyterian Church, Cedar Knolls presented his church's story of One Great Hour of Sharing.

Vice Moderator Chad Rodgers took the gavel.

INVITATION TO HYBRID ANNOUNCEMENTS

Vice Moderator Rodgers invited participants to place their announcements in the Chat Function. Later in the meeting, those announcements would be shared, either by highlighting posted items," or by giving 30 seconds to those persons physically present.

COMMITTEE ON PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY

Ruling Elder Donna Rahmann, Fairmount Presbyterian Church, Califon, Co-Moderator of the Committee on Preparation for Ministry presented their work on the Commissioned Ruling Elder Policy.

The Committee recommends that the following additions to the CRE Policy be approved as follows:

Page 2:

"in accordance with G-2.1002, "A ruling elder who seeks to serve under the terms of G-2.1001 shall receive such preparation and instruction as determined by the presbytery to be appropriate to the particular commission. Such preparation shall include a certificate of completion of boundary training, which includes the topic of sexual misconduct, and child

sexual abuse prevention training with recertification at least every thirty-six months. The presbytery shall determine which trainings are approved to meet the criteria of these two requirements." This boundary training must be completed before the year-long internship can begin."

Page 3:

PSYCHOLOGICAL EVALUATION

"All aspirants must complete a psychological evaluation approximately one year after beginning the CRE process. They are responsible for signing the necessary releases to have the results of their psychological evaluation sent to the chairperson of the CPM. The entire psychological evaluation will be reviewed with the members of the CPM and discussed with the aspirant at their annual consultation. Confidentiality is assured. This evaluation is a tool to be used to point out strengths and areas where growth is needed. It may also highlight areas of concern and bring to light issues which need to be addressed in order for the aspirant to become effective in their future commissioning(s). Aspirants will not be commissioned until this process has been completed.

The CPM requires that the evaluation be done at:

Physis Associates
Dr. Dennis J. O'Hara
109 Fox Knoll Lane
West Chester, PA 19380
610-269-3037
<https://physisassociates.com/>

The chairperson of the CPM should be notified when an appointment has been made so that payment of the presbytery's one-third, church's one-third, and aspirant's one-third shares of the cost may be arranged. The aspirant is responsible for the cost of transportation, lodging, meals, and incidental expenses. Financial assistance may be available. Appointments are generally booked months in advance. Those interested are encouraged, therefore, to call the center for an appointment as early as possible."

Page 4:

"Upon commissioning to a particular pastoral service, the CRE must meet the same standards of boundary training as minister members of the Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey."

MOTION APPROVED

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Ruling Elder Lisa Gray, Old Greenwich Presbyterian Church, Stewartsville submitted the following slate:

Administrative & Coordinating Team Class of 2026

Ruling Elder Richard Rubin (A), Presbyterian Church in Morristown

MOTION APPROVED

DISCERNMENT TEAM

Presbytery Leader Jeanne Radak presented an update of the Discernment Team progress. introduced a video announcing the pairings for the Presbytery Scramble. This is a pulpit (and several members) exchange between churches.

Emerging themes from the presentations and conversations •Relationships •Navigating the post pandemic environment for the church •Care for our pastoral leaders •Managing conflict in congregations •Resourcing - education •leadership development •Bringing people together for a variety of things •Rituals are important •Embrace new models for ministry •Creativity and innovation •Communication.

The process is not over. We are more or less right in the middle of it. Next steps is to continue with more conversations over the summer and into the fall Work together on discerning what is our vocation statement and our responsibilities as a presbytery Visioning on our present and future Developing Action steps to work towards the Future where God is calling. More information will be forth coming this summer and early fall. We have had hundreds of people participate so far. If you haven't please join us on this Discernment Journey.

ADMINISTRATION AND COORDINATING TEAM

Elder Pete Peterson, Clinton Presbyterian Church, ACT Co-Moderator, highlighted the work of the Funds Development Team:

Per Capita Makes things Happen – Through your contributions we are able to fund our ministry of supporting pastors, congregations and the greater denomination

Legacy Giving – The Jim and Marie Chesnutt Fund – Supports those items in budget that get defunded first but may have the longest lasting impact.

Missional Giving – the vehicle by which our faith, cares and passions for Spiritual and Disciple Formation are broadcasted to the world.

The Funds Development Team and The ACT wish to thank you for your gifts and contributions to the presbytery.

DIGITAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

Vice Moderator Chad Rodgers read the Digital Announcements that were collected from the chat and individuals came to the microphone to share their announcements. Those submitted to be included in the minutes are:

Atlantic Health is having a seminar on pain management hosted by Highlands Presbyterian church in Long valley. Meeting is tomorrow Wednesday May 15 at 11 am. Preregistration is required. Call 908.441.1157

Music at BBPC. Bound Brook Presbyterian church is hosting Jephthe Giacomo Carissimi on June 23, 2024, at 5 PM. Contact Ben@BBPC.org

Moderator Sue Cail assumed the Gavel

The Presbytery Voted for and installed the following for General Assembly Commissioners

Clergy

Rev. Robin Palmer Burton, Highlands Presbyterian Church, Long Valley

Rev. Rich Gelson, Pilgrim Presbyterian Church, Phillipsburg

Elders

Elder Craig Barth, Presbyterian Church in Morristown

Elder Alec Jain, Presbyterian Church of Morris Plains

NEW BUSINESS

No New Business was requested at this time.

ADJOURNMENT

Moderator Cail closed the meeting after prayer at 8:51PM.

Attested: _____
Steven H. Shussett Stated Clerk

REPORTS:

ADMINISTRATION AND COORDINATING TEAM REPORT – PART 1

Items for Report:

The ACT reports the following from their April 23, 2024 called meeting:

ACT-1

Approved Rev. Fred Milligan as Overture Advocate for two overtures the presbytery concurred with, ENV 1 and ENV 2.

ACT-2

Approved Jeanne and Steve identifying the Overture Advocate for Overture **ORD-06** *On Appointing a Committee to Review the Preparation for Ministry Process.*

ACT-3

Approved the transfer of \$60,000 from the Mission and Ministry Fund (NCT) to replenish the Church Building Fund due to a need to repair and stabilize the sanctuary/steeple of Oxford Second Presbyterian Church in order to sell the building. Some of the proceeds from the sale of the property will pay back the fund.

ACT-4

Reported receipt of a bequest from the Estate of Josephine Khare Lojune, member of the dissolved congregation of the Hillsborough Presbyterian Church. The \$10,000 was added to the Hillsborough Presbyterian Church Fund, which is used for grants for congregations (*See Who is My Neighbor? Project*).

ACT-5

Reviewed the May 14th Presbytery Meeting Agenda.

- 4 pm – Worship and dedication of the Highlands Pavilion followed by hors d'oeuvres and beverages provided by the Johnsonburg Board of Directors
- 6 PM - presbytery dinner in the dining hall (\$12 per person)
- 6:30PM - the business meeting including Commissioning of GA Commissioners

ACT-6

Discussed the Presbytery Insurance Partnership update. GuideOne is underwriting the new policy for the Insurance Partnership.

ACT-7

Discussed the Discernment Retreat and next steps in the discernment process.

ACT-8

Reviewed the possible agenda items for the September Presbytery Meeting.

ACT-9

The Treasurer and Moderator of the Budget and Finance Team gave a first quarter report of the Presbytery's finances. Income and expenses are on track for the budget. Per Capita receipt is at 24%.

ACT-10

Team Reports

- Personnel Committee working on anti-harassment policy
- Budget and Finance will begin plans soon for the 2025 budget

ACT-11

Approved a motion to grant Rev. Dr. Steven Shussett, Resource Staff/Stated Clerk an extra week's vacation for 2024 because of the extra work he has put in this first quarter of the year. The ACT expressed gratitude for his excellent workshops on ethics and the extra work he has done for the judicial case.

ACT-12

Approved a date change for Presbytery Leader Rev. Jeanne Radak's Sabbatical Part 2. Jeanne will be starting her sabbatical on June 1 and returning July 20. It was supposed to begin May 18.

ADMINISTRATION AND COORDINATING TEAM REPORT – PART 2

Items for Report:

The ACT reports the following from their May 9, 2024 called meeting:

ACT-13

Referred back to Property and Insurance Team the request from First Presbyterian Church of Franklin for sale of manse to gather more details and information regarding their request.

ACT-14

Approved request from Insurance Partnership Team to develop a fund and policy for assisting small congregations under the new GuideOne umbrella policy with the proposed large deductible expenses. The Property and Insurance Team will be asked to develop the policy.

ACT-15

Discussed the Synod Permanent Judicial Commission decision. Appointed a team of four members to meet with the COM team to discuss next steps.

ACT-16

Approved empowering the ACT & COM Task force to move forward with any action forthcoming in regard to the Synod's Decision and Order on Ryan Irmer vs Highlands Presbytery, SNE 2023-04.

CHURCH DEVELOPMENT TEAM REPORT

Items to Report:

CDT-1

CDT has scheduled Rev. Tom Scornavacchi as a speaker via zoom on Thursday, May 30 at 7:30. Pastor Tom works with individuals and families affected by addiction and mental health. In his work he combines the wisdom and practice of the 12-steps with the forgiveness and grace that comes from his Lutheran faith. Pastor Tom is passionate about creating authentic faith communities that welcome diversity, foster intimacy, and celebrate God's love for all of creation. <https://cgrcommunity.org/>

CDT-2

CDT will be overseeing a new grant process.

Who is My Neighbor? Conversations about your neighborhood for \$1000.

The objective is to learn from the demographic study, and then do one thing with a population you've learned about in your community, with a community partner (and it does not have to be another church).

God is in ministry in our neighborhoods and communities. How are we going to respond?

First find those people in your neighborhood to whom God is calling you as partners.

Who is My Neighbor is a process of using your congregation's demographics to learn about the people in your neighborhood and ministry opportunities.

CDT-3

CDT has been overseeing Technology grants. This grant process has come to a close.

CDT-4

CDT has been overseeing the Quick Start Grants for \$1,000 Based on Matthew 25. This grant process has come to a close.

CDT-5

CDT is currently supporting nine congregations that are in transition.

COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY REPORT

Items for Report:

From the April 2, 2024 meeting:

COM-1

Appointed Rev. Robin Palmer Burton as the moderator for the Musconetcong Valley Presbyterian Church, Hampton.

COM-2

Appointed Rev. Bill Stone as moderator for the Presbyterian Church of Madison.

COM-3

COM training for the month was a review of the five sections of the COM handbook.

COM-4

Completed exit interview for Rev. Chad Rodgers.

COM-5

Approved the Terms of Call for the following:

- Rev. Dennis Jones and Basking Ridge Presbyterian Church.
- Rev. Dr. Maureen Paterson and Basking Ridge Presbyterian Church.
- Rev. Sarah Cairatti and First Presbyterian Church of Whippany.
- Rev. David Young and Rev. Dr. Nancy Young (shared interim position) and First Presbyterian Church of Branchville.
- Rev. Nancy Nalepa-Skibo and Somerset Presbyterian Church.
- Rev. Eric Lai and Taiwanese American Fellowship Presbyterian Church.

COM-6

Approved the Ministry Discernment Profile for First Presbyterian Church of Stanhope and Andover Presbyterian Church.

COM-7

Approved the Ministry Discernment Profile for Lamington Presbyterian Church, Bedminster.

COM-8

Approved a request to empower the Congregational Care Team to approve Lower Valley Presbyterian Church Interim pastor position description prior to the May COM meeting. (Minor changes were needed.)

COM-9

Approved a process for the transition of the Installed Associate Pastor to the Installed Pastor position in accordance with G-2.0504, a & c.

COM-10

Approved the request from Frenchtown Presbyterian Church to begin the process of searching for a Covenant Supply Pastor.

From the May 7, 2024 meeting:

COM-11

Appointed Rev. Dennis Jones moderator for Lamington Presbyterian Church, Bedminster.

COM-12

Approved the request from Long Island Presbytery to transfer the membership of Rev. H. Bradford Morgan from Highlands Presbytery to Long Island Presbytery.

COM-13

Approved the request from Coastlands Presbytery to transfer membership of Rev. Beth Scibienski from Highlands Presbytery to Coastland Presbytery.

COM-14

Approved the Terms of Call for the following:

- Rev. Don Brown and the Presbyterian Church of Morris Plains.

- Rev. Kathi Heath and Ogden Memorial Presbyterian Church, Chatham with a minor change.

COM-15

Empowered the Congregational Care team to review and approve the job description for the Covenant Supply Pastor for Frenchtown Presbyterian Church.

COM-16

The Congregational Care Team reported that they approved the Lower Valley Presbyterian Church, Califon Job Description for an interim pastor.

COM-17

Reviewed the Synod PJC decision concerning Rev. Ryan Irmer vs. the Presbytery of the Highlands.

COM-18

Designated a small group from COM to work with ACT in regards to any next steps concerning the Synod PJC decision.

COMMITTEE ON PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY REPORT

Items for Report:

From the April 15, 2024 meeting:

CPM-2

Updates were provided on all those under care of the Presbytery, and those considering such a relationship.

CPM-3

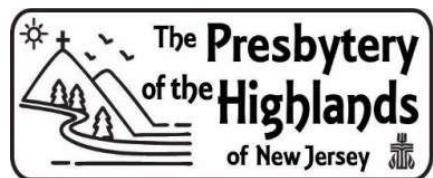
Steve Shussett continued CPM training by reviewing the next section of the CPM manual.

CPM-4

The question was raised whether Commissioned Ruling Elders have to complete a Psychological Evaluation. A quick review of the existing Policy revealed that neither it, nor the Book of Order requirements on boundary training, are currently requirements.

Following discussion, additions were recommended. See CPM-1 and CRE Policy attached.

The Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey Commissioned Ruling Elder Policy



AUTHORITY

According to the *Book of Order* (G-2.10), a presbytery may authorize a ruling elder to be “commissioned to limited pastoral service” when, in consultation with the session or other responsible committee, the presbytery “determines that its strategy for mission requires

it.”

In the Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey the Committee on Preparation for Ministry (CPM) is responsible for the approval of applicants according to the qualifications below as well as their training and examination in accordance with (G-2.1002). The CPM is also responsible for approving candidates as ready to accept a position as a Commissioned Ruling Elder (CRE). The Committee on Ministry (COM) is responsible for authorizing the placement and commissioning in accordance with (G-2.1001-2.1004). The CPM and the COM consider the commissioning of ruling elders a further means of fulfilling the presbytery’s commitment to ensure that all congregations within its bounds have the best possible leadership in ministry.

COMMISSIONED RULING ELDER

A CRE is a salaried or volunteer ruling elder interested in congregational ministry, affirmed by their session, and trained and commissioned by the presbytery to pastoral service in a particular parish or congregation in the Presbytery. Normally, a CRE provides pastoral leadership in congregations that are unable to secure pastoral leadership from a teaching elder because of congregational size, geography, finances or language. CREs may also be commissioned to serve specialized ministries such as immigrant or emerging ministries. A CRE is not an ordained Minister of Word and Sacrament, but is commissioned only to a particular congregation in Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey and may not provide pastoral leadership or services outside of that commission or after the commission ends. As part of their commission, the COM will establish whether a CRE is authorized to moderate the session of the congregation to which they are commissioned, to administer the Sacraments, and to officiate at marriages. This commission shall also specify the term of service, which shall not exceed three years but shall be renewable. The presbytery, through the COM, shall review the commission at least annually.

QUALIFICATIONS

Normally, the qualifications for acceptance into the program shall be that the individual (known as an “applicant” until CPM accepts them into the CRE process, and thereafter as an “aspirant”):

- Senses that they have a call to ministry.
- Is a member in good standing of a congregation in the Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey.
- Possesses recognized leadership ability in the congregation as a ruling elder and has been ordained for at least two years.
- Demonstrates pastoral ability and shows a commitment to personal spiritual growth through prayer, Bible reading and devotions.
- Holds a baccalaureate degree or its equivalent, except in certain cases approved by CPM. The CPM shall determine appropriate credit for post high school course work and life experience.
- Is endorsed by the session of the congregation where they are a member.
- Is recommended by three references, at least one of whom is a teaching elder and a member of the Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey.
- Accepts and has an understanding of the ethical standards of the PCUSA and the presbytery of Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey.
- Is willing to accept the care and guidance of a mentor appointed by the Presbytery.

APPLICATION

Qualified individuals interested in pursuing a commission to pastoral service process (the aspirant) should complete the following steps:

1. Submit a completed *Commissioned Ruling Elder Application* (Appendix A) along with the supplemental questions and list of references to the Committee on Preparation for Ministry.
2. Obtain a letter of personal reference from three individuals familiar with their involvement in the Presbyterian Church (USA), including one from the applicant's pastor or another teaching elder in the Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey. Letters should address the following areas of the applicant's readiness to enter a program of training for ministry:
 - a. Personal faith
 - b. Commitment to the PC(USA)
 - c. Gifts, talents and skills for pastoral ministry
 - d. a recent example of service to the congregation
3. Obtain a written letter of endorsement from their home session.
4. Submit to a criminal background check, which the Presbytery will complete prior to the applicant's first meeting with CPM.
5. Meet with the CPM for an initial consultation and endorsement. At this meeting, the CPM shall:
 - a. Review the individual's application, reference letters and related materials.
 - b. Discuss the roles and responsibilities of a CRE with a specific focus on how a CRE's commission differs from the ordination of a teaching elder.
 - c. Provide an overview of the CRE training process and steps toward commissioning once it is complete.
 - d. Determine the applicant's readiness to enter a program of training and education according to the requirements below.
 - e. Assign a liaison from the committee to work with the applicant during this process.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The aspirant must complete a suitable educational/training program that will prepare them to lead congregations in all aspects of service to God and each other. The Presbytery of the Highlands in New Jersey does not offer CRE training, but will work with each aspirant, through its assigned liaison, to design a program that shall include formalized instruction in the following areas:

- Presbyterian Polity
- New and Old Testament, including Biblical Exegesis
- Reformed Worship and Sacraments
- Reformed Theology
- Preaching
- Pastoral Care
- Christian Education

The proposed training program must be approved by the CPM prior to beginning any coursework. The aspirant may choose to enroll in a designated CRE training program offered by a college, seminary, or other governing body. In cases where this is not

practical due to financial and/or time constraints, the CPM will work with the aspirant to find appropriate classes, seminars and/or courses that will satisfy these requirements. Ordinarily, instruction is to be at the post-graduate level, with exceptions to be determined by the CPM.

In addition to the courses outlined above, **in accordance with G-2.1002, “A ruling elder who seeks to serve under the terms of G-2.1001 shall receive such preparation and instruction as determined by the presbytery to be appropriate to the particular commission. Such preparation shall include a certificate of completion of boundary training, which includes the topic of sexual misconduct, and child sexual abuse prevention training with recertification at least every thirty-six months. The presbytery shall determine which trainings are approved to meet the criteria of these two requirements.” This boundary training must be completed before the year-long internship can begin.**

CPM may require the aspirant to attend additional presbytery workshops and/or training events to supplement his or her training.

INTERNSHIP

Each aspirant shall also be required to satisfactorily complete a year-long internship in a congregation of the Presbytery of the Highlands. The internship shall offer opportunities for preaching, worship leadership and pastoral care, and involvement in other aspects of the congregation’s life. The congregation’s pastor, who must be a teaching elder in good standing with the presbytery, will supervise and meet regularly with the intern.

Throughout the education and training phase, the aspirant will meet at least annually with the CPM to review their progress and determine other needs or future plans.

If a CRE who has been trained or formally commissioned by another presbytery seeks to be commissioned to a congregation in the Presbytery of the Highlands, the CPM will evaluate the training program and explore past ministerial experiences of the CRE aspirant. The CPM would then interview the CRE aspirant to determine if they have met the standards established for training CREs in the Presbytery of the Highlands. Any discrepancies of training will be made up at the discretion of the CPM, prior to the recommendation of the CRE aspirant to COM for recommendation to a congregation for commissioning by the presbytery.

PSYCHOLOGICAL EVALUATION

All aspirants must complete a psychological evaluation approximately one year after beginning the CRE process. They are responsible for signing the necessary releases to have the results of their psychological evaluation sent to the chairperson of the CPM. The entire psychological evaluation will be reviewed with the members of the CPM and discussed with the aspirant at their annual consultation. Confidentiality is assured. This evaluation is a tool to be used to point out strengths and areas where growth is needed. It may also highlight areas of concern and bring to light issues which need to be addressed in order for the aspirant to become effective in their future commissioning(s). Aspirants will not be commissioned until this process has been completed.

The CPM requires that the evaluation be done at:

**Physis Associates
Dr. Dennis J. O'Hara
109 Fox Knoll Lane
West Chester, PA 19380
610-269-3037
<https://physisassociates.com/>**

The chairperson of the CPM should be notified when an appointment has been made so that payment of the presbytery's one-third, church's one-third, and aspirant's one-third shares of the cost may be arranged. The aspirant is responsible for the cost of transportation, lodging, meals, and incidental expenses. Financial assistance may be available. Appointments are generally booked months in advance. Those interested are encouraged, therefore, to call the center for an appointment as early as possible.

ANNUAL GRANT

The Presbytery can provide a \$1000 grant annually to those persons formally in the CRE process who have completed a Financial Planning form, and who have submitted a written request indicating the purpose of the grant. This may include the psychological examination, books, or other course-related expenses.

EXAMINATION

At the successful completion of all the coursework and following the desires of the aspirant, an examination of the aspirant shall be arranged by the CPM. The examination shall be scheduled at a time, place, and location and in a manner determined by the CPM, including virtual meetings.

Prior to, and in preparation for the examination, CRE aspirants must submit to CPM (carefully prepared and typed double spaced) the following items:

- **Sermon Manuscript:** The length of the sermon, including the reading of the scripture, should be no more than 10 minutes in length. This sermon will be preached at a CPM meeting or in a setting approved by CPM.
- **Exegesis:** Exegetical study of the biblical material out of which the sermon arose including a study of key words, discussion of context, notes on significant points of grammar and variant readings, and an interpretation of the passage.
- **Statement of Faith:** This statement should be a statement of the CRE aspirant's personal faith (not a restatement of a creed) and ought to address matters of faith, including but not limited to: God, Jesus, the , Holy Spirit, the Trinity, the life and mission of the Church, the authority of Scripture, and the role of the Sacraments. The statement of faith should not be longer than one side of an 8 ½" x 11" sheet of paper. It should be single-spaced, and double-spaced between paragraphs. We recommend sensitivity to the use of inclusive language.

The material shall be reviewed by the CPM and discussed with the aspirant. In addition, the scripture will be read and preached to the CPM. Input may also be offered or requested from the aspirant's mentor or pastor. Based on this discussion and examination:

1. The CPM may request that the material be revisited or rewritten.
2. The CPM may approve the aspirant's readiness and preparedness to be a Commissioned

Ruling Elder.

After the CPM has approved the candidate as ready to be commissioned, the candidate may actively seek a position as a CRE. An invitation to serve must be recommended by the COM and approved by the Presbytery. When commissioned, they come under the supervision of the Presbytery through the COM.

COMMISSIONING

Upon recommendation by the Committee on Preparation for Ministry (CPM) to the Committee on Ministry (COM), the designated commissioned ruling elder may complete a Personal Information Form (PIF) and may be considered for commissioning to a specific congregation or validated ministry as a Commissioned Ruling Elder.

Upon commissioning to a particular pastoral service, the CRE must meet the same standards of boundary training as minister members of the Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey.

This commission shall be valid for a period up to three years as designated by the session, COM, and the CRE and approved by the Presbytery. It should document in writing the CRE's full compensation package, including salary, vacation time, study leave and other allowances as determined by the Session, the CRE, and COM. A CRE's commission may be renewed at expiration or terminated at any time at the discretion of the Session, the CRE, or COM, with approval of the Presbytery.

The commissioning of a ruling elder to a particular congregation or specialized ministry is an act of the presbytery. Ordinarily, the commissioning service shall take place at a stated meeting of the Presbytery. If other circumstances warrant, and if Presbytery approves, the commissioning may take place at another time and place. Refer to the *Book of Order* (W-4.0404) for questions asked at the time of commissioning.

The CRE may perform pastoral functions not requiring ordination as a teaching elder, in agreement with the session such as teaching, visitation of members in home or hospital, visitation of prospective members, supervising Sunday school, leading music, prayer meetings, or study groups or conducting funerals. If commissioned to a congregation, the CRE will ordinarily be the primary leader of worship and preacher for the congregation.

Upon the written request of the session to the COM, and with the recommendation of the mentor and supervisor, the CRE may also be authorized by the Presbytery to carry out other functions allowed in the *Book of Order*, G-2.1001:

1. Administer the Lord's Supper
2. Administer the Sacrament of Baptism
3. Moderate the session of the congregation under the supervision of, and when invited by, the moderator of the Session appointed by the Presbytery;
4. Have voice in meetings of the Presbytery;
5. Have a vote in meetings of the Presbytery;
6. Perform a service of Christian marriage when invited by the session or other responsible committee of the Presbytery.
7. May be appointed by the Presbytery as moderator of the session to the congregation to they have been commissioned.

If the CRE is to be commissioned to a validated ministry, rather than a congregation of the Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey, then the CRE will follow the same procedure through the COM for confirmation of that field of service as a validated ministry as followed by teaching elders. (*Book of Order*, G-2.0503a)

RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The Commissioned Ruling Elder shall work under the supervision of a mentor who is assigned by the COM and is a teaching elder. The mentor and supervisor will meet regularly with the CRE, at least annually with the CRE and members of the session of the commissioning congregation to conduct the annual review of the work of the CRE. The results of this annual review will be communicated to the CRE and the COM.

The CRE shall comply with the polity of the Presbyterian Church (USA), including **G-4.0301**, and the by-laws of the congregation(s) being served. The CRE is expected to participate in continuing educational training experiences while commissioned.

***Appendix A* Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey Commissioned Ruling**

Elder Application

Name:

Mailing Address:

Phone: Home, Work

Email:

Occupation/Place of Employment:

Academic Background

List the academic institutions you have attended, beginning with high school and complete the information requested:

<u>Institution</u>	<u>Dates Attended</u>	<u>Program or Major</u>	<u>Diploma or Degree</u>
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Describe any previous experience in Preaching or CRE Training:

Occupational History

List the three most recent full-time or part-time positions in which you have been employed and also provide the following information: job title, dates of employment,

aspect most enjoyed, aspect most disliked.

1. Current employment:

2. Next most recent:

3. Second most recent:

Congregational History

Date and place of baptism:

Date and place of profession of faith:

Congregation Membership (name, city, and state):

Date joined:

Date ordained an elder:

Date ordained a deacon (if applicable):

List other congregations where you have been a member:

List areas of involvement in your local congregation both as a participant and leader.
Indicate areas of leadership.

List areas of involvement in Presbytery, Synod or General Assembly.

List voluntary services, civic or social organizations of which you are or have been a member. Indicate your extent of participation and your role.

List any factors that may place limits on your ability to receive training or to serve as a
Commissioned Ruling Elder:

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Questions for Reflection

Write a response to each of the following. These responses should be attached to this application.

1. In one or two paragraphs, describe yourself as a person.
2. Describe briefly what it means to you to be a Commissioned Ruling Elder. What has motivated you to consider this program?
3. Write a brief statement of your personal faith describing what you believe about God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit and your relationship to them.
4. What does it mean to you to be Presbyterian?
5. Describe your current spiritual journey, spiritual practices, prayer life, and disciplines.
6. Who/what is your ideal/role model for ministry? What do you expect in your ministry? What aspect of ministry do you find least interesting?

References

On a separate sheet attached to this application, please list three people who will serve as references. One should be your pastor or a teaching elder within Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey. Please include name, mailing address, email, daytime phone number and relationship to you.

Please ask your references to answer the following questions and send their responses under separate cover directly to the Committee on Preparation for Ministry at the following address: The Presbytery of the Highlands, 390 Route 10 West, Randolph, NJ 07869 or email it to one or both co-moderators.

1. How long have you known the applicant and would you say you know the applicant well?
2. What is your relationship to the applicant and under what circumstances have you observed his or her leadership in the church?
3. To what extent does the applicant's way of life demonstrate the teachings of Christ?
4. What is your experience of the applicant's commitment to the Presbyterian Church (USA)?
5. What special gifts, talents and skills does the applicant exhibit for service as a Commissioned Ruling Elder?
6. What is the most recent example of the applicant's service to the congregation?
7. If the applicant were your Commissioned Ruling Elder, what specific areas would you wish him or her to improve?

After completing the application, email it to one or both co-moderators.

PROPERTY AND INSURANCE TEAM REPORT

Items for Report:

From the April 23, 2024 meeting:

P&I-1

Cemetery Association –

Presbytery Leader Jeanne Radak informed P&I that the East Hanover cemetery will become part of the program on June 9, joining Bloomsbury, Mt. Freedom, and Old Clove.

The East Hanover cemetery dates to the colonial era. It is about 1.5 acres.

A Cemetery Association is under consideration, focused on finding the best ways to manage the properties effectively and affordably. The bylaws will be reviewed in order to meet this objective.

P&I-2

Franklin Manse Sale

Alan Ford reported on the First Presbyterian Church of Franklin manse. It has been rented to others for years and not used by a pastor for some time. It is at least 60 years old and needs improvements. The church does not expect to use it as a manse in the future so they are maintaining it just to use as a rental.

The Church proposes to sell the manse and to use the proceeds to facilitate:

1. Invest for possible future housing needs.
2. Growing the congregation (youth group, community events).
3. Increase pastoral time for visitation and counseling.
4. Community mission work (bread of life, soup nights).
5. Provide easier access to the church.

The last appraisal was done at the end of 2022, for just over \$300,000. The land is not contiguous to the church, it is about a block away.

The Property and Insurance Team has recommended to the ACT, acting on behalf of the Presbytery, that the sale of manse of the First Presbyterian Church of Franklin, New Jersey be approved, and the Property and Insurance Team be commissioned to approve the final terms and contract of sale on behalf of the Presbytery.

P&I-3

Insurance Partnership Update

Scot McCachren reported on the Insurance Partnership. Brown & Brown is suggesting that the partnership go with a program offered by GuideOne. The proposed plan will have minimum deductibles for each church based on its total insured value. Other details forthcoming as they are resolved. Presenters will be found to speak at the May Presbytery meeting.

Stated Clerk's Report

May 14, 2024

Items to Report:

SC-13

Rev. Kathi Heath, Ogden Memorial Presbyterian Church, Chatham has been appointed as Moderator of the Administrative Commission for the Oxford Second Presbyterian Church.

SC-14

The Presbytery has received five concurrences on its overture to the General Assembly, now known as "OVT-11 On Appointing a Committee to Review the Preparation for Ministry Process."

These concurrences have come from:

1. Baltimore Presbytery
2. Boise Presbytery
3. Salem Presbytery
4. Southern New Jersey Presbytery
5. The Western Reserve Presbytery

Reminder: An overture must receive at least one concurrence from another presbytery to be placed on the agenda for a General Assembly committee.

SC-15

At the direction of the Administration and Coordinating Team, the Stated Clerk has notified the Office of the General Assembly that the Rev. Fred Milligan (Ringwood) has been appointed as Overture Advocate for

- ENV-02 On removal of investments in and subsidies for fossil fuels; and
- ENV-03 On becoming free from plastic pollution

Highlands Presbytery is able to appoint an Overture Advocate by virtue of having concurred with these two items. In this 226th General Assembly (2024), committee meetings will take place via Zoom.

SC-16

In adherence to D-5.1003 “Duty of the Stated Clerk”

“If the council is meeting when the decision is received from the clerk of the permanent judicial commission, the stated clerk shall report the decision immediately and enter the full decision upon the minutes of the council. If the council is not meeting, the stated clerk shall report the decision to the council at its first stated or adjourned meeting or at a meeting called to hear the decision, whichever comes first, and enter the full decision upon the minutes of the council”

and at the direction of the Synod Permanent Judicial Commission of the Synod of the Northeast, the Stated Clerk has included, in his report and in this packet, the Decision and Order on SNE 2023-04, the Rev. Ryan Irmer v the Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey.

REVIEW OF THE 2023 SESSION MINUTES REPORT – PART 1

Minutes approved without exceptions:

Panther Valley Ecumenical Church
First Presbyterian Church of Blairstown
First Presbyterian Church of Boonton
Bound Brook Presbyterian Church
First Presbyterian Church of Branchville
Fairmount Presbyterian Church
Presbyterian Church of Chatham Township
First Memorial Presbyterian Church
United Presbyterian Church, Flanders
Flemington Presbyterian Church
First Presbyterian Church of Franklin

First Presbyterian Church of Franklin
Long Valley Presbyterian Church
Alexandria First Presbyterian Church
Mine Hill Presbyterian Church
Presbyterian Church in Morristown
Pilgrim Presbyterian Church
Bethlehem Presbyterian Church
First Presbyterian Church of Rockaway
First Presbyterian Church, Stirling
West Milford Presbyterian Church
First Presbyterian Church of Whippany

Minutes approved with exceptions:

Andover, Andover Presbyterian Church
Bedminster, Lamington Presbyterian Church
Lower Valley Presbyterian Church
Clinton, Clinton Presbyterian Church
Hackettstown, First Presbyterian Church of Hackettstown
Lambertville, Second English Presbyterian Church
Highlands Presbyterian Church
Presbyterian Church of Madison
Oak Ridge, Oak Ridge Presbyterian Church
Ringoes, United First Presbyterian Church of Amwell
Stanhope, First Presbyterian Church of Stanhope
First Presbyterian Church of Stewartsville
First Presbyterian Church of Sussex

**INTERIM REPORT OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE COMMISSION OF THE
WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, PHILLIPSBURG**

The Administrative Commission for the Westminster Presbyterian Church of Phillipsburg was formed in May 2023. Members of the AC are RE Cathy Ahart, Rev. Nicholas Hatch, Rev. Ryon Herin, RE Pete Peterson (Moderator), staff liaison Lizabeth Hutchinson, Resource Staff/Stated Clerk Steven 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 property, all funds, all records, and to oversee the disposal of the property on behalf of the Presbytery.

In the interim period since last fall, our realtors have continued to list the property and occasionally respond to inquiries. In February 2024, our realtors recommended we agree to a price reduction in encourage more interest in the property. After discussion, the Commission agreed to the recommended price reduction. In March 2024, the church's insurance company provided notice of the need to repair a section of the sidewalk in front of the church. Our Financial Administrator, Liz Hutchinson, was able to make arrangements for the necessary repairs.

We continue in the hope of finding an activity interested enough in the property to make an offer.

Respectfully submitted,

Pete Peterson
Moderator, Westminster Administrative Commission

YOUNG LEADER FORMATION TEAM REPORT

Items to Report:

YLFT-1

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

This lively event included times of teaching, games, crafts, and music. Parents and children together learned about what it means to live out a relationship with God in the daily moments of life. The event was guided by Steve Shussett, Joanne Willans, Steve Gaden and Diane Halper.

The YLF team will host its Annual Summer Workshop for Youth Leaders at Johnsonburg on Sunday, August 25th from 2 – 6:30 pm. Our speaker this year will be Liz Moore, Assistant Director of the Institute for Youth Ministry at Princeton Theological Seminary. Our hope is that this workshop will provide opportunities for those involved in youth ministry to be challenged and encouraged in engaging youth in their churches and communities. Information and registration information will be coming out soon. Please consider joining us and encouraging those who work with youth in your congregation to register.

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

<https://highlandspresbytery.org/young-leader-formation-team/>

Permanent Judicial Commission

Synod of the Northeast, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

SNE 2023-04: Rev. Ryan Irmer v. the Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey

Decision and Order

26 April 2024

Rev. Ryan Irmer
Complainant

v.

Presbytery of the
Highlands of New
Jersey

SNE 2023-04

Decision and Order

Arrival Statement

The first Complaint in this case, designated SNE 2023-04, was received as a Remedial Complaint under D-4.0000, claiming an irregularity on the part of the Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey (“PHNJ”). The Complaint was received by the Stated Clerk of the Synod of the Northeast (“SNE”), Rev. Nancy Talbot, on Thursday 30 November 2023, and forwarded to the Executive Committee (“EC”) of the Synod Permanent Judicial Commission (“SPJC”) on the same day. The Complaint sought a Stay of

Enforcement of the vote of the congregation of the Long Valley Presbyterian Church (“LVPC”), the vote of the presbytery’s Committee on Ministry (“COM”) to dissolve Rev. Irmer’s pastoral call to LVPC, and the imposition of Administrative Leave upon Rev. Irmer.

The EC of the SPJC issued its Preliminary Ruling on 5 December 2023, answering all five Preliminary Questions in the affirmative and accepting the case for trial. On 28 February 2024 the Stated Clerk of SNE informed the parties that the trial would be held on Tuesday 16 April 2024 in New Jersey.

On 10 December 2023 the Stated Clerk of the SNE informed the parties that at least three members of this Commission had supported in writing a Stay of Enforcement on the imposition of Administrative Leave upon Rev. Irmer.

The Committee of Counsel of the PHNJ filed its Answer to the Complaint in SNE 2023-04 with the Stated Clerk of the SNE on 31 January 2024. Accompanying Respondent’s Answer to the Complaint was a Challenge to the Stay of Enforcement of Administrative Leave in this matter. On 9 February 2024 the EC of the SPJC affirmed its Preliminary Ruling. No challenge to this affirmation was filed. The EC of the SPJC further scheduled a hearing on the Challenge to the Stay of Enforcement for 8 March 2024 over Zoom.

Complainant filed a second Complaint on 31 January 2024, designated SNE 2024-01, claiming that the continuing statements and actions by officers and agents of the Presbytery allegedly interfering with his search for a new call violated the Stay issued in 2023-04 and seeking a far more detailed and comprehensive Stay of Enforcement to cause those statements and actions to cease. The core of the new Stay that Complainant sought was contained in two separate paragraphs of the Complaint.

Rev. Nancy Talbot, the Stated Clerk of the Synod of the Northeast, reported to the parties that at least three members of the SPJC had certified support for a Stay of Enforcement based on each paragraph.

Although Respondent’s Answer to the Complaint in SNE 2024-01 had not yet been filed at the time of the 8 March 2024 hearing on the Stay in SNE 2023-04, Respondent indicated that it would also challenge the SPJC’s Stay of Enforcement in 2024-01. The Executive Committee of the SPJC then (a) requested briefing from the parties on the challenges to the Stays of Enforcement in both 2023-04 and 2024-01; and (b) proposed the consolidation of the two matters. The parties did not object to addressing both stays in one hearing or to the proposed consolidation of the two matters. The SPJC scheduled and held a hearing to consider both challenges to the Stays of Enforcement on Friday 8 March 2024.

In its ruling issued on 14 March 2024, the SPJC did consolidate the two cases into SNE 2023-04, and ordered that the Stay of Enforcement issued in Case No. SNE 2023-04 on or around December 18, 2023, and the Stay of the Enforcement issued in Case No. SNE 2024-01 on or around February 20, 2024, be consolidated, sustained, and modified into one Stay of Enforcement under Case No. SNE 2023-04 to remain in full force and effect during the pendency of these proceedings pursuant to D-4.0602c.

The parties met over Zoom with the EC of the SPJC on Monday 8 April 2024 for the Pre-Trial Conference, dealing with issues related to the Certified Record, the organization and logistics of the trial, and efforts to achieve agreement on facts and issues. On or about 12 April 2024 the parties jointly submitted their STIPULATION OF FACTS FOR TRIAL IN REMEDIAL ACTION 2023-04, which included at the end their STIPULATED LIST OF ISSUES OF CONSTITUTIONAL INTERPRETATION, consisting of 10 items labeled A through J. Our Decision appearing below is organized around those ten issues of constitutional interpretation.

Complainant and Respondent submitted Trial Briefs on 12 April 2024, and the SPJC held the trial at the Central Presbyterian Church in Summit, NJ, on Tuesday 16 April 2024, beginning at 9:00 a.m. and ending at approximately 9:15 p.m. The trial was an open meeting; the witnesses were sequestered.

Jurisdictional Statement

This Commission finds that it has jurisdiction: The Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey (PHNJ) is a constituent presbytery of the Synod of the Northeast. Rev. Ryan Irmer, Complainant, is a minister-member of PHNJ, and is the subject of the actions at issue in this case. The complaint was filed in a timely manner, and states complaints which, if true, would constitute an irregularity and for which this Commission could grant relief.

Appearances

Complainant, Rev. Ryan Irmer, appeared along with his Counsel, Rev. Robert Eyre. The Committee of Counsel for the PHNJ appeared along with their Counsel, Ruling Elder Tania Nemeth. The Stated Clerk of the SNE, Rev. Nancy Talbot, administered the oath to witnesses and kept time for the parties. One member of the SPJC, Ruling Elder Craig Barth, was recused because he is a member of a church in the PHNJ. Two members of the SPJC, Commissioned Ruling Elder Brunhilda Sanders-Lee and Ruling Elder Peter Weishaar, were excused. The Commission maintained its quorum throughout the trial and deliberations.

Exhibit Notation

The Certified Record in the case consisted of three types of exhibits: more than 175 documents, two YouTube videos created by Rev. Irmer, and Zoom recordings of several meetings. The Stated Clerk of PHNJ certified the authenticity of each of those records and provided them to the SPJC and the parties in the form of links to Dropbox files on three occasions.

Each file was identified, both in the Exhibit List provided by the Stated Clerk and in the file name itself, by a so-called Exhibit Number which began with C or R or SC. In the first two batches of documents the prefix C indicated that the files had been provided by Complainant, while R referred to files provided by Respondent and SC to additional files provided by the Stated Clerk himself. All of the files in the third batch contained Exhibit Numbers with the prefix SC.

During the trial, each counsel requested that various exhibits be entered into the trial record. When the Moderator of the SPJC ruled to admit an exhibit, it was assigned a sequential “Trial Exhibit Number” with the prefix TC if it were presented by the Counsel to the Complainant, or TR if it had been presented by the Counsel to the Respondent. The parties’ joint Stipulation contained citations to various exhibits, which were admitted as a whole and designated with the prefix TS unless they had already been admitted separately upon request by one of the Counsels.

All references to exhibits in this Decision and Order use the Trial Exhibit Numbers. Two tables are appended to this Decision and Order, serving as a concordance between the PHNJ Exhibit Numbers and the Trial Exhibit Numbers.

Findings of Fact

Based on the joint stipulations from the two parties and the testimony and evidence introduced at trial, the SPJC found the following facts:

1. The Complainant, Rev. Ryan Irmer, a minister-member of the Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey, was the installed Pastor of Long Valley Presbyterian Church (“LVPC”).

2. Disputes between Complainant and one or more members of session grew during 2022. Complainant sought help from the Committee on Ministry (“COM”) of PHNJ, which arranged for mediation in February 2023. That effort was not successful; the disputes remained unabated. [STIP # 5 & 6]
3. On 10 May 2023 Complainant met with Rev. Jeanne Radak, the Presbytery Leader of PHNJ, informing her of the toll that the escalating disagreements were taking on his physical and mental health, supported by a note from his Advanced Practice Nurse, again seeking help from COM. [STIP # 7, 8 & 23; TS02]
4. The COM created a “Care Team” consisting of three of its members in response to Complainant’s request. Complainant met them via Zoom on 25 May 2023. [STIP # 9, 13 & 20]
5. In a message dated 26 May 2023 the head of the Care Team, Rev. David Young, informed both Complainant and the member of session with whom he had been most in conflict that COM recommended “... a paid Leave of Absence beginning ... June 18th and continuing until September 10, 2023,” with no indication that it was later to be called an Administrative Leave nor that it would involve any restrictions beyond a so-called “email and social media ‘sabbatical’” to promote a “cooling-off period.” [STIP # 21 & 22; TS01]
6. The COM also recommended that Complainant attend the Clergy Program at the Davidson Centre for the Professions in Davidson, NC. [STIP # 22; TS01].
7. Rev. Young also informed Complainant that the presbytery had engaged the services of Rev. Byron Leasure, a minister described as “a trained clergy coach and consultant in conflict management, to work with the pastor and the session....” [STIP # 22; TS01].
8. On 1 June 2023, the session of LVPC met in a called meeting to approve the COM’s plan. The minutes of the meeting indicate that Complainant “turned over the Moderation of the meeting to Pastor David Young of COM,” who referred to “...a breakdown of good communication and working relationships between the pastor and elders” and described Complainant’s leave as “administrative leave” with no indication that it was for any purpose other than to “support Pastor Ryan and his family.” [STIP # 24 through 27; TR31]
9. Following the meeting of members of COM’s Care Team with session, the Stated Clerk of PHNJ wrote to members of the congregation on 4 June 2023 also using the term “administrative leave” but indicating that “we anticipate his return in the fall.” [STIP # 28 through 30; TS03]
10. Complainant did attend the Davidson Centre.
11. Complainant met with Rev. Leasure on 7 August 2023, telling Rev. Leasure of his desire to return to his pastorate at LVPC. He reiterated his desire to complete his leave and return to LVPC to the Care Team on 23 August. [STIP # 33 & 37]
12. In response, Rev. Young of the Care Team asked whether Complainant wished his desire to return to his pastorate at LVPC be conveyed to its members at an upcoming Q&A Session; Complainant did so wish, and Rev. Young promised to do so. However, Rev. Young did not inform the congregation, later telling Complainant that he believed that session should be informed first. He further told Complainant that Complainant would not moderate or even attend session meetings in September, because of what Rev. Young called “unresolved matters.” [STIP # 37 through 41]

13. The Care Team and Rev. Leasure established “a process of reconciliation” requiring both Complainant and the session to exchange lists of three things that the other party must do to resolve the conflicts. Both the session and Complainant complied on 23 September 2023, and Complainant asked to meet with members of session to discuss the lists. [STIP # 45, 46 , 48 and 49]
14. LVPC’s session met on 4 October 2023, moderated by Rev. Leasure without notice to Complainant. Session discussed Complainant’s list, and voted to inform COM of their request to dissolve the pastoral relationship with Rev. Irmer. Rev. Irmer was informed of that decision by emails from Rev. Young and by two members of session reporting during a Care Team meeting on 11 October 2023. [STIP # 50 & 53]
15. Rev. Robert Eyre, by then engaged as Counsel to Complainant, objected to the process and actions of LVPC’s session and the Care Team in letters to the Presbytery Leader and Rev. Young on 23 October 2023 [STIP # 55; TC17] and to LVPC’s session on 25 October 2023 [STIP # 57; TS05]. The Clerk of Session of LVPC replied that the session would not change its decision or plans. [STIP # 58]
16. LVPC’s congregational meeting was held on 5 November 2023. Complainant was excluded. Rev. Leasure was present, answering questions and sharing his judgments of the allegedly broken relationship between Complainant and members of session. [STIP # 63 & 69]
17. COM invited Complainant to attend their meeting on 7 November 2023. COM gave Complainant 20 minutes to speak; he was asked no questions and received no acknowledgement of the objections sent by Rev. Eyre. The Care Team appeared before the COM after Complainant. Then COM discussed the request by LVPC to dissolve the pastoral relationship. [STIP # 70 & 87; testimony of Complainant]
18. The following day, Rev. Radak and Rev. Jacqui Van Vliet informed Complainant that the COM had voted to dissolve his pastoral relationship with LVPC [although Complainant holds that the COM lacked the *specific* authorization from the presbytery to dissolve *his* pastoral relationship], to specify his severance package, and to impose upon him Administrative Leave pending a psychological evaluation. They claimed in the letter that their action could not be reviewed by presbytery. In the letter they introduced the paragraph announcing the Administrative Leave with the sentence, “We realize this is something you were not expecting.” [STIP # 71 & 72; TC08]
19. The report of the COM to presbytery for the stated meeting on 14 November 2023 was part of the Consent Agenda, and was accepted by presbytery without comment. Complainant was excluded from the presbytery meeting. [STIP 72, 73 & 80; TS08]

Decision

In their document “Stipulation of Facts for Trial in Remedial Action 2023-04¹,” the parties agreed to ten issues of constitutional interpretation, listed as letters A-J. Based on the facts, the relevant portions of the Book of Order, and organized around the stipulated issues, the DECISION of the Permanent Judicial Commission is as follows:

ISSUE 1 [Originally identified as “A” in the Stipulated list of Issues of Constitutional Interpretation.]

Complainant alleges that the Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey’s Committee on Ministry acted erroneously in dissolving the pastoral relationship between Complainant and LVPC per G-3.0109b(5). This claim of irregularity is sustained

The COM lacked specific authority to dissolve the pastoral relationship between LVPC and Complainant per G-2.0903, G-3.0109, G-3.0109b(5), and G-3.0307. The Presbytery commissioned the COM with particular powers to dissolve pastoral calls in instances where both the pastor and congregation agree, powers which the Presbytery has a right to delegate when there is “specific authorization” (*John v. Presbytery of New York City, Remedial Appeal 225-05*). The first page of the document describing the COM’s delegated responsibilities [TR26] references that the COM “makes recommendations to the presbytery regarding the establishing and dissolving of pastoral calls...” and lists “dissolution and severance, when necessary.” The second page of the document, however, specifically states that the COM is authorized to dissolve only “pastoral relationships *where pastor and congregation concur.*” [TR26, emphasis added] Lacking the specific authority to dissolve the pastoral relationship where the pastor does not concur, an action of the presbytery was necessary to constitute the dissolution of the call. Therefore, Respondent also erred in denying Complainant the ability to state why the call should not be dissolved at the November 14th Presbytery meeting per G-2.0903, which says that “if pastor does not concur with the request to dissolve the relationship, the presbytery shall hear from him or her the reasons why the presbytery should not dissolve the relationship.” [TS08]

ISSUE 2 [Originally identified as “B” in the Stipulated list of Issues of Constitutional Interpretation.]

Complainant alleges that the COM lacked constitutional authority pursuant to D-7.0902 or otherwise to place Complainant on administrative leave or impose conditions or restrictions on his functions as pastor or his search for a new call.

This claim of irregularity is sustained.

¹ The parties agreed on the record at trial that this document represented shared stipulations of both fact and issues before the SPJC, with the exception of factual background number 5.

D-7.0902 addresses the use of administrative leave in allegations of sexual abuse, which is not raised in this case. D-7.0905 suggests the availability of administrative leave in other circumstances: “Nothing in this section shall preclude a presbytery from establishing its own rules for administrative leave or other restrictions on a minister’s service.” This language in D-7.0905 indicates that (a) a presbytery does have the authority to impose administrative leave or other restrictions on service, and (b) that authority should be guided by written rules.

In this case, Respondent did not have an established, written policy on administrative leave at the time of the COM meeting on November 7, 2023, when the COM voted to place Complainant on administrative leave, pending a psychological examination [TC08]; nor did Respondent create or communicate a clear definition or parameters of administrative leave in its work with Complainant. As a result, and as discussed more fully below, the COM’s action violated fundamental fairness because Complainant was not on notice prior to the COM meeting that he might be placed on administrative leave or the potential impact of administrative leave, which prevented his opportunity to be heard at the COM meeting on the question of administrative leave (*Lewis v. Pby of NYC, Remedial Case 207- 13, 11.066*).

Without any written rules, Respondent’s imposition of administrative leave had no defined guardrails and did not provide notice to Complainant that such action by the COM was even a possibility. Testimony at trial indicated that while Respondent had used administrative leave for medical reasons in the past, generally those were circumstances where the pastor did not object to being placed on leave. [Testimony of Presbytery Leader Rev. Jeanne Radak]

Although a presbytery has powers under G-3.03 over the ministries of its members, including some ability to impose conditions or restrictions on the functions of its members, Respondent consistently rooted its authority to restrict Complainant's functions within the presbytery in its imposition of administrative leave. (See, e.g., TR02, Email from Stated Clerk Shussett to Complainant: "Per the Presbytery's action on Administrative Leave, however you are not permitted to function in any way associated with being ordained to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament.") Likewise, Respondent relied upon administrative leave to justify denying Complainant's transfer of membership to another presbytery. [TC16] As found below, Complainant was not afforded fundamental fairness when the COM placed him, involuntarily, on administrative leave in November; therefore, Respondent's subsequent conditions and restrictions on Complainant likewise were unfair.

ISSUE 3 [Originally identified as "C" in the Stipulated list of Issues of Constitutional Interpretation.]

Complainant alleges that the actions taken by the COM on 7 November 2024 were disciplinary in nature or otherwise required the application of the procedural safeguards of *Church Discipline*; and that the COM did not comply with such procedural safeguards.

This claim of irregularity is not sustained.

Because we find that the COM's decision to place Complainant on involuntary administrative leave pending a psychological evaluation without prior notice or the ability to be heard on the issue violated standards of fundamental fairness (see discussion in Issue 4, below), we need not decide whether procedural safeguards and due process would be required outside of a formal disciplinary process.

We do not find that the COM's actions to dissolve the pastoral relationship or to approve the severance package approved by the congregation of LVPC were akin or rose to the level of being disciplinary in nature. While, as discussed herein, the COM's actions to dissolve the pastoral relationship between Complainant and the congregation were flawed and violated the Presbytery's own policy, that in and of itself does not make the action disciplinary in nature. Furthermore, as discussed herein, the severance package complied with a policy that the Presbytery would later adopt in compliance with G-3.0303c, and therefore Complainant was not harmed.

ISSUE 4 [Originally identified as "D" in the Stipulated list of Issues of Constitutional Interpretation.]

Complainant alleges that the constitution of the Church required the actions taken by the COM on 7 November 2023 to comply with the standards of fundamental fairness, and that the COM did not comply with those standards.

This claim of irregularity is sustained in part and not sustained in part.

"[A] presbytery is 'obligated to treat all parties fairly and provide them with an opportunity to present their positions. The test is fundamental fairness – the opportunity to be heard and a consideration of their respective positions without prejudice.'" (*Wolfe v. Presbytery of Winnebago*, 2010, 219-04, quoting *Lewis v. Presbytery of New York City*, Minutes, 1995, 11.066) The actions of the COM at its 7 November 2023 meeting are subject to the fundamental fairness standard and whether it gave Complainant the opportunity to be heard and it considered Complainant's position without prejudice. The COM took three actions on 7 November 2023: dissolving the pastoral relationship, approving terms of dissolution, and placing Complainant on Administrative Leave.

Based on the facts before us, the COM and the Presbytery failed to give the Complainant an opportunity to be heard prior to its imposition of involuntary administrative leave upon Complainant and thereby violated standards of fundamental fairness. Testimony by Complainant and Rev. David Young revealed that Complainant was uncomfortable with having his time away from LVPC being labeled as “administrative leave.” To address Complainant’s unease and Complainant’s belief that the congregation might think that his consenting to time away from the congregation was due to misconduct, in his address to the congregation on Sunday 4 June 2023 Rev. David Young addressed these concerns by telling the congregation that “it is important to note that this Leave did not come about in response to any form of misconduct, misappropriation of funds, or anything criminal. In our day and age, unfortunately, these are too often the assumptions that are made. That is simply not the case.” [TR32] By late August 2023, Complainant had communicated to the Care Team his desire that the voluntary administrative leave end and that he be able to return to LVPC. The materials Complainant’s attorney submitted to the COM for its 7 November 2023 meeting set forth Complainant’s position that he no longer consented to the voluntary administrative leave and considered its continuation to be an imposition of “involuntary ‘administrative leave.’” [TC19 at 14, et seq.]

On the facts before us, the Presbytery’s lack of notice to Complainant as well as the Presbytery’s failure to provide Complainant an opportunity to object and be heard prior to the imposition of administrative leave violated standards of fundamental fairness. Rev. Jeanne Radak’s 6 November 2023 email to the Complainant inviting him to the 7 November 2023 COM meeting outlined the process for the COM meeting as it related to the Complainant and his objections to the dissolution of the pastoral relationship between himself and LVPC. [TR24] Nowhere in the email does it mention “administrative leave” or the placing of Complainant on “administrative leave.” Complainant testified that at the COM meeting his focus was on his objections to the dissolution of the pastoral relationship. He further testified that no questions were asked of him during or after the time allotted to him by the COM. On behalf of the COM and the Presbytery, Rev. Jaqui Van Vliet, the co-moderator of COM, and Rev. Jeanne Radak, sent a joint letter to Complainant dated 8 November 2023 in which they informed Complainant, among other things, of the COM’s decision to place him on administrative leave. [TC08] After informing Complainant that he had been placed on administrative leave, the letter goes on to state “[w]e realize that this is something you were not expecting” and that the decision was based on COM’s concerns about Complainant’s “[readiness] to move forward with a new congregation.” [TC08] The COM’s action to place Complainant on involuntary administrative leave pending a psychological evaluation without prior notice or the opportunity to be heard prior to its imposition violated standards of fundamental fairness.

Based on the facts before us, the COM and the Presbytery did act with fundamental fairness and gave Complainant an opportunity to be heard as to the severance package, and there is no evidence they did not consider Complainant’s position without prejudice. Complainant had at least two opportunities to discuss the severance package with Rev. Jeanne Radak and Rev. David Young prior to the COM’s 7 November 2023 meeting, in addition to the time granted Complainant to be heard on that issue at the 7 November 2023 meeting. We do not find that the severance package violated standards of fundamental fairness.

As to COM’s action to dissolve the pastoral relationship between Complainant and LVPC, we already have found that the COM’s action to dissolve the pastoral relationship exceeded the authority granted to it by the Presbytery and that by excluding Complainant from its 14 November 2023 meeting, the Presbytery violated G-2.0903’s requirement that if the pastor does not concur in the dissolution, the presbytery shall hear from them why it should not be dissolved.

ISSUE 5 [Originally identified as “E” in the Stipulated list of Issues of Constitutional Interpretation.]

Complainant alleges that Respondent acted unconstitutionally in denying Complainant access to the Presbytery Meeting on 14 November 2023.

This claim of irregularity is sustained.

The actions of Respondent were unconstitutional under G-2.0903, which requires: “If the pastor does not concur with the request to dissolve the relationship, the presbytery shall hear from him or her the reasons why the presbytery should not dissolve the relationship.” Since the action needed to be taken at the presbytery meeting (see discussion under Issue 1, above), Complainant should have been heard at the 14 November 2023 presbytery meeting. Complainant was denied access to the presbytery meeting and had no opportunity to pull the matter of dissolution from the Consent Agenda or be heard on the issue; therefore Respondent violated G-2.0903.

ISSUE 6 [Originally identified as “F” in the Stipulated list of Issues of Constitutional Interpretation.]

Complainant alleges that the COM failed to correct the constitutional errors, fundamental unfairness, and denial of procedural safeguards in the process that led to the vote of the congregation on 5 November 2023.

This claim of delinquency is not sustained.

Complainant alleges several constitutional errors in the process leading to the vote of the congregation on 5 November 2023, including: the change in role of Rev. Leasure and the COM Care Team from a pastoral role to an “adverse witness”; the interference with Complainant’s resumption of duties as pastor of LVPC; the lack of an actual request of the congregation to call a meeting to consider dissolving the pastoral relationship pursuant to G-2.0903; the exclusion of Complainant as moderator and member of the session; the refusal of the session or COM to correct these errors in advance of the congregational meeting; the disparagement of Complainant during his absence from LVPC; the exclusion of Complainant from the congregational meeting; the omission of the subject of approval of terms of dissolution from the notice of the congregational meeting; and other procedural issues. [2023- 04 Complaint pp. 63-65]

The SPJC has jurisdiction over actions of the Respondent presbytery (D-4.0206(d)). We do not have jurisdiction over actions of the session or the congregation of LVPC. Our determination is confined to determining whether COM should have acted to correct any error or unfairness.

Regarding the calling of the congregational meeting pursuant to G-2.0903, the decision of the GAPJC in *John v. Presbytery of NYC, Remedial 226-02*, affirmed the SPJC’s determination in that case that the session could call “a special meeting of the congregation to consider dissolution of the pastoral relationship” where the session had heard concerns from several members “after several months of interaction among Rev. John, the Session, and the COM.” The SPJC’s decision in that case had noted that the “Complainant’s interpretation would require the session to call a meeting of the congregation to determine if the congregation wants to call a meeting to consider the dissolution of the pastoral relationship, or wait until one fourth of the members requested a meeting in writing pursuant to G-1.0502” (*John v. Presbytery of NYC, Remedial Case SNE 202-02*); we agree those additional steps would be unnecessary here as well, where the session’s decision to call a congregational meeting followed several months of involvement by a COM-appointed body with the congregation, the session, and Complainant.

We do have some concerns and questions about the process prior to the congregational meeting. For example, we acknowledge and are deeply troubled by the confusion and blurred boundaries around Rev. Leasure’s role, who was simultaneously operating as a “coach” to Complainant, a “consultant” to the

congregation and presbytery, a sometimes-moderator of session, and a preacher in worship. (We see less factual support for an adversarial role of the Care Team; testimony supported that the Care Team was seeking, in good faith, to care for both Complainant and the congregation and to restore the pastoral relationship if possible.) We likewise are concerned that the COM Care Team conducted several listening sessions with the LVPC congregation without sharing with Complainant the areas of contention that underlay the conflict and ultimately led to dissolution of the pastoral relationship.

But we also conclude that Respondent has the authority in G-3.0301a to dissolve pastoral relationships, and within that authority could appoint another moderator for meetings of the session or congregation. Additionally, G-2.0903 offers Complainant the opportunity to be heard by the presbytery, not the congregation, if he does not concur with a request to dissolve the pastoral relationship, and so it was not unconstitutional to prevent Complainant from addressing the congregation at the meeting.

Ultimately, the COM, in weighing any deficiencies in process, could nevertheless have concluded that the vote of the congregation itself was conducted fairly, with notice to and opportunity for discussion among members of the congregation. Thus, the COM could have found that any errors or unfairness leading up to the meeting would not have changed the outcome; the congregation had the power to vote against dissolution but chose to approve the motion for dissolution, with 83 votes in favor and 10 opposed (2 people abstained). (See *Phinisee v. Pby of Grace, Remedial Case 206-2, 11.085*, finding no error in the dissolution of the call, despite potential unfairness in the process, where the vote the congregation was overwhelming and the pastors had not demonstrated sufficient reasons why the relationships should not be dissolved.) And while the call for the congregational meeting would have been cleaner if it specifically referenced the terms of dissolution, we likewise determine that the COM could have found no prejudice in that (a) it would not have been unexpected for the congregation to consider terms of dissolution as part of a meeting on dissolution; and (b) the congregation had the opportunity to discuss and vote on those terms.

ISSUE 7 [Originally identified as “G” in the Stipulated list of Issues of Constitutional Interpretation.]

Complainant alleges that the COM’s own meeting on 7 November 2023 violated constitutional standards of fundamental fairness and/or denied Complainant procedural safeguards and due process.

This claim of irregularity is not sustained.

Based on the facts before us, the COM did act with fundamental fairness and gave Complainant an opportunity to be heard.

“[A] presbytery is ‘obligated to treat all parties fairly and provide them with an opportunity to present their positions. The test is fundamental fairness – the opportunity to be heard and a consideration of their respective positions without prejudice.’” (*Wolfe v. Presbytery of Winnebago, 2010, 219-04*, quoting *Lewis v. Presbytery of New York City, Minutes, 1995, 11.066*) The actions of the COM at its 7 November 2023 meeting are subject to the fundamental fairness standard and whether it gave Complainant the opportunity to be heard and considered Complainant’s position without prejudice.

Notice was given to the complainant for the 7 November 2023 COM meeting. Rev. Jeanne Radak’s 6 November 2023 email to Complainant invited him to the 7 November 2023 COM meeting and outlined the process for the COM meeting as it related to Complainant and his objections to the dissolution of the pastoral relationship between himself and LVPC. [TR24; see also TR18]

Complainant and his attorney did attend the meeting and were heard. Complainant was allotted twenty minutes to address the committee regarding his dissolution of his pastoral relationship. This is confirmed by Complainant's testimony during trial, as well as the testimony of Rev. Jeanne Radak. Complainant testified that at the COM meeting his focus was on his objections to the dissolution of the pastoral relationship.

ISSUE 8 [Originally identified as "H-J" in the Stipulated list of Issues of Constitutional Interpretation.]

Complainant alleges that the COM's vote to approve an agreement to terms of dissolution was separately irregular for lack of policy under G-3.0303c; the COM's vote to approve an agreement to terms of dissolution was separately irregular because there was no agreement in fact; and the COM's vote to approve an agreement to terms of dissolution was arbitrary and inequitable, in violation of the principles of fairness and equity intended to govern such terms under G-3.0303c.

This claim of irregularity is not sustained.

The 20 October 2023 letter from Rev. Jeanne Radak to Complainant provides Complainant with two opportunities to be heard with respect to the severance package: 26 October 2023 with Rev. Radak and Rev. David Young from the Care Team and again on 7 November 2023 with the COM, commissioned by the Presbytery to act on all dissolutions [TR21/TC07]. The letter extended an invitation for legal counsel to be present. The letter concludes with a three (3) page detailed proposal for severance.

In the ruling of ISSUE 4 there has been a determination that COM and the Presbytery acted with fundamental fairness and gave Complainant an opportunity to be heard as to the severance package on these two (2) occasions. Complainant had opportunities to discuss and negotiate some of the terms. Just because it is called an agreement does not mean that the end result has to be entirely in Complainant's favor. Therefore, we do not find that the severance package violated standards of fundamental fairness.

Furthermore, the ruling of ISSUE 3 speaks to the nature of a three-way call. The severance package was approved by a vote of the congregation of the LVPC after the motion was approved to dissolve the pastoral relationship. The severance package was approved by the COM commissioned by the Presbytery to act on all dissolutions [TR26]. The terms of severance were included in the COM report of the 14 November 2023 Stated Meeting and could have been pulled from the Consent Agenda. The Consent Agenda was approved by the attending body.

With respect to G-3.0303c, the Presbytery has authority to "establish *minimum* compensation standards, **including provisions for dissolution terms**, for pastoral calls...." This addition to the Book of Order went into effect in July 2023. The Presbytery, through its Administration and Coordinating Team (ACT) was in the process of establishing minimum compensation standards for dissolution of pastoral calls concurrently and separately from the actions of this proceeding. The severance agreement was consistent with these standards that were ultimately adopted by the Presbytery and were not separately irregular.

Comments

Clergy Coaching

Throughout the trial, there was much discussion about the use of Rev. Byron Leasure, provided by PHNJ. The role of Rev. Leasure was murky. At times, he was characterized as a consultant and, at other times, he was presented as a coach for Complainant; this led to confusion about confidentiality and unclear boundaries.

In the future, we recommend that any coaches PHNJ utilizes follow the same standard as the Synod of the Northeast's Coaching Network. Coaches in this network follow the code of conduct and ethics provided by the International Coaching Federation, which includes clear delineations of a coach's role, illuminates potential conflicts of interest in combining roles, and adheres to a strict code of confidentiality that may only be broken in extreme circumstances. PHNJ should consider the certification of coaches they employ and whether they meet the professional standards of coaches that are used throughout the Synod of the Northeast.

Pastoral Statement

The SPJC realizes that this whole process was difficult emotionally and spiritually for all involved. Although we are called upon to decide matters of constitutional interpretation and procedural fairness, we want to acknowledge that a case like this arises out of a complex and painful set of circumstances. Complainant is not alone among pastors in struggling with mental health challenges, particularly in a world and church changed by a global pandemic. Respondent is not alone among presbyteries in trying to navigate conflict among pastors and congregations, where there is no guidebook for doing so. Even as we find that the process did not always meet the test of fundamental fairness, we also know that Respondent faithfully dedicated considerable time and resources to working with LVPC and Complainant to try and seek a resolution. We recognize that Respondent was dealing with significant concerns raised about Complainant and his pastoral leadership by members of the congregation, which escalated to the point that members of the congregation “expressed concern regarding their safety” at the congregational meeting, and the session responded by engaging police presence for the congregational meeting at issue. [TS06] We also recognize that caring for Complainant’s well-being, and the well-being of his family, are an important part of “building up the body of Christ” (D-1.01).

We acknowledge that presbyteries have broad authority to supervise and regulate the behavior of their minister-members, when applied equally to all with prior notice and fundamental fairness. In the context of this case, we affirm that Respondent can expect Complainant, as well as the members and officers of LVPC, to honor and conform to any separation ethics policy of the presbytery.

As this remedial matter moves to resolution, we pray that members of the congregation, representatives of the presbytery, and Complainant and his family all seek and experience God’s peace and wholeness in their future ministries.

Remedies

On 5 November 2023, the “congregation voted to request that the Presbytery of the Highlands of NJ dissolve the Pastoral relationship between Pastor Ryan Irmer and the Long Valley Presbyterian Church.” The motion was approved by an overwhelming majority of the congregation. As stated above, the SPJC has no jurisdiction over the actions taken by a congregation. Even though Respondent’s action to concur with the vote of the congregation to dissolve the pastoral relationship was fundamentally unfair because Complainant was prevented from attending or speaking at the meeting of the presbytery, the appropriate remedy is not to reinstate the pastoral relationship; neither Complainant nor LVPC would benefit from forcing a relationship that is irreconcilably broken.

Moreover, Complainant’s terms of dissolution were fair and consistent with the policy developed by the presbytery.

We therefore focus the remedies in our order on addressing Complainant’s current status within PHNJ and his path to a future call to ministry.

Order

IT IS ORDERED that the action of COM effectuated by PHNJ at its 14 November 2023 meeting to place Complainant “on Administrative Leave pending appropriate assessments” is hereby vacated in its entirety.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that as it relates to this case and facts of this case, Respondent shall be prohibited from communicating (verbally, in writing, or otherwise) to the officers, agents, employees, or volunteers of another council of the PC(USA) that Complainant had been placed on “Administrative Leave pending appropriate assessments,” “administrative leave,” or “leave,” by the COM or by the Presbytery or that he was or is in any way involuntarily restricted or involuntarily suspended from exercising his duties, obligations, and rights as a Minister of the Word and Sacrament and minister-member of the PHNJ who is not currently serving a congregation or serving in a validated ministry.

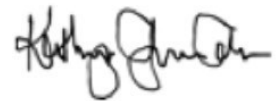
IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that Respondent shall be prohibited from restricting Complainant from exercising his duties, obligations, and rights as a Minister of the Word and Sacrament and minister-member of PHNJ who is not currently serving a congregation or serving in a validated ministry.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that Respondent shall allow Complainant to participate in the process of transfer of membership to another presbytery as it would any other minister member of the presbytery.

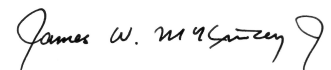
All other claims for relief are denied.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the Stated Clerk of PHNJ report this decision to the presbytery at its next stated meeting, that the presbytery enter the full Decision upon its minutes, and that an excerpt from those minutes showing entry of the Decision be sent to the Stated Clerk of the SNE; and that the Stated Clerk of the SNE report this Decision at the next stated meeting of the synod.

Signed this 26th day of April, 2024:



Rev. Kate Jones Calone
Moderator, Permanent Judicial Commission



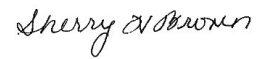
James W. McKinsey, Jr.
Clerk, Permanent Judicial Commission



Rev. Casey Carbone
Asst. Clerk, Permanent Judicial Commission



Rev. Evan Hansen
Clerk-Elect, Permanent Judicial Commission



Sherry Brown
Member, Permanent Judicial Commission



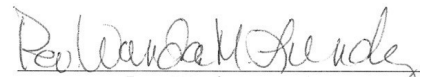
Rev. Joseph Chu
Member, Permanent Judicial Commission



Commissioned Ruling Elder Caroline Demers
Member, Permanent Judicial Commission



Rev. Shelley Gardner
Member, Permanent Judicial Commission



Rev. Wanda M. Lundy
Member, Permanent Judicial Commission

