

**The 18th Stated Meeting of
The Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey**

November 12th, 2024
(to be approved at the
19th Stated Meeting of
The Presbytery of the
Highlands of New
Jersey)

The Body of Christ, A Call to Gather

The Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey of the Presbyterian Church (USA) held its 18th Stated Meeting on November 13th, 2024, on the ZOOM platform.

The Moderator, Ruling Elder Sue Cail (Ringwood Community), called the meeting to order at 7:00 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
Alpha	Rev. Scott DeCaro	P		A
Andover	Pamela Osborne	P	Marcia Bruno	P
Basking Ridge (3)	Rev. Dennis Jones	P	Elizabeth Cleary	P
	Rev. Dr. Maureen Paterson	P	Joan Eichhorn	P
				A
Bedminster, Lamington	Vacant	V		A
Belvidere	Rev. Dr. Pamela Szurek	E		A
Blairstown (2)	Rev. David Harvey	P	Zach Burke	P
				A
Boonton (2)	Rev. Carie Morgan	P	Meg Meyer	P
				A
Bound Brook (3)	Rev. Linda Owens	P	Douglas Boleyn	P
			Kathy Hobbs	P
			Elaine Tetreault	P
Branchville	Rev. Dr. Nancy Young	P	Kathleen Katzenstein	P
	Rev. David Young	P		
Califon, Fairmount	Rev. Mike Atzert	E	Sherry Cameron	P
Califon, Lower Valley	Rev. Tex Culton	P		A

Cedar Knolls, Hildale Park	Rev. Ross Lang	P		A
Chatham Township (2)	Rev. Thomas Brown	P	Evan Skinner	P A
Chatham, Ogden Memorial	Rev. Kathi Heath	A	Donn Mansfield	P
Chester	Rev. Christopher Scrivens	A	Jeanne Perry	P
Clinton (2)	Rev. Tracey Henry	P		A A
Delaware	Vacant	V		A
Delaware, 1st Oxford	Vacant	V	Jody Flynn	P
Denville, Union Hill	Rev. Timothy Clarkson	P	John Ware	P
Dover, First Memorial	Rev. Alan Schaefer (HR)	E		A
East Hanover, Kitchell	Rev. Hannah Allred	A	Carol Corea	P
Flanders (2)	Rev. Cliff Acklam	P	Suzanne Preston Lois Steward	P P
Flemington (3)	Rev. Amy Lincoln	P	Jennifer Calvelli Jennifer Willis Michael Russell	P P P
Florham Park, Calvary	Rev. Ronald de Groot	A	Becky Tate	P
Franklin (2)	Rev. Julie Raffety	P		A A
Frenchtown (2)	Vacant	V		A
Gillette, Meyersville	Rev. Stefanie Muntzel	E		A
Hackettstown	Rev. Erin Hayes-Cook	P		A
Hampton, Musconetcong Valley	Stephanie Farley, CRE	P		A
Hillsborough, TAFPC	Rev. Eric Lai	A		A
Lambertville (2)	Vacant	V	Phillip McCloughan	P A
Lambertville, 2nd English	Vacant	V		A
Long Valley	Vacant	V		A
Long Valley, Highlands	Rev. Robin Burton Palmer	P	Ruth Babula	P
Madison	Rev. Carol Howard	P		A
Mendham	Rev. Scot McCachren	P	Van Buchanan	P
Milford	Rev. Dr. Linda Erkert-Bullock	A		A
Milford, Alexandria (2)	Rev. Nicholas Hatch	P		A A
Milford, Holland Bible	Rev. Geoff Stanley	A	Virginia Derbyshire	P
Mine Hill	Vacant	V	Debbie Hooper	P
Morris Plains	Rev. Donald Brown	P	Sue Vigilante	P
Morristown (3)	Rev. Daniel Vigilante Rev. Audrey Webber	A A	Richard Albright Craig Barth	P P A

New Vernon	Rev. William Stone	P		A
Newton	Rev. Heather Morrison Yaden	E	Alice Sharik	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 McGuinness	P
Pittstown, Bethlehem	Rev. Linda Gaden	P		A
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	A		A A
Ringwood	Rev. Arlene Romaine	P		A
Rockaway (2)	Rev. Ryon Herin	P		A A
Somerset (2)	Rev. Nancy Nalepa-Skibo	P		A A
Sparta	Rev. Dr. Patrick Sileo	A		A
Stanhope	Pamela Osborne	P	Carol Barry	P
Stewartsville	Rev. Stephen Choi	P	Denise DeMasi	P
Stewartsville, Old Greenwich	Rev. Mary Beth Mardis-Lecroy	P		A
Stirling	Rev. Stefanie Muntzel	E		A
Stockton	Rev. David Snyder	P		A
Succasunna (2)	Rev. Timothy Clarkson	P	Cathy Fellows	P A
Sussex	Rev. Katherine Scott-Kirschner	P	Charles Bates	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	P	Dorothy Decker	P
West Milford (2)	Rev. Dr. Christopher Doyle	P	Betsy Engelhardt	P A
Wharton	Rev. Sarah Green	P		A
Wharton, Berkshire Valley	Vacant	V		A
Wharton, Hungarian	Vacant	V		A
Whippany	Rev. Sarah Cairatti	P		A

Teaching Elders Engaged in a Validated Ministry

Rev. Joanne Miller	E
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Rev. Robin Miller Curras (<i>serving church out of bounds</i>)	A
Rev. Christine Davies	P
Rev. Jennifer Hrynyk	A
Rev. John C. Kile	A
Rev. Jeanne Radak (<i>Presbytery Leader – Highlands Presbytery</i>)	P
Rev. 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. M. Elizabeth Blythe	A
Rev. Justin Choi	P
Rev. Dr. Ellen Clemot	A
Rev. Courtney Cromie	A
Rev. Dan Dorrow	A
Rev. Jin Hee Han	P
Rev. Ryan Irmer	P
Rev. Donna McDaid	P
Rev. Peter Magnan	P
Rev. Merideth Mueller-Bolton	P
Rev. Hayley O'Connor	A
Rev. Gail Pendleton	A
Rev. Annie Tsai	A

Honorably Retired

Rev. Peter Amerman	E
Rev. Janice Ammon	E
Rev. Jeff Archer	E
Rev. Nancy Asbury	E
Rev. Barbara Aspinall	P
Rev. Charles Baier	E
Rev. Joicy Becker-Richards	E
Rev. Robert Beringer	E
Rev. George Blank	E
Rev. Sally Campbell	E
Rev. Cynthia Crowner	E
Rev. William Culton	P
Rev. James D'Angelo	E
Rev. William Davis	E
Rev. Judith Dean	E
Rev. Richard Dole	E

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

Ruling Elders by Virtue of Office

Paula Benson, Highlands Presbyterian Church, Long Valley, Past Moderator	P
Sue Cail, Community Presbyterian Church of Ringwood, Moderator	P
John Crozier, First Presbyterian Church of Boonton, COM Co-Moderator	P
Wendy Doidge, Presbyterian Church in Morristown, Past Moderator	P
Alan Ford, Bethlehem Presbyterian Church, Pittstown, Past Moderator	P
Lisa Gray, Old Greenwich Presbyterian Church, Stewartsville, Past Moderator	P
John Hellriegel, Community Presbyterian Church, Chester, ACT Member	P
Alec Jain, Presbyterian Church of Morris Plains, ACT Member	P
Jane McDonald, First Presbyterian Church of Newton, PW Commissioner	P
Joe Martinoni, First Presbyterian Church of Rockaway, Past Moderator	P
David Peterson, Clinton Presbyterian Church, ACT Co-Moderator	P
Mel Prestamo, Long Valley Presbyterian Church, Past Moderator	P
Donna Rahmann, Fairmount Presbyterian Church, Califon, CPM Co-Moderator	P
Richard Rubin, Presbyterian Church in Morristown, ACT Member	P

Others in Attendance

Sonja Gaertner, Office Manager & Attendance Clerk, Presbytery of the Highlands	P
Lizabeth Hutchinson, Financial Administrator, Presbytery of the Highlands	P
Pamela Davis, Wilson Memorial Church, Visitor	P
Jamie Evans, Flemington Presbyterian Church, Visitor	P
Robert Eyre, Christ Community Church, Philadelphia Presbytery, Visitor	P
Bill Getman, Southern Presbytery of NJ, Visitor	P
Lisette Gonzalez-Sosa, Sanctuary & Seed, Visitor	P
Tania Nemeth, Community Presbyterian Church of Ringwood, Visitor	P
Nancy Scott, Wilson Memorial Church, Visitor	P
Judy Wall, Wilson Memorial Church, Visitor	P
Jamie Wilson, Visitor	P
Debbie Spinelli, Visitor	P
Leanne Bridjidl, Visitor	P
Shirley Gonzalez, Visitor	P
Iris Gonzalez, Visitor	P

Total in Attendance – 124

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

WORDS OF GREETING**INTRODUCTION OF NEW RULING ELDER COMMISSIONERS**

Ruling Elder Van Buchanan, First Presbyterian Church of Mendham

Ruling Elder Cathy Fellows

Ruling Elder Becky Tate

Ruling Elder Sherry Cameron

EXPLANATION OF UNANIMOUS CONSENT

ITEMS FOR UNANIMOUS CONSENT:

CORRESPONDING MEMBERS AND GUESTS

Bill Gettman, Teaching Elder, Presbytery for Southern New Jersey
Tania Nemeth, Ruling Elder, Community Presbyterian Church, Ringwood

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

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

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

ADOPTION OF THE CONSENT AGENDA

SC-1

Approve the minutes of the Presbytery meeting held September 10, 2024.

SC-2

Approve the minutes of the Special Presbytery meeting held October 10, 2024.

SC-3

Approve excuses for the Presbytery meeting of November 12, 2024.

SC-4

Receive the Imbalance Correction for November 12, 2024 effective January 1, 2025.

SC-5

Receive the report of the Administrative Commission to Install Rev. Arlene Romaine.

SC-6

Receive the report of the Administrative Commission to Ordain & Install Pamela Osborne.

SC-7

Receive the report of the Administrative Commission to Install Rev. Eric Lai.

SC-8

Receive the report of the Administrative Commission to Install Rev. Tom Brown.

SC-9

Receive the interim report of the Administrative Commission of the Westminster Presbyterian Church, Phillipsburg.

SC-10

Receive the report of the Administrative Commission of the First Presbyterian Church of Hanover, East Hanover.

SC-11

Receive the report of the Administration and Coordinating Team.

SC-12

Receive the report of the Church Development Team.

SC-13

Receive the report of the Committee on Ministry – Part 1

SC-14

Receive the report of the Committee on Ministry – Part 2

SC-15

Receive the report of the Committee on Preparation for Ministry.

SC-16

Receive the report of the Nominating Committee.

SC-17

Receive the report of the Property & Insurance Team.

SC-18

Received the report of the Presbyterian Women of the Highlands Presbytery.

SC-19

Receive the report of the Young Leader Formation Team.

SC-20

The Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program (PILP) has offered a loan in the amount of \$57,000 to the Oak Ridge Presbyterian Church, to convert from oil to gas. The Administration and Coordinating Team approved the loan on the recommendation of the Property and Insurance Team. The Presbytery, or the Administration and Coordinating Team on its behalf, must approve and sign for such a loan, as the Presbytery is responsible if the Church cannot make its payments.

COM-9

The COM recommends approval of the Presbytery the Leave of Absence Policy.

COM-10

The COM recommends updates to the Presbytery Family and Medical Leave Policy.

Upon request, SC-11 and SC-14 were removed from the Consent Agenda and moved to New Business.

Consent agenda approve as amended.

Stated Clerk's Report

SC-21

On September 15, 2024, Chet Penza informed the Presbytery that he had joined a congregation of United Methodist Church. He was then informed of the consequences of joining a congregation in another denomination, and concurred with these, per G-2.0509 "Renunciation of Jurisdiction," which reads "Renunciation of jurisdiction shall remove the minister of the Word and Sacrament from membership and ordered ministry and shall terminate the exercise of that ministry. The renunciation shall be reported by the stated clerk at the next meeting of the presbytery, which shall record the renunciation, delete her or his name from the appropriate roll, and take such other administrative actions as may be required by this Constitution, including public communication of such a renunciation."

SC-22

Following a Request for Reference (D-7.04) by one of the Presbytery's congregations, the Presbytery Permanent Judicial Commission agreed to the request on September 30, 2024, and appointed an Investigating Committee. The Investigating Committee had its first meeting on October 21, 2024.

SC-23

On October 25, 2024 the 2023 minutes of Highlands Presbytery were approved without exception.

SC-24

The Stated Clerk provided an oral summary of the Decision of the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission in the matter of The Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey v. Rev. Ryan Irmer 2024-02. The Decision can be found in its entirety attached and on the Presbytery and General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commissions websites.

COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY

INTRODUCTIONS OF NEW PASTORAL RELATIONSHIPS

Rev. Van Vliet introduced new Pastors and Pastors in new positions:

Rev. Carol Howard, Covenant Supply Pastor, Presbyterian Church of Madison

Rev. Pamela Osborne, Pastor, First Presbyterian Church of Stanhope & Andover Presbyterian Church

Rev. William “Tex” Culton, Interim Pastor, Lower Valley Presbyterian Church, Califon

Rev. Tom Brown, Pastor, Presbyterian Church of Chatham Township

EXAMINATION OF CANDIDATE

Rev. Van Vliet stated the motion to examine Lissette González Sosa for ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacrament, for the purpose of serving as Executive Director/Wild Seed Pastor of the Sanctuary and Seed, a ministry validated by the Presbytery at its September 2024 meeting.

Rev. Van Vliet introduced Lissette to the Presbytery, and after re-stating the motion, invited her to share her biography. The floor was then opened for questions to the candidate.

Following a series of questions from the assembled, it was **MOVED, SECONDED, AND CARRIED** to suspend the examination. Lissette was dismissed to a waiting room as discussion was invited.

Returning to the motion, it was **MOVED, SECONDED, AND CARRIED** to approve the ordination of Candidate Lissette González Sosa, and to place her on the rolls of the Presbytery.

Prayers for Lissette and the ministry were offered.

WORSHIP

Worship was led by members of the Worship Planning Team, Revs. Dr. Nancy Young (HR), Mary Beth Mardis-Lecroy (Old Greenwich), and Steve Shussett.

Administrative Commission of the First Presbyterian Church of Hanover

Rev. Sarah Caraitti (Whippany), Moderator of the Administrative Commission of the First Presbyterian Church of Hanover presented the following:

BACKGROUND:

The Administrative Commission for First Presbyterian Church of East Hanover was approached by the East Hanover Township to purchase the Parish house and Manse, which are adjacent to each other, as the location for a Senior Community Center. After negotiations the Administrative

Commission agreed to the sale of the parish house and manse. The agreement includes allowing the tenants to remain in the manse until the summer of 2025. The resolution is requested by the attorney in order to move forward with the contract for sale of the property. The sale does not include the Sanctuary or the cemetery which is across the street from the Parish house and manse. It does include that the owners or renters of the Sanctuary will have access to the parking lot of the Senior Center. A worshipping community using the sanctuary on a regular basis may also have use of the Senior Center on Sundays.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey, Inc. as the successor in interest to the First Presbyterian Church of Hanover is authorized to enter into a Contract for the sale of real property and to sell the property located at 16 Hanover Road, Township of East Hanover, County of Morris, State of New Jersey to the Township of East Hanover for the purchase price of Two Million Five Hundred Thousand (\$2,500,000.00) Dollars.

The motion was **MOVED, SECONDED, AND CARRIED**

CHURCH DEVELOPMENT TEAM

The Rev Nick Hatch (Alexandria) spoke to the “Who is Our Neighbor?” program and encouraged the churches of the Presbytery to participate.

DISCERNMENT TEAM

Presbytery Leader Rev. Jeanne Radak updated the Presbytery on the work of the Discernment Team, and reminded those in attendance of the Vocation Statement for the Presbytery of the Highlands

God calls the Presbytery of the Highlands
to equip, enable, and nurture the presbytery community
as we exemplify the love of Christ in and through creative ministries
preparing our faith communities to embrace and engage a new season.

DIGITAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

Rev. Rodgers read the Digital Announcements that were collected from the chat.

SHARING OUR STORIES

The Andover Presbyterian Church video, “The Small Church with the Big Heart” was shown, featuring Sandra Wozniak.

ADMINISTRATION AND COORDINATING TEAM

2025 Budget

Ruling Elder Pete Peterson (Clinton), ACT Co-Moderator, assisted by Presbytery Leader Jeanne Radak, highlighted work of the Finance and Budget team and presented the 2025 Budget for a approval. He reviewed the factors of the budget while highlighting the changes for 2025: Increase in Per Capita, Initial stage of the GA Funding Model Experiment – Percentage Model, Board of Pensions changes, and a decrease in the deficit.

MOTION: The Administration and Coordinating Team recommends: The 2025 Budget. The budget reflects the changes to the Board of Pensions and the 2% increase for the staff.

MOTION APPROVED

Pete also reviewed the following Presbytery Meeting Dates approved by the Administration & Coordinating Team:

March 11, 2025

May 13, 2025

September 9, 2025

November 11, 2025

Rev. David Harvey (Blairstown), moderator of the ACT Personnel Committee moved the following:

That the Rev. Dr. Steven Shussett be elected as Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of Highlands for another three years (January 1, 2025 to December 31, 2027), and that his contract as resourcing staff be renewed concurrently.

MOTION APPROVED

MOTION: Approve the attached Anti-Racism Policy.

MOTION APPROVED

DWELLING IN THE WORD: Members worked in small groups to discuss Romans 12:1-6 (ESV)

Nominations for 2025

NOMINATING COMMITTEE (NOM)

NOMINATED by the Administration and Coordinating Team

Class of 2025

Rev. Amy Lincoln (B) (Flemington/Presbyterian)

Rev. William "Tex" Culton (B) (HR)

Class of 2026

Rev. Barbara Aspinall (B) (HR)

Elder Alec Jain, (A) (Morris Plains/Presbyterian)

Class of 2027

Elder Paula Benson (A) (Long Valley/Highlands)

Vacant

NOMINATED by the Nominating Committee

ADMINISTRATION AND COORDINATING TEAM (ACT)

Class of 2025

Elder Sue Cail, Ringwood/Community (Immediate Past Moderator)

Rev. Scott DeCaro (A), Alpha/United

Elder Alec Jain (A), Morris Plains/Presbyterian

Elder David “Pete” Peterson (B), Clinton/Presbyterian, ACT Co-Moderator

Class of 2026

Rev. David Harvey (B), Blairstown/First, ACT Co-Moderator

Rev. Stefanie Muntzel (A), Meyersville/Presbyterian & Stirling/First

Rev. Chad Rodgers, Califon/Lower Valley (Moderator)

Vacant

Class of 2027

Rev. Hannah Allred (A), East Hanover/Kitchell Memorial

Rev. Ryon Herin, Rockaway/First (Vice Moderator)

Vacant

Vacant

PROPERTY AND INSURANCE TEAM (P&I)

Class of 2025

Rev. Scot McCachren (A), Mendham/First (Moderator/Co-Moderator)

Elder Ken Nickel (A), Boonton/First (Moderator/Co-Moderator)

Class of 2026

Elder Alan Ford (B), Pittstown/Bethlehem

Elder Doug Smith (B), Gillette/Meyersville

Class of 2027

Elder Lisa Kolterjahn (B), Stewartville/Old Greenwich

Vacant

CHURCH DEVELOPMENT TEAM (CDT)

Class of 2025

Rev. Mary Beth Mardis-Lecroy (A), Stewartville/Old Greenwich

Rev. Ian Rankine (A), Pluckemin/Presbyterian, Co-Moderator

Vacant

Class of 2026

Elder Betsy Engelhardt (A), West Milford/Presbyterian
Rev. Sarah Green (A), Wharton/United
Rev. Dr. Meredith Mueller-Bolton (B), At-Large

Class of 2027

Rev. Nicholas Hatch (B), Milford/Alexandria
Rev. Carie Morgan (B), Boonton/First Co-Moderator
Vacant

COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY (COM)

Class of 2025

Rev. Robin Palmer Burton (B), Long Valley/Highlands
Rev. Dr. Ellen Clark Clemot (B), At-Large
Elder John Crozier (B), Boonton/First, Co-Moderator – with Presbytery permission
Rev. Rich Gelson (B), Phillipsburg/Pilgrim
Elder Joe Martinoni (B), Rockaway/First
Rev. Heather Morrison-Yaden (A), Newton/First
Vacant
Vacant

Class of 2026

Rev. Cliff Acklam (A), Flanders/United
Rev. Michael Atzert (B), Chaplain
Elder Jerry Chandler (B), Newton/First
Elder Betty Darcy (B), Morristown/Presbyterian
Rev. Dr. Maureen Paterson(B), Basking Ridge/Presbyterian
Elder Carol Skidmore (B), Basking Ridge/Presbyterian
Rev. Jacqui Van Vliet (B), Madison/Presbyterian, Co-Moderator
Vacant

Class of 2027

Elder Craig Barth (A), Morristown/Presbyterian
Rev. Robin Curras (A), At-Large
Elder Lisa Gray (A), Stewartsville/Old Greenwich
Rev. Carol Howard (A), Madison/Presbyterian
Rev. Daniel Vigilante (A), Morristown/Presbyterian
Rev. David Young (B), HR/Branchville/First, Co-Moderator
Vacant
Vacant

COMMITTEE ON PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY (CPM)

Class of 2025

Elder Craig Barth (A), Morristown/Presbyterian

Vacant

Class of 2026

**Rev. Dr. Christopher Doyle (A), Oak Ridge/Presbyterian & West Milford/Presbyterian),
Co-Moderator**

Rev. Kathi Heath (A), Chatham/Ogden Memorial, Co-Moderator

Class of 2027

Rev. Linda Gaden (A), Pittstown/Bethlehem

Elder Donna Rahmann (B), Califon/Fairmount

COMMITTEE ON REPRESENTATION (COR)

Class of 2025

Elder Mel Prestamo (B), Long Valley/Presbyterian)

Rev. Audrey Webber (A), Morristown/Presbyterian

Class of 2026

Elder Bisham Singh (A) Bedminster/Lamington

Rev. Bill Stone (A), New Vernon/First

Class of 2027

Rev. Erin Hayes-Cook (B), Hackettstown/First, Moderator

Elder Marie Knapp (B), Milford/Alexandria First

PERMANENT JUDICIAL COMMISSION (PJC)

Class of 2025

Rev. Barbara Aspinall (HR)

Elder Donna Keoppel, Boonton/First, Co-Clerk

Elder Stuart Ours, Washington/First, Co-Moderator

Elder Mel Prestamo, Long Valley/Presbyterian

Class of 2027

Elder Jamie Evans, Flemington/Presbyterian, Co-Clerk

Rev. David Harvey, Blairstown/First, Co-Moderator

Rev. Linda Gaden, Pittstown/Bethlehem

Vacant

Class of 2029

Rev. Peter Magnan, At-Large
Rev. Fred Milligan, HR
Elder Jack Felch, Stewartsville/Old Greenwich
Rev. Tom Brown, Chatham/Presbyterian

BLAIR ACADEMY CONSULTATION TEAM

Class of 2025

Ann Bain (A), Branchville/First
Rev. Dr. Pamela Szurek (A), Belvidere/United

Class of 2026

Elder Owen Newson (B), Stanhope/First

Vacant

Class of 2027

Rev. Julie Raffety (A), Franklin/First
Erica Wulster (A), Blairstown/First

YOUNG LEADER FORMATION TEAM

Class of 2025

Steven Gaden (A) (Morris Plains/Presbyterian)
Vacant

Class of 2026

Catherine Morgan (B), Ringwood/Community
Vacant

Class of 2027

Amy Clarkson (B), Denville/Union Hill
Joann Willans (B), Whippany/First

CORPORATION OFFICERS

President of Corporation – Rev. David Harvey
Term: ACT Moderator

Secretary of the Corporation – Rev. Scot McCachren
Term: P & I Moderator

Treasurer – Elder Becky Moody (2024-2029)

Moderator and Vice Moderator
2025 – Rev. Chad Rodgers, Moderator
2025 – Rev. Ryon Herin, Vice Moderator

Nominations were requested from the floor. **THE SLATE WAS APPROVED AS PRESENTED**

INSTALLATION OF 2025 MODERATOR AND VICE-MODERATOR OF THE PRESBYTERY OF THE HIGHLANDS OF NEW JERSEY

Rev. Chad Rodgers (Johnsonburg) and Rev Ryon Herin (Rockaway) were installed as 2025 Moderator and Vice-Moderator, respectively. Elder Sue Cail presided

NEW BUSINESS

As requested, SC-11 and SC-14 were read to the Presbytery. Following discussion these items were **MOVED, SECONDED, AND CARRIED.**

ADJOURNMENT

Moderator Cail closed the meeting after prayer at 10 PM.

Attested: _____
Steven H. Shussett Stated Clerk

REPORTS:

Imbalance Correction for November 12, 2024 effective January 1, 2025.
Report of the Administrative Commission to Install Rev. Arlene Romaine.
Report of the Administrative Commission to Ordain & Install Pamela Osborne.
Report of the Administrative Commission to Install Rev. Eric Lai.
Report of the Administrative Commission to Install Rev. Tom Brown.
interim Report of the Administrative Commission of the Westminster Presbyterian Church, Phillipsburg.
Report of the Administrative Commission of the First Presbyterian Church of Hanover, East Hanover.
Report of the Administration and Coordinating Team.
Report of the Church Development Team.
Committee on Ministry – Part 1
Committee on Ministry – Part 2
Report of the Committee on Preparation for Ministry.
Report of the Nominating Committee.
Report of the Property & Insurance Team.
Report of the Presbyterian Women of the Highlands Presbytery.
Report of the Young Leader Formation Team

ATTACHMENTS:

Family & Medical Leave Policy
Pastor Leave of Absence Policy Nov 2024
Anti-Racism Policy Presbytery of the Highlands

Biography of Lissette Gonzalez Sosa
Statement of Faith written by Lissette Gonzalez Sosa
Charge for the Ogdensburg Administrative Commission
2025 Proposed Highlands Operating Budget

THE PRESBYTERY OF THE HIGHLANDS OF NJ
IMBALANCE CORRECTION FOR November 12, 2024
Effective January 1, 2025

The Book of Order, G-3.0301, states:

“The presbytery is the council serving as a corporate expression of the church within a certain district and is composed of all the congregations and ministers of the Word and Sacrament within that district. The presbytery shall adopt and communicate to the sessions a plan for determining how many ruling elders each session should elect as commissioners to presbytery, with a goal of numerical parity of ministers of the Word and Sacrament and ruling elders. This plan shall require each session to elect at least one commissioner and shall take into consideration the size of congregations as well as a method Councils of the Church G-3.03 G-3.0301a–c Book of Order 2017/2019 51 to fulfill the principles of participation and representation found in F-1.0403 and G- 3.0103. Ruling elders elected as officers of the presbytery shall be enrolled as members during the period of their service. A presbytery may enroll, or may provide by its own rule for the enrollment of, ruling elders during terms of elected service to the presbytery or its congregations.”

The recommended imbalance correction is based on the following information:

<u>Teaching Elder Members</u>	
Members as of 10/31/2023	138
Temporary Members	4
Non-resident Members	<29>

TOTAL RESIDENT TEACHING ELDERS
113

Ruling Elder Commissioners

Administration and Coordinating Team Members

Sue Cail	
John Hellriegel	
Alec Jain	
David Peterson	
Richard Rubin	5

Committee/Team Chairs

John Crozier (COM)	
Donna Rahmann (CPM)	2

Past Presbytery Moderators not serving on ACT or a Committee Moderator

Matt Allen
Paula Benson
Wendy Doidge
Alan Ford
Lisa Gray

Joe Martinoni	
Margaret Meyers	
Ken Nickel	
Mel Prestamo	
Michael Young	10

<i>Commissioned Ruling Elders</i>	
Stephanie Farley	1
<i>Certified Christian Educator</i>	0
<i>One Commissioner Elected by Each Church Session</i>	75
<i>Additional Elected Commissioners by Church Size & attendance</i>	20

TOTAL RULING ELDER COMMISSIONERS
113

Churches Entitled to Additional Ruling Elder Commissioners

<u>Church</u>	<u>Total Commissioners</u>
Basking Ridge	3
Chatham	3
Flemington	3
Morristown	3
Bound Brook	2
Flanders	2
Franklin	2
Frenchtown	2
Hackettstown	2
Madison	2
Oak Ridge	2
Ringwood	2
Rockaway	2
Sparta	2
Stewartsville	2
Succasunna	2

**Please note that the proposal to redress the imbalance is designed to get ruling elder commissioners to stated meetings. It is evaluated annually. Churches who routinely fail to send the additional commissioners that they are allotted under the proposal may not be granted additional commissioners when the imbalance proposal is re-evaluated next year.*

Presbytery of the Highlands
Stated Meeting
Report of the Administrative Commission to Install
Rev. Arlene Romaine
November 12, 2024

The meeting on Sunday, September 08, 2024 convened at 2:35 PM.

Commission Members Present:

Elder Jeanne Perry, Community Presbyterian Church of Chester
Rev. Daniel Vigilante, Presbyterian Church in Morristown
Rev. Richard Bierwas, Executive Minister, Classis of Greater Palisades, RCA
Rev. Dr. Steven Shussett, Stated Clerk, Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey
Rev. Dr. Chris Doyle, Oak Ridge and West Milford Presbyterian Churches
Elder John Crozier, First Presbyterian Church of Boonton
Elder Joe Martinoni, First Presbyterian Church of Rockaway
Elder Sue Cail, Community Presbyterian Church of Ringwood, Moderator, Presbytery of the Highlands

The meeting was called to order and opened in prayer by the Moderator.

Purpose of the Meeting: to install Rev. Arlene Romaine as Pastor of the Community Presbyterian Church of Ringwood.

The commission reviewed the service and the duties assigned.

Motion was made and seconded to have the meeting adjourn with the Benediction at the end of the of the Installation Service. The motion carried.

The meeting was closed in prayer by Rev. Arlene Romaine

Respectfully submitted by:

Elder Sue Cail
Moderator

Presbytery of the Highlands
Stated Meeting
Report of the Administrative Commission to Ordain and Install Pamela Osborne
November 12, 2024

The meeting on Sunday, September 29, 2024 convened at 2:35 PM.

Commission Members Present:

Elder Richard Palmer, First Presbyterian Church of Stanhope
Elder Jeanne Perry, Community Presbyterian Church of Chester
Rev. Stefanie Muntzel, First Presbyterian Church of Stirling and Meyersville Presbyterian Church, Gillette
Rev. Dr. Patrick Sileo, First Presbyterian Church of Sparta
Rev. Caroline Unzaga, Manager of Spiritual Care, Morristown Medical Center
Elder Sue Cail, Community Presbyterian Church of Ringwood, Moderator, Presbytery of the Highlands

The meeting was called to order and opened in prayer by the Moderator.

Purpose of the Meeting: to ordain Pamela S. Osborne and install her as Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Stanhope and the Andover Presbyterian Church.

The commission reviewed the service and the duties assigned.

Motion was made and seconded to have the meeting adjourn with the Benediction at the end of the of the Installation Service. The motion carried.

The meeting closed at 2:46pm.

Respectfully submitted by:

Elder Sue Cail
Moderator

Presbytery of the Highlands
Stated Meeting
Report of the Administrative Commission to Install Rev. Eric Yih Wen Lai
November 12, 2024

The meeting on Sunday, October 6, 2024 convened at 2:40 PM.

Commission Members Present:

Rev. Stephen Park Choi, Stewartsville Presbyterian Church
Rev. Dr. Ellen Clark Clémot, Professor at Princeton Theological Seminary
Elder Steve Decker, Bound Brook Presbyterian Church
Rev. Amy L. Sandlin, Trinity United Church, Warren
Elder Christine Su, Taiwanese American Fellowship Presbyterian Church
Elder Sue Cail, Community Presbyterian Church of Ringwood, Moderator, Presbytery of the Highlands

The meeting was called to order and opened in prayer by the Moderator.

Purpose of the Meeting: to install Rev. Eric Lai as Senior Pastor of the Taiwanese American Fellowship Presbyterian Church, Hillsborough.

The commission reviewed the service and the duties assigned.

Motion was made and seconded to have the meeting adjourn with the Benediction at the end of the of the Installation Service. The motion carried.

The meeting closed at 2:48pm.

Respectfully submitted by:

Elder Sue Cail
Moderator

Presbytery of the Highlands
Stated Meeting
Report of the Administrative Commission to Install Rev. Tom Brown
November 12, 2024

The meeting on Sunday, October 20, 2024 convened at 3:35 pm.

Commission Members Present:

Elder Sue Cail, Community Presbyterian Church of Ringwood and Moderator of the Presbytery of the Highlands

Rev. Hannah Allred, Pastor, Kitchell Memorial Presbyterian Church, East Hanover

Rev. Stephen Choi, Pastor, Stewartsville Presbyterian Church

Rev. Dennis Jones, Pastor, Basking Ridge Presbyterian Church

Elder Lisa MacCallum, Presbyterian Church of Chatham Township

Elder David “Pete” Peterson, Clinton Presbyterian Church

The meeting was called to order and opened in prayer by the Moderator.

Purpose of the Meeting: to install Reverend Thomas A. Brown as Pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Chatham Township.

The commission reviewed the service and the duties assigned.

Motion was made and seconded to have the meeting adjourn with the Benediction at the end of the of the Installation Service. The motion carried.

The meeting closed at 3:50 pm.

Respectfully submitted by:

Elder Sue Cail
Moderator

Interim Report of the Administrative Commission for the Westminster Presbyterian Church,
Phillipsburg
November 12, 2024

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 this past spring, our realtors have continued to list the property and occasionally respond to inquiries. During the summer, our realtors recommended delisting the property and then relisting it at a lower price which included the stained glass windows in the sanctuary. The windows had previously been listed as a negotiable item option to purchase. During October, we were notified by the executrix of a former member of the church that the Presbytery (on behalf of the church) would receive a \$10,000 bequest from the woman's estate. Accompanying the bequest is a recommendation for the funds to be sent to a mission organization in Phillipsburg that Westminster Presbyterian Church used to partner with and the woman had been active in that ministry.

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

Report of the Administrative Commission for the First Presbyterian Church of Hanover
November 12, 2024

The Administrative Commission for First Presbyterian Church of Hanover recommends the following:

Resolution by The Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey, Inc.

I hereby certify that I am the Stated Clerk of The Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey, Inc., successor in interest to the First Presbyterian Church of Hanover, and the keeper of the records and seal of said corporation, and that the following is a true and correct copy of the Resolution duly adopted at a stated meeting of the said Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey, Inc. on the 12th day of November, 2024

BE IT RESOLVED that Sarah J. Cairatti as Chairperson of The Administrative Commission for the First Presbyterian Church of Hanover of The Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey, Inc. is authorized directed and empowered, in the name and on behalf of the Presbytery to execute such contracts, deed, affidavits, settlement statements and other related documents and take any and all actions which may be necessary or appropriate to effectuate said sale and transfer of the property of the church;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that The Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey, Inc. as the successor in interest to the First Presbyterian Church of Hanover is authorized to enter into a Contract for the sale of real property and to sell the property located at 16 Hanover Road, Township of East Hanover, County of Morris, State of New Jersey to the Township of East Hanover for the purchase price of Two Million Five Hundred Thousand (\$2,500,000.00) Dollars; and

The authority given hereunder shall be deemed retroactive and the acts hereunder performed prior to the passage of these resolutions are hereby ratified and affirmed.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto affixed my name as Stated Clerk and have caused the seal to be affixed this _____ day of _____, 2024.

Rev. Steven H. Shussett
Stated Clerk of The Presbytery of the
Highlands of New Jersey, Inc.

Background Information:

The Administrative Commission for First Presbyterian Church of East Hanover was approached by the East Hanover Township to purchase the Parish house and Manse, which are adjacent to each other, as the location for a Senior Community Center.

After negotiations the Administrative Commission agreed to the sale of the parish house and manse. The agreement includes allowing the tenants to remain in the manse until the summer of 2025. The resolution is requested by the attorney in order to move forward with the contract for

sale of the property. The sale does not include the Sanctuary or the cemetery which is across the street from the Parish house and manse. It does include that the owners or renters of the Sanctuary will have access to the parking lot of the Senior Center. A worshipping community using the sanctuary on a regular basis may also have use of the Senior Center on Sundays.

Administration and Coordinating Team

November 12, 2024

Items for Action:

ACT-1

The ACT recommends the attached Anti-Racism Policy for the Presbytery of the Highlands.

ACT-2

The ACT recommends the renewal of Rev. Dr. Steven Shussett's contract as resourcing staff and that he be elected as the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of Highlands for another three years (January 1, 2025 to December 31, 2027.)

ACT-3

The ACT recommends the 2025 budget. The budget reflects the changes to the Board of Pensions and the 2% increase for the staff.

Items to Report:

From the October 29, 2024 Meeting:

ACT-4

The ACT reviewed the September Presbytery meeting and the upcoming November meeting agenda.

ACT-5

Reviewed the year-to-date Financial Reports. The treasurer, Elder Becky Moody, reported that our bank account was compromised due to check washing. The funds have been recovered and she and Liz are working with the bank to set up a new account or additional safeguards and to update our authorized signers.

ACT-6

The ACT approved that Rev. David Harvey and Elder Pete Peterson as authorized signers for the Presbytery of Highlands financial accounts.

ACT-7

The Personnel Committee conducted the annual review of Rev. Dr. Steve Shussett. Other staff reviews will come later in November.

ACT-8

The Personnel Committee reported that they have received notice that Liz Hutchinson, Financial administrator, will be retiring effective April 1, 2025. The Personnel Committee will be meeting in November to discuss and recommend the next steps.

ACT-9

The Personnel Committee recommended that the Presbytery Leader and Stated Clerk receive a 2% increase in their effective salary. The Presbytery leader opted for the Covenant Pastor's Package and PPO health Care. This provided a savings of over \$6,000 compared to the Transitional Pastor Package which was originally in the budget.

ACT-10

The Funds Development Team is working on a series of workshops for 2025 on Developing a Financial Sustainability Plan for congregations.

ACT-11

The Discernment Team reported that they are close to the finish line. There will be a leadership retreat for Visioning and Action Steps on November 14.

ACT-12

The Moderator reported that she has officiated at 3 installations and 1 ordination/installation in the last two months

- September 8 – Installation – Rev. Arlene Romaine – Community Presbyterian Church of Ringwood
- September 29 – Ordination and Installation - Rev. Pamela Osborne – First Presbyterian Church Stanhope and Andover Presbyterian Church
- October 6 – Installation - Rev. Eric Lai -Taiwanese American Fellowship Presbyterian Church, Hillsborough
- October 20 – Installation of Rev. Tom Brown - Presbyterian Church of Chatham Township

ACT-13

The Stated Clerk reported that the GAPJC affirmed the decisions of the Synod PJC, which indicated that we made several errors in our process. The COM is working to ensure compliance moving forward. However, the GAPJC also indicated for the first time that a psychological evaluation can be mandated for any minister member at any time, provided that stated process is followed and an opportunity for the member to be heard is offered. Additionally, it is the duty of the sending presbytery to ensure that members undergo psychological testing.

ACT-14

The Presbytery 2023 Minutes were reviewed by the Synod and approved without exceptions.

ACT-15

There are two "cross" presbytery partnerships projects in process. The 2025 Youth Triennium will be with Northeast Presbytery and Hudson River Presbytery. The four New Jersey Presbyteries and Long Island Presbytery are working together to develop a "Preachers' school for Ruling Elders. More information is coming soon.

ACT-16

The ACT approved the 2025 Presbytery Meeting dates as the following:

- March 11, 7PM, Zoom
- May 13, Time TBD, Hybrid
- September 9, Time TBD, Hybrid
- November 11, 7PM, Zoom
- There will be NO January Presbytery meeting. Instead, we will have two in-person Presbytery gatherings, one in January/February and one in October or December focused on community building and learning together. More information will be available soon.

ACT-17

Approved the request from Committee on Ministry to appoint an Administrative Commission for the First Presbyterian Church of Ogdensburg to assist them in the dissolution of the congregation in 2025. The following have been appointed at this time for the commission: Rev. Julie Raffety, First Presbyterian Church of Franklin, Elder Howard Alden, First Presbyterian Church of Branchville and Rev. Dr. Pat Sileo, First Presbyterian Church of Sparta.

ACT-18

Approved a request from Thompson Memorial Church, New Hope, PA to implement Mission projects in Lambertville area, working specifically with Fisherman's Mark. *Background: Thompson Memorial Presbyterian Church is in the Philadelphia Presbytery. They are only a few miles from Lambertville, New Jersey and would like to expand their mission work with Fisherman's Mark by developing their involvement with the project in Lambertville. They needed the permission of the Highlands Presbytery to expand their mission in our presbytery (G-3.03). The Thompson Memorial Church team is looking forward to expanding their mission partnership with Fisherman's Mark in Lambertville and continue to partner with our congregations in this project.*

ACT-19

Rev. David Harvey, Blairstown Presbyterian, gave a report of the latest Blair Academy Consultation Team meeting.

Church Development Team Report November 12, 2024

Items to Report:

CDT-1

CDT has scheduled Rev. Richard Hong as a guest speaker on Thursday, November 7 at 7:30pm via zoom. His topic is: Creating a Culture of Change. Rev. Hong is the pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Englewood. Prior to entering ministry, Rich ran his own software consultancy for twenty years, writing computer programs for research scientists in the pharmaceutical industry. Rich brings his technological background to ministry, and he writes a regular column on the "digital church" for Presbyterians Today magazine.

CDT-2

CDT is overseeing the grant:

Who is My Neighbor? Conversations about your neighborhood.

The grant amount is \$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.

We have not received any applications.

CDT-3

Motion to ACT to allow CDT to give a very short announcement to the Presbytery about this grant at the November 12 Presbytery meeting.

CDT-4

CDT will provide support for the New Church Development out of Bound Brook Presbyterian Church.

The new worshipping community, Seed & Sanctuary, has started meeting on Sunday afternoons at 2:00pm.

CDT-5

Churches in transition:

First Presbyterian Church of Berkshire Valley, Wharton has completed the Turn the Page Discernment Study and has been moved to COM.

First Presbyterian Church of Boonton has completed the Turn the Page Discernment Study and has been moved to COM.

CDT-6

CDT is currently supporting five congregations that are ready to begin or have already started the Turn the Page Discernment Study.

Submitted by:

Rev. Carie Morgan Co-Chair of CDT

**Committee on Ministry Report – Part 1
November 12, 2024**

Items to Report:

From the October 1, 2024 meeting:

COM-1

Approved a Board of Pensions exemption to the Milford Presbyterian Church and provided a process for the Session and Congregation for moving forward with transitioning Rev. Dr. Linda Erkert-Bullock from an installed pastor (101) to non-installed (108) in order for them to take

advantage of the Covenant Pastors package and Medical coverage from another source.

COM-2

Approved the Installation Commission for the Rev. Eric Lai, Taiwanese American Fellowship Presbyterian Church, Hillsborough.

COM-3

Removed Rev. Chet Penza, HR, from the rolls. Rev. Penza renounced jurisdiction of his ordination in the PCUSA upon joining a United Methodist Congregation.

COM-4

Approved the final Discernment Report for First Presbyterian Church of Boonton and granted permission to move forward with the election of Pastor Nominating Committee.

COM-5

Approved the position description of Executive Director/Wild Seed Pastor for Lisette Gonzalez Sosa at the Sanctuary and Seed New Church Development as a validated ministry.

COM-6

Approved presenting Lisette Gonzalez Sosa to the presbytery for examination for ordination at either a special meeting or the November presbytery meeting.

COM-7

Recommended to the ACT to approve the position description for the Administrative Commission of the First Presbyterian Church of Ogdensburg to assist the congregation with moving forward with dissolution of the congregation in 2025.

COM-8

Presbytery leader provided an update to the COM on the Ryan Irmer vs The Highlands Presbytery appeal to the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission. The appeal will be heard by the GAPJC on October 18.

**Committee on Ministry Report – Part 2
November 12, 2024**

Items for Consent Agenda:

COM -9

The COM recommends the following:

The COM approved recommending to the Presbytery the Leave of Absence Policy.

Background: The Leave of Absence policy is for times when there are significant difficulties and issues between the congregation and the pastor. This policy is not for medical leave of absence or administrative leave as related to the Church Discipline.

The *Book of Order* states in - G-2.0501-2.0509- that a pastor has membership in their presbytery by action of the presbytery itself, which alone can establish, change or dissolve pastoral relationships. In the performance of their ministry, a Minister of Word and Sacrament or Commissioned Ruling Elder is accountable to their presbytery.

A presbytery's duty to see to the health and welfare of its pastors and congregations (G-3.0303) includes the responsibility to consider establishing policies and procedures both effective and sensitive to the needs of the parties involved. These difficulties might be about leader burnout, unaddressed conflicts, factions, loss of health, mental health issues, competing visions, differing expectations, anger management challenges, violations of the presbytery's *Policy on Ethical Standards of Behavior for Teaching Elders and Commissioned Ruling Elders*, or any number of other things that, although they are entirely unrelated to sexual abuse, can generate significant turmoil and relational difficulties sufficient to warrant Committee on Ministry engagement.

Sometimes, as the Committee on Ministry seeks to address such turmoil, it realizes that if the church's pastor could step out of their responsibilities for a time—if the pastor could have a *Leave of Absence*—it would be immediately helpful. A period of a *Leave* may provide a pastor, a session, a congregation and a presbytery time, space and opportunity for listening and learning, prayer and discernment, for planning and practice of new ways of behavior by those involved—presbyteries, pastors, congregations, ruling elders—so that difficulties can be resolved.

Among the presbytery's responsibilities lodged within its Committee on Ministry is that of “facilitating relations between the presbytery and its congregations, ministers of Word and Sacrament, ruling elders commissioned to pastoral service... and settling difficulties on behalf of the presbytery where possible and expedient” (G-3.0307). In certain circumstances, when the difficulties that have arisen warrant it – in order to promote the welfare of a congregation, or its pastor, or of both parties – providing a way for a pastor to have, for a time, distance from their congregation and relief from all pastoral leadership responsibilities may create the very opportunity the Committee on Ministry needs to engage effectively in a restorative process and ministry.

COM -10

The COM recommends updates to the Presbytery Family and Medical Leave Policy.

Background: The Family and Medical Leave Policy has been updated to reflect changes to the Book of Order and to include a statement about extended medical leave for pastors.

Items for Action:

None.

Items to Report:

From the November 5, 2024 meeting:

COM-11

Transferred Rev. Christopher Small, chaplain in validated ministry, to the Presbytery of Santa Fe

to serve as a chaplain in a validated ministry.

COM-12

Approved request from the Rev. Karen Brostrom to grant her permission to officiate over communion at the PWP fall retreat on November 16, 2024 at the Shrine of St. Joseph's, Stirling, NJ

COM-13

Approved the Validated ministry of Rev. Salvatore Seirmarco as chaplain at the Orange County Hospice, Middletown, NY.

COM-14

Approved the Terms of Call and position descriptions for:

- Rev. Heather Morrison Yaden as Covenant Supply for Long Valley Presbyterian Church (starting Jan 1, 2025)
- Rev. Dr. Linda Eckert-Bullock as Covenant Supply for Presbyterian Church of Milford (October 27, 2025)
- Rev. Michael Cuppett as Pastor for First Presbyterian Church of Newton (starting Jan 1, 2025)

COM-15

Approved the annual reports of pastors in Validated Ministries and Members at Large:

Rev. Angella Son
Rev. Salvatore Seirmarco
Rev. Courtney Cromie
Rev. Christine Davies
Rev. Dan Dorrow
Rev. Donna McDaid
Rev. Dr. Ellen Clark Clemot
Rev. Gail Pendleton
Rev. Halley O'Connor
Rev. Justin Choi
Rev. Jin Hee Han
Rev. Jennifer Hrynyk
Rev. John Christian Kile
Rev. Joanne Miller
Rev. Liz Blythe
Rev. Robin Curras

COM-16

Reviewed the GAPJC decision Ryan Irmer vs. The Presbytery of the Highlands. Approved the process presented by the Presbytery Leader and Co-moderators for moving forward with Rev. Irmer.

COM-17

Requested that the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery send a letter to Rev. Irmer informing him of the consequences of serving a congregation that has not been validated by the presbytery – G-2.0502, G-2.0503 and G -3.0306

Committee on Preparation for Ministry Report November 12, 2024

Items to Report:

From the September 16, 2024 meeting:

CPM-1

The Committee met with Candidate Laura Choi for her annual consultation. Laura is a member of Stewartsville Presbyterian Church.

CPM-2

The Committee requested a Special Presbytery Meeting, which was held on October 10, 2024, for the purpose of examining Inquirer, Benjamin Willans, to move Benjamin to Candidate. Benjamin is a member of the First Presbyterian Church of Whippany.

From the October 21, 2024 meeting:

CPM-3

The Committee met with Candidate Jessica Fisher, who is Certified Ready to Receive a Call, for her annual consultation. Jessica is a member of the Presbyterian Church of Morris Plains.

Respectfully submitted,

Donna Rahmann and Christine Davies, CPM Co-Moderators

Property and Insurance Team November 12, 2024

Items for Consent Agenda:

None.

Items for Action:

None.

Items to Report:

From the October 23, 2024 meeting:

P&I-1

Cemetery Update:

- Interest in a cemetery oversight committee has been received.

- Steve will contact persons who have expressed interest in participating in a committee to direct cemeteries under the Presbytery's responsibility.

P&I-2

Use of Facility Form:

- Following a congregation's inquiry, and thanks to Bethlehem Presbyterian Church, a format for a facility form/contract for single day use has been provided.
- The committee will review and create a template of this document to place on the website.

P&I-3

Franklin Manse

- The Team is responding to an inquiry concerning the sale of the Franklin manse.
- As is Highlands Presbytery's practice, the question of what would happen if and when a manse is needed has been raised.
- The church will be contacted in regard to a plan for future housing.

Report of the Presbyterian Women in the Presbytery of the Highlands of NJ November 12, 2024

Items to Report:

PWP-1

Entered into a three (3) year Covenant Relationship with the Presbytery of the Highlands of NJ.

PWP-2

The PWP held its Spring Gathering at the Presbyterian Church in Morristown, NJ, focusing on immigration, wherein the PWP representative spoke of her U.A. American Mission Experience to the border of Mexico. The Gathering was highlighted with a presentation by the author of *Discerning Welcome*, the Rev. Dr. Ellen Clark Clemot.

PWP-3

Women of New Jersey and the Synod of the Northeast PWP attended the PWP Churchwide Gathering in St. Louis, Mo in August. The Gathering was entitled, "*Do Everything in Love*".

PWP-4

The PWP held its Fall Gathering at Fairmount Presbyterian Church, Califon, NJ, bringing back what was learned at the Churchwide Gathering.

PWP-5

Voted and appointed Jane MacDonald as Commissioner to the Presbytery of the Highlands of NJ, on behalf of Presbyterian Women in the Presbytery of the Highlands of NJ.

PWP-6

Forwarded an email blast to the women of the PWP to encourage donations to PDA, in support of its mission to assist all in need from recent disastrous weather events.

Respectfully submitted,

Donna Rahmann, Moderator

**Young Leader Formation Team
November 12, 2024**

Items for Consent Agenda:

None.

Items for Action:

None.

Items to Report:



We are forming a delegation from the Highlands Presbytery to attend the national Presbyterian youth event - Triennium 2025! We encourage you to talk with high school youth at your church about this life-impacting event. We plan to share a bus with the Presbytery of Northeast New Jersey and possibly Hudson Valley Presbytery (NY). The bus will depart from our area on Sunday evening, July 27th and return late Thursday night, July 31st. The estimated cost for youth to attend is \$500, pending anticipated financial support from the Presbytery of the Highlands. Mae Martella, Children's Ministry Coordinator at The Presbyterian Church of Morris Plains, will be serving as the Triennium Registrar for the Presbytery of the Highlands. Official registration will open early in 2025. For now, we are gathering names of youth and adult chaperones who are interested in attending Triennium. There will be room on the bus for approximately **16 youth and 2 chaperones** from the Presbytery of the Highlands. We strongly encourage you to talk with your youth and ask them to fill out this google form in order to reserve a spot.

<https://forms.gle/qmUG2KsdmdzQ65VZA>.

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

<https://presbyterianyouthtriennium.org/>

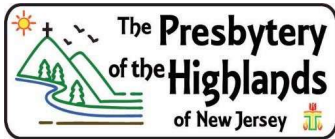
You can also send questions to the Young Leader Formation Team Coordinator, Amy Clarkson

(amyclarkson103@gmail.com).

Save the Date: **Family Spirituality Camp - March 1, 2025!**

This will be a Saturday morning event designed for families, to support home routines and rituals that encourage spiritual awareness and connection. Together we will ask “Where is God?” by stepping into stories that help us explore the question from a variety of perspectives.

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



Presbytery of The Highlands of NJ
Family and Medical Leave Policy -2024

The celebration, nurture and encouragement of the family takes place in many ways and on many levels in the life of a church.

During times of joy and times of sadness, the congregation has the opportunity and the responsibility of extending care for the pastor and the pastor's family. This **policy** was developed by the Presbytery of The Highlands to guide sessions and pastors since it is now a requirement that the terms of family and medical leave are incorporated into the terms of call.

PURPOSE

The purpose of these policy guidelines is to provide sessions and other employing agencies **minimum** standards for a pastor's family and medical leave to be included in all call packages. Individual churches and employers should not feel limited by these guidelines and should respond to the need for family and medical leave responsibly and generously. The purpose of this document are: (1) to establish a Family and Medical Leave Policy for Pastors and Commissioned Ruling Elders (CRE) of the Presbytery of the Highlands; and (2) to require that Terms of Call for all pastors include paid family and medical leave.

I.I. DEFINITION

Full and part-time minister members/teaching elders serving in installed/Covenant positions are entitled to job- protected leave for qualified family and medical reasons.

ELIGIBILITY

Eligibility for all Family and Medical Leave within the Presbytery of The Highlands shall be extended to all installed/covenant pastors and CREs, regardless of whether employed on a full- or part-time basis.

I.II. GUIDELINES

Medically Certified Disability

Pastors who are, according to certification of a licensed physician or psychologist , temporarily disabled shall refer to the Committee on Ministry (COM) and the Board of Pensions (BoP) for direction and process for Temporary or long-term Disability coverage.

Maternity, Paternity or Parental Leave

- The length of leave for parent(s) welcoming a new child shall be 12 weeks. If a pastor desires more or less time, the session is encouraged to be flexible. The timing

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of the leave is up to the pastor.

- Maternity, Paternity or Paternal Leave takes place prior and after the birth, adoption or guardianship of a child.
- Sessions shall grant full salary and benefits for the entire leave. If the session and pastor(s) negotiate a leave that extends beyond 12 weeks, then other salary options may be negotiated as well, including a percentage decrease in pay, unpaid leave and/or the use of accrued vacation time.
- Annual study and vacation leaves, or sabbatical/clergy renewal leaves should not be taken immediately before or after a maternity, paternity or parental leave without consultation with the session and COM.

Family Care and Bereavement Leave

- There is no minimum length of time for Family Care or Bereavement Leave – but the maximum allowed per year is suggested at 12 weeks. Family Care or Bereavement Leave does not need to be consecutive and can be spread out over a 12-month period.
- Family Care and Bereavement Leave takes place when the employee's spouse, child, parent or other dependent has a serious health condition, is being placed in a long-term care facility, or has died.

III. Additional Considerations

These guidelines should be considered when family leave is deemed necessary:

- Study leave shall not be used for family, maternity, paternity or adoptive leave.
- Should a pastor experience a miscarriage or still birth, she/he shall be given the maternity/paternity leave she/he would have received had the pregnancy been carried to term with no complications.
- The time periods listed are intended to occur annually. They do not accrue.
- The COM shall be informed when the family leave option is exercised by a pastor.

III. IV. Session Responsibilities during the Pastor's Leave

The session is responsible for the ongoing work of the congregation during the pastor's leave. Session should be ready to arrange and pay for pulpit supply, coverage for hospital and emergency visitation and whatever teaching and programming for which the pastor was responsible. Should this become a hardship for a congregation, they may seek assistance and support from the Presbytery, through its COM, to help in whatever ways are necessary to make full leave available. COM shall appoint a session moderator pro temp.

If both **Maternity, Paternity or Parental Leave** and **Family Care and Bereavement Leave** occur in the same calendar year, please contact the COM and the Presbytery Leader.

Introduction

The *Book of Order* states in - G-2.0501-2.0509- that a pastor has membership in their presbytery by action of the presbytery itself, which alone can establish, change or dissolve pastoral relationships. In the performance of their ministry, a Minister of Word and Sacrament or Commissioned Ruling Elder is accountable to their presbytery.

A presbytery's duty to see to the health and welfare of its pastors and congregations (G-3.0303) includes the responsibility to consider establishing policies and procedures both effective and sensitive to the needs of the parties involved. These difficulties might be about leader burnout, unaddressed conflicts, factions, loss of health, mental health issues, competing visions, differing expectations, anger management challenges, violations of the presbytery's *Policy on Ethical Standards of Behavior for Teaching Elders and Commissioned Ruling Elders*, or any number of other things that, although they are entirely unrelated to sexual abuse, can generate significant turmoil and relational difficulties sufficient to warrant Committee on Ministry engagement.

The *Book of Order* also relates in - G-3.0301c- that a presbytery is responsible for nurturing the covenant community of disciples of Christ. In exercising this responsibility, a presbytery is empowered to ordain, receive, dismiss, install, remove and discipline its members who are pastors. It also is empowered to promote the peace and harmony of congregations and to inquire into the sources of congregational discord.

Sometimes, as the Committee on Ministry seeks to address such turmoil, it realizes that if the church's pastor could step out of their responsibilities for a time—if the pastor could have a *Leave of Absence*—it would be immediately helpful. A period of a *Leave* may provide a pastor, a session, a congregation and a presbytery time, space and opportunity for listening and learning, prayer and discernment, for planning and practice of new ways of behavior by those involved—presbyteries, pastors, congregations, ruling elders—so that difficulties can be resolved.

Among the presbytery's responsibilities lodged within its Committee on Ministry is that of "facilitating relations between the presbytery and its congregations, ministers of Word and Sacrament, ruling elders commissioned to pastoral service... and settling difficulties on behalf of the presbytery where possible and expedient" (G-3.0307). In certain circumstances, when the difficulties that have arisen warrant it – in order to promote the welfare of a congregation, or its pastor, or of both parties – providing a way for a pastor to have, for a time, distance from their congregation and relief from all pastoral leadership responsibilities may create the very opportunity the Committee on Ministry needs to engage effectively in a restorative process and ministry.

The *Book of Order*,² in the section titled Church Discipline, specifically gives councils the authority of oversight of its members (D-7.-0301). The Presbytery exercises this authority through an Investigative Committee and its Permanent Judicial Commission which will have the authority to place pastors on *Administrative Leave* for situations when allegations of sexual abuse have been communicated to their Stated Clerk (**D-7.0902**). [Note: The term

“Administrative Leave” may only be used accordance with “Church Discipline” in the Book of Order of the PCUSA, the Presbytery’s Sexual Misconduct Policy and the laws of the State of New Jersey.]

This being so, the Presbytery of the Highlands of NJ establishes the following Policy on placing a Pastor on a *Leave of Absence* to make it possible for its Committee on Ministry to use this tool to relieve pastors, when it’s warranted and appropriate, for defined periods of time from their responsibilities to and involvement with their congregations. This policy applies to all installed and temporary pastoral positions that take place within the bounds of this Presbytery.

Committee on Ministry Responsibilities

A recommendation to relieve a pastor, from their pastoral responsibilities and involvements, for a defined period of time, may be made by the Presbytery’s Committee on Ministry to pastor and session.

The Committee on Ministry will, to the best of its ability, follow the following process and procedure:

- The recommendation should be grounded in a conviction that the welfare of the congregation, the pastor, or both warrants and calls for such a step.
- There should be compelling evidence of the need for the Committee on Ministry to act in order to prevent or mitigate harm to the pastor, the church, or the presbytery, and to provide time and space for the Committee on Ministry, on behalf of the presbytery, to aid in settling difficulties. The evidence might include expressions of concern by the pastor, by colleagues in ministry, by members of the congregation or community; letters or calls of complaint, with allegations clearly articulated; and direct observation of relational conflict by the Session or the Committee on Ministry.
- Two members of the Committee on Ministry and the Presbytery leader will consult with the pastor and the church session about the potential use of this process.
- The Committee on Ministry will vote to recommend whether to relieve a pastor from their responsibilities for a time. The recommendation shall include the initial period of Leave, which may be up to 90 days. The recommendation shall also include the terms and expectations of the leave which may include any or all of the following: no contact with church/session members, no pastoral responsibilities, medical concerns addressed, application for short term disability if applicable, supervision, coaching, and other items as determined by the COM.
- The Committee on Ministry recommendation will include in the expectations for the *Leave of Absence* any methodology to be employed for assessment, counseling, and discernment purposes including mental health inventories or financial audits.
- The Session shall meet and review the recommendation whether or not to vote to concur. This must be a 2/3 vote of the Session.
- The Committee on Ministry will appoint and brief/train a COM Care Team of three to five members, ordinarily, current members or former members of

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Committee on Ministry to work with the church's session/ leadership and pastor[s]. The COM Care Team will be introduced to the pastor and session as soon as possible.

- The Committee on Ministry shall appoint a temporary Moderator for the Session.
- THE COM shall appoint, in consultation with the pastor, an advocate for the purpose of acting as an advocate and companion to the pastor on Leave. A covenant agreement including expectations will be developed by the COM, advocate and pastor.
- As appropriate, the Committee on Ministry will inform the Presbytery of the actions it has taken. The language used will be sensitive to both the need for confidentiality, particularly for a personal health crisis, as well as the need for transparency.
- The COM reserves the right, if necessary, to disrupt and/or end the process as it relates to D-7.01 "Disciplinary Process" and/or form an Administrative Commission to address other issues where the COM needs to take immediate action.

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COM Care Team Responsibilities

The COM Care Team shall be responsible for:

- Meeting with the church's session and pastor to discuss the purpose of the *Leave* and provisions for managing it and the congregation's ministry.
- Assisting the Session in communicating with the congregation regarding the necessity for *Leave*.
- Establishing and documenting :
 - the terms for the pastor's compensation during the pastor's *Leave*. A congregation will be expected to honor the terms of compensation it has agreed upon for its pastor. Any change to the terms of call, in particular any change in compensation, must be approved by the congregation, pastor and Committee on Ministry.
 - the pastor's relationship and communication with the Session and other church staff members.
 - the pastor's relationship and communication with the Congregation.
 - the length of time the pastor is on *Leave*.
- Working with the session to provide preaching, pastoral care and administrative support.
- Assisting the session in listening and learning through prayer and discernment, planning and practicing new ways of behavior by those involved so that difficulties might be resolved.
 - Determining, with the approval of the COM, if extensions to the initial leave period are warranted. If an extension is needed, work with the church leadership to determine the appropriate way and process to provide for the pastor's compensation and the congregation's welfare.
- The COM Care Team will be in contact with the Committee on Ministry's Team on Sexual Misconduct Prevention if there is a possible violation to the Presbytery's Sexual Misconduct Prevention Policy which is related to the *Leave of Absence* of the pastor.

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Church/Session Responsibilities

The sessions responsibility includes the following:

- Continue compensation for the pastor in accordance with the approved Terms of Call through the initial period of the *Leave of Absence*.
- Be in relationship with the COM Care Team to work with them concerning appropriate people to provide pastoral services and to consider carefully its directives and behavioral expectations for the Session and the congregation.
- Have no contact with the pastor except as the terms of the *Leave* specifically permits.

Pastor's Responsibilities

When the Session acts to relieve the pastor[s] of their responsibilities and the Committee on Ministry appoints a Care Team to work with the congregation and its leaders, the pastor will be expected to:

- Be in relationship with the COM Care Team and comply with the terms of the *Leave*.
- Remain out of all church facilities and off of the church's properties, except for the manse, if applicable.
- Refuse to initiate or have contact, including through social media, with any member of the church or its staff, except for a person designated specifically by the COM Care Team to deliver communications.
- Decline to conduct corporate worship or to engage in any form of pastoral activity (exceptions for extraordinary cases may be arranged in consultation with the COM Care Team).
- Not attend or participate in any meetings or activities of the church.
- Be in relationship with the COM assigned advocate for support of their needs.
- Apply for and follow through with the BOP short term disability if applicable.

Any party's (pastor, session, and/or congregation) violation of the terms of the *Leave* or the behavioral expectations agreed upon, may result in a review by COM with recommendations for possible further action."

Endnotes

1. All references to pastoral leader in this policy should be understood to include Ministers of Word and Sacrament and/or Commissioned Ruling Elders whether installed or in a temporary pastoral relationship.
2. *Leave of Absence* in response to allegations of sexual misconduct shall be called an Administrative Leave and shall be administered in accordance with the Rules of Discipline in the Book of Order and the Presbytery's Sexual Ethics Prevention Policy.

3. This policy is not intended as a disciplinary policy and is not a substitute for disciplinary actions as prescribed by the Book of Order under the Rules of Discipline.
4. The Committee on Ministry Leadership Team for *Leaves of Absence* shall be composed of the COM co-moderators, the COM Care Team members and the Presbytery Leader, Ex Officio.
5. Medical Leave is a different form of leave. (*See the Family and Medical Leave Policy of the Presbytery*).

Anti-Racism policy for the Presbytery of the Highlands
Fall 2024
We cannot move forward without looking back.
Repair begins when reconciliation and truth telling begins

Introduction

Timeline info

In 2016, the 222nd General Assembly of the PC(USA) approved a new churchwide antiracism policy titled: *Facing Racism: A Vision of the Intercultural Community*. This policy began as a review of the earlier 1999 statement on racism in America, and began by noting that, "...the realities of racism in the United States have not improved significantly..." Several years later, acting on the recommendation and report of various committees, the 225th General Assembly revised the Book of Order (G-3.0106) to require all church councils to adopt and implement an antiracism policy.

Theological/Biblical Foundation

The Bible insistently reveals that God loves diversity and justice. This is seen in the wide variety of creation in which God delights. It is heard in the words of the prophets, who reject oppression and commend justice as true worship. It is embodied in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, who resists the power of empire and values all persons, regardless of status, as children of God. Jesus gathered a community of people around him that crossed over every social and cultural boundary. Those who had been set apart were brought together: poor and rich, male and female, Gentile and Jew, centurion and tax collector, Canaanite, Galilean, and Syrophonecian. Jesus called this community together in anticipation of, and participation in, the coming of the new creation. –From *Facing Racism*

The Bible testifies that humanity is diverse and yet one, unique but together created in the image of God.

The words of the Apostle Paul remind us of the common identity we share as members of God's family. "*As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.*" –Galatians 3:27-28

The vision of John in Revelation shows us a multitude gathered from every nation worshiping God together. "*After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb!'*" – Revelation 7:9-10

Faith challenges us to acknowledge the distance between God's vision for humanity and our present reality. Faith also calls us to action, building up things which help that vision to flourish,

and removing obstacles and stumbling blocks we encounter along the way (John 10:10, 1 Thessalonians 5:11, Romans 14:13). **One of the largest stumbling blocks that persists in our culture today is racism.**

Confession/acknowledging our complicity/role

Recognizing that sin exists in our world at both an individual and a corporate level, in both intentional and unintentional harm, and echoing the words of Paul, who reminds us that, *“all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God,”* we confess our participation in a society and culture that allows racism to persist (Romans 3:23). **As a response to our confession we affirm our desire to lean into uncomfortable conversations, to promote growth, and embody a faithfulness that works to dismantle racism within and beyond our communities.**

We Commit Ourselves to Accountability

We hold ourselves accountable for working consistently and purposefully towards racial justice and equity in our synod, our presbytery and our congregations.

We commit to take steps as a presbytery to participate in the ongoing process to dismantle racism in our churches, communities and our own lives through the following and other ways we may not be aware of at this time:

- Engage with resources and conversations to help us grow and learn through training events or other similar opportunities
- Create opportunities to invite people into conversations about dismantling racism.
- Provide for worship experiences at presbytery gatherings that work toward dismantling racism.
- Commit to self reflective truth-telling concerning actions and experiences where our actions or inactions perpetuated racism or continue to perpetuate racism.
- Listen to voices long silenced

ACTION STEPS

The Presbytery of the Highlands commits to the following:

- At least one presbytery-wide annual training/workshop on racism
- Work with congregations to implement Matthew 25
- Provide at least one worship service annually that focuses on dismantling racism
- Engage the presbytery in conversations about racism through workshops, small groups, seminars, or book study.
- Work alongside the Committee on Representation to assure that diversity is expressed in Presbytery committees and teams and that the environment in which we serve and gather provides for open and affirming dialogue and action

- Provide resources and communications about dismantling racism.
- Annually review the Anti-racism policy and recommend updates

Definitions and other resources from the PCUSA Committee on Racism, Truth and Reconciliation can be found on the Presbytery of the Highlands webpage.

Bio – Lissette González Sosa

Lissette González Sosa's life has been a journey of faith, service, and profound commitment to healing and justice. Currently, she serves as the Director of Christian Education at The Presbyterian Church at Bound Brook and is the visionary founder of *Sanctuary + Seed*, a newly validated ministry of the Presbytery of the Highlands. Through this ministry, Lissette leads the community in restorative spirituality and eco-spiritual practices, primarily through *Wild Church* gatherings, where participants reconnect with the earth and find healing alongside the rhythms of creation. For those who have felt distant from traditional church structures, *Sanctuary + Seed* offers a welcoming space to explore faith anew.

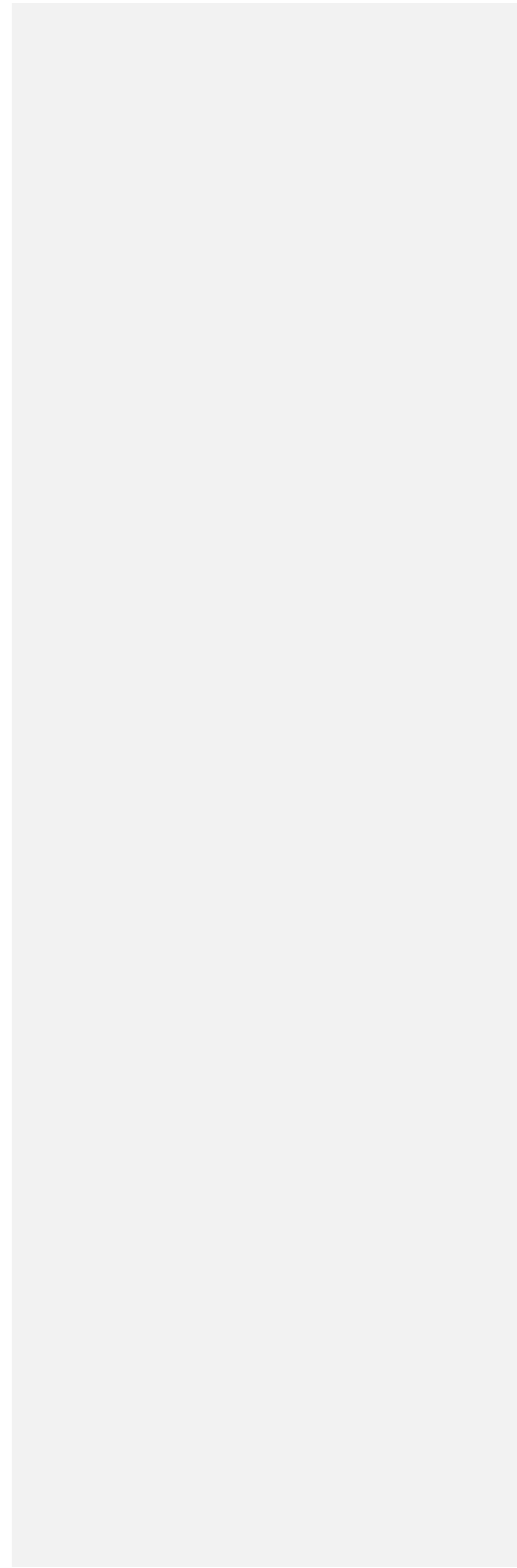
Lissette is a member *La Iglesia Presbiteriana Hispana Bet-el* in Vineland, NJ, and is under care with the Presbytery for Southern New Jersey, certified ready to receive a call for ordained ministry with the PC(USA). Her ministry journey began at her home church, where she served in diverse roles including Sunday school teacher, choir director, Vacation Bible School leader, worship service translator, social worker, and even wedding planner. In her early twenties, Lissette joined First Presbyterian Church of Moorestown as a youth leader and missions translator to Mexico. In 2002, she was commissioned there as a young adult mission volunteer with PC(USA) to serve in Honduras, where she met her beloved husband, Mario. After her time in Honduras, Lissette returned to Moorestown as Youth Director and later supported their contemporary worship service as a volunteer.

In time, God called her family back to her home community, where she took on a role with PathStone Corporation, serving migrant and seasonal farmworker populations. This return also allowed her to re-engage with her home church as a youth leader, ordained elder, worship leader, and community organizer, deepening her dedication to supporting and empowering vulnerable communities.

Lissette's academic pursuits have enriched her ministry, holding three degrees from Princeton Theological Seminary—a Master of Divinity, a Master of Arts in Christian Education and Formation, and a Master of Arts in Theology and Ecology. Her studies have deeply shaped her *Mujerista* theology, which intertwines her commitment to liberation, land, people, and justice

in a powerful, compassionate witness. She lifts up Indigenous voices, advocates for marginalized communities, and brings a holistic approach to her ministry.

Widowed, Lissette's life is lovingly anchored by her children, family, and friends, who support her passion for the natural world and her mission of justice and empowerment for the BIPOC community. In her free time, Lissette and her daughters travel around the world seeking adventure and joy. Her life's work tells a story of resilience, love, and unwavering faith—a journey as inspiring as the ministry she leads.



Lisette González Sosa
Certified Ready Candidate for Ordained Ministry
Statement of Faith

I believe in God, the Alpha and Omega, the eternal “I Am” (Exodus 3:14), who exists beyond time and space yet chooses to be present with us. God, the Creator of all, brought life and order into being and filled creation with the Spirit, breathing life into everything that moves and giving humanity the ability to know and be known by God (Genesis 1:27; Psalm 139:13-16). God’s Spirit sustains us, calls us into relationship, and comforts and refines us (Psalm 46:1; Isaiah 40:29-31). I believe God hears the cries of the oppressed, responding with both justice and mercy (Psalm 9:9; Micah 6:8). In love, God sent Jesus Christ, fully divine and fully human, to reveal God’s compassion, to dwell among us, and to bridge heaven and earth (John 1:14; Philippians 2:6-7). I see in God a desire to bring all creation back into harmony, calling us to live justly and love deeply.

I believe in Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, fully God and fully human.¹ Through him, all things were made, and in him, we see the fullness of God’s love (Colossians 1:15-17). Jesus, the Word made flesh, lived among us, sharing in human struggles, experiencing our joys and sorrows, and expressing God’s love in word and deed (Hebrews 4:15). He demonstrated the boundless mercy of God, extending grace to sinners, welcoming the outcast, and embodying God’s compassion (Matthew 11:28-30; Luke 19:10). As the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world, Jesus bore the weight of sin and reconciled us to God through his crucifixion (2 Corinthians 5:18-19; 1 Peter 2:24). Raised from the dead, he triumphed over sin and death and now reigns as Lord, offering forgiveness, restoration, and eternal life to all who call upon his name (Romans 6:9-10; Philippians 2:9-11).

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, fully God and the giver of life, who proceeds from the Creator and the Savior.² The Spirit indwells believers, guiding, empowering, and sanctifying us to live holy lives (John 14:26; 16:13). As the living presence of God, the Spirit works in us to bring forth fruits of the Spirit, renewing our minds and transforming our hearts (Galatians 5:22-23; Romans 12:2). The Spirit intercedes on our behalf, lifting our prayers to God and empowering the Church to fulfill its mission (Romans 8:26-27; Acts 1:8). Through the Spirit’s work, we are gifted with wisdom, discernment, and the strength to share the love of Christ. I trust in the Spirit’s continuous guidance of the Church, enabling us to understand Scripture anew and inspiring us to live as witnesses to the gospel (1 Corinthians 2:10-12; John 16:13-14).

I believe in one holy baptism, a sacrament symbolizing an outward sign of inward grace, uniting us with Christ and his Church. Baptism signifies the cleansing of sin and incorporates us into the body of Christ, a reminder of God’s grace that brings us into covenant as children of God (Matthew 28:19-20; Galatians 3:26-27). Through baptism, we are marked as part of God’s covenant family, united with Christ in his death and resurrection, and joined in fellowship with the Church (Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:12). This sacrament, instituted by Jesus, is a declaration of our faith and a lifelong commitment to follow Christ. In infant baptism, parents promise to nurture their children in faith, trusting that they may one day affirm the promises made on their behalf (Proverbs 22:6; Acts 2:39). I believe baptism is an enduring reminder of our identity in

¹ “Nicene Creed,” BOOK OF CONFESSIONS, “The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA),” 2004.

² *Ibid.*

Christ and our place within the body of believers.

I believe in the Lord's Supper, a communal celebration of thanksgiving that reminds us of Christ's sacrificial love and reconciliation. In Communion, we receive Christ's love, remembering his body broken and blood shed for the forgiveness of sins and the salvation of the world (Luke 22:19-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26). The table is open to all who desire a deeper communion with God and one another. In this sacrament, we anticipate the coming kingdom and are spiritually nourished to continue in faith (Matthew 26:29). By participating in Communion, we are empowered by the Spirit to embody Christ's grace, love, and hospitality in the world.

I believe the Holy Scriptures, both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, are the trustworthy and inspired words of God. They reveal God's covenant with Israel, showing us God's faithfulness and the foreshadowing of Christ's coming (Isaiah 53:5; Jeremiah 31:31-34). The New Testament proclaims God's salvation through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the teachings of the apostles form the foundation of Christian faith and practice (2 Timothy 3:16-17). I affirm that the Scriptures have divine authority to teach, correct, and guide us in all aspects of life, providing us with timeless wisdom (Psalm 119:105). Through the Scriptures, we witness God's unfolding story of grace and redemption, and we are called to participate in it (Hebrews 4:12). The Bible is not just historical text but a living document, revealing God's love and calling us to faithful service (James 1:22-25).

I believe the Church, the body of Christ, is called to embody the love of God and respond to God's grace and mercy. As the hands and feet of Christ, the Church extends healing and reconciliation, offering a loving invitation to those who are hurt or disillusioned (1 Corinthians 12:27). Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the Church goes beyond walls, serving and seeking justice, and bringing hope to those in need (Acts 1:8; Micah 6:8). It is a dynamic community, both united and diverse, called to be salt, light, and a beacon of hope in the world (Matthew 5:13-16). The Church celebrates our shared life in Christ, welcoming people from all walks of life into a transformative community of faith. In our mission, we seek to reflect the heart of Christ, loving, serving, and drawing all people into God's embrace (Matthew 28:19-20; Ephesians 4:4-6).

Commission Charge
for an Administrative Commission
of the Highlands Presbytery of New Jersey
for the First Presbyterian Church of Ogdensburg

*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:
a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant and a time to pluck up what is planted.*
Ecclesiastes 3:1-2

*Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life.
Those who believe in me, though they die, will live;
and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die."*
John 11:25-26

After many years of fruitful ministry, the Session of the First Presbyterian Church of Ogdensburg, after consulting with the COM liaison and the Presbytery Leader, has requested the Presbytery of the Highlands assist them in the transition to dissolution as a congregation.

Therefore, acting on behalf of the Presbytery, with gratitude for the faithful witness of this congregation and with confidence in God's grace, the Administration and Coordinating Team appoints an Administrative Commission with the following responsibilities:

- To work with the Session to conclude the affairs of the First Presbyterian Church of Ogdensburg and, at an appropriate time, to assume original jurisdiction.
- To assist the session and congregation with the sale of the church property to the North Star theatre company and to assist in the development of a use of property agreement.
- To provide for the continuing spiritual and pastoral care of the remaining members of the congregation, assisting them to find a new church home and ensuring that letters of transfer are issued to other congregations as appropriate, within a period of one year following dissolution.
- To dissolve the First Presbyterian Church of Ogdensburg following the *completion of the tasks for the Commission*.
- At the appropriate time, to take possession of all real and corporate property and funds of the Ogdensburg Presbyterian Church, along with financial records and inventories of equipment, and to oversee the transfer of ownership of all real property and accounts to the Presbytery.
- At the appropriate time, to ensure that bills are paid, the property is maintained and secured, and adequate insurance coverage remains in place, if needed.
- Following the last worship service, to take possession of all minutes, rolls, registers and

other records of the Session and congregation and to make arrangements for those having historical value to be transferred to the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery so they may be deposited in the archives of the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia.

- To consult with the Session regarding requests members of the congregation may have regarding the disposition of equipment, memorials and other property, honoring such requests whenever reasonable and possible; however, the Commission shall have sole discretion with respect to the granting of such requests.
- To assert the claim of the Presbytery to any property of the First Presbyterian Church of Ogdensburg not known at this time, or to property or funds which may be received by reason of the congregation being named as the beneficiary of a will or trust not known at this time.
- To discern, in consultation with the Committee on Ministry and the Administrative Coordinating Team of the Presbytery, the future use of the real property, and, if necessary to carry out the sale the property.
- To complete any additional tasks necessary to close the corporation of the church.
- To work with the Session to ensure that the ministry and faithful history of the First Presbyterian Church of Ogdensburg are suitably celebrated in a service of worship.

In undertaking these actions, the Administrative Commission shall be sensitive to the memory, heritage and concerns of the members of the Ogdensburg Presbyterian Church.

The quorum of the Administrative Commission shall be a majority of its members.

The Administrative Commission shall report its progress to the Presbytery at least bi-annually. The Commission's final report to the Presbytery shall include the following elements:

- a. A brief sketch of the congregation's history, lifting up the highlights and giving thanks for its ministry.
- b. A report of the process and actions the Commission has taken.
- c. A full accounting of the transfer of members, including the names of those still remaining on the roll so the Stated Clerk can thereafter keep the roll.
- d. A full accounting of the distribution of the congregation's assets.

Appendix

Book of Order G-3.0109b, Administrative Commissions

Administrative commissions are designated to consider and conclude matters not involving ecclesiastical judicial process, except that in the discharge of their assigned responsibilities they may discover and report to the designating [presbytery] matters that may require judicial action by the [presbytery].

Functions that may be entrusted to administrative commissions include, but are not limited to....visiting particular...congregations...reported to be affected with disorder, and inquiring into and settling the difficulties therein...

A commission of presbytery, synod, or General Assembly shall be composed of ruling elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament in numbers as nearly equal as possible and sufficient to accomplish their work. A quorum of any commission shall be established by the designating [presbytery] but in no case shall be less than a majority of its members (except as limited by D-5.0204)....

A commission shall keep a full record of its proceedings and shall submit that record to the [presbytery] for incorporation into its records. Actions of a commission shall be regarded as actions of the [presbytery] that created it. A commission may be assigned additional duties as a committee, which duties shall be reported and handled as the report of a committee.

The decisions of an administrative commission shall be reported to the clerk of the designating [presbytery], who shall report it to the [presbytery] at its next stated meeting. A [presbytery] may rescind or amend an action of its administrative commission in the same way actions of the [presbytery] are modified.

When an administrative commission has been designated to settle differences within a particular organization...it shall, before making its decision final, afford to all persons affected by its decision fair notice and an opportunity to be heard on matters at issue.

Book of Order G-4.0203 Church Property Held in Trust

All property held by or for a congregation, a presbytery, a synod, the General Assembly, or the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), whether legal title is lodged in a corporation, a trustee or trustees, or an unincorporated association, and whether the property is used in programs of a congregation or of a higher council or retained for the production of income, is held in trust nevertheless for the use and benefit of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Book of Order G-4.0205 Property of a Dissolved or Extinct Congregation

Whenever a congregation is formally dissolved by the presbytery, or has become extinct by reason of the dispersal of its members, the abandonment of its work, or other cause, such property as it may have shall be held, used, and applied for such uses, purposes, and trusts as the presbytery may direct, limit, and appoint, or such property may be sold or disposed of as the presbytery may direct, in conformity with the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

**THE PERMANENT JUDICIAL COMMISSION
OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)**

Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey,
Appellant/Cross-Appellee

v.

The Rev. Ryan Irmer,
Appellee/Cross-Appellant

Decision and Order
Remedial Case 2024-02

Arrival Statement

This is an appeal to the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission (GAPJC or this Commission) filed by the Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey (Appellant or Presbytery) from a decision of the Permanent Judicial Commission of the Synod of the Northeast (SPJC) dated April 26, 2024.

A second appeal from the same SPJC decision (cross-appeal) was filed with the GAPJC by The Rev. Ryan Irmer (Appellee or Rev. Irmer). On June 20, 2024, the officers of the GAPJC issued a Preliminary Order dismissing the cross-appeal on the grounds that the cross-appeal was not timely filed. Rev. Irmer subsequently challenged the dismissal of the cross-appeal. The Presbytery objected to this challenge as untimely, but the officers of the GAPJC overruled that objection, finding that the challenge to the dismissal of the cross-appeal was timely.

In addition, the Presbytery requested a stay of portions of the SPJC decision, and on June 24, 2024, a stay was entered. Rev. Irmer challenged this stay.

Several issues were presented at a hearing of the GAPJC on October 18, 2024:

- a. Rev. Irmer's challenge to the dismissal of the cross-appeal;
- b. the merits of the Presbytery's appeal;
- c. the merits of Rev. Irmer's cross-appeal, to be considered if Rev. Irmer's challenge to the dismissal of the cross-appeal were to be sustained; and
- d. Rev. Irmer's challenge to the entry of the stay.

Jurisdictional Statement

This Commission finds that it has jurisdiction over the appeal, that Appellant has standing to file its appeal, that the appeal was timely filed, and that the appeal states one or more of the grounds for appeal set forth in the *Book of Order*, D-6.0202c.

This Commission finds that it has jurisdiction over the cross-appeal, that Appellee has standing to file his cross-appeal, and that the cross-appeal states one or more of the grounds for appeal set forth in the *Book of Order*, D-6.0202c. However, the timeliness of the cross-appeal was contested and subject to a hearing as described below.

Appearances

Ruling Elder Joe Martinoni, Ruling Elder Becky Moody, and The Rev. Stefanie Muntzel appeared as committee of counsel, with counsel Ruling Elder Tania M. Nemeth, on behalf of Appellant. The Rev. Ryan Irmer appeared as Appellee, with his counsel, The Rev. Robert Eyre. The Rev. Steven Shussett, Stated Clerk for the Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey, and The Rev. Nancy Talbot, Stated Clerk for the Synod of the Northeast, also were present. With the agreement of both parties, the parties and their counsel appeared for the hearing by videoconference.

History

Rev. Irmer was installed as the Pastor of Long Valley Presbyterian Church (LVPC) in May of 2021. Two years into his pastorate, Rev. Irmer and an elder from the LVPC session separately reached out to The Rev. Jeanne Redak, Presbytery Leader, seeking the Presbytery's assistance with conflict that had arisen between Rev. Irmer and certain members of the session. In response, the Presbytery's Committee on Ministry (COM) recommended that Rev. Irmer take a "paid leave of absence" beginning June 18, 2023, and extending at least through September 10, 2023. This leave was understood by both parties to be voluntary and had clearly stated terms. This recommendation was shared at a meeting of the LVPC session on June 1, where The Rev. David Young, representing the COM, was in attendance and moderated, at Rev. Irmer's invitation. The minutes of that meeting show that Rev. Young described the proposal as "administrative leave." The session agreed to the COM's plan, and the following Sunday Rev. Young addressed the congregation of LVPC and described the plan as "administrative leave," making clear that "the Leave did not come about in response to any form of misconduct, misappropriation of funds, or anything criminal."

Over two months into this leave, having met with a COM-assigned clergy coach (The Rev. Byron Leasure) and having attended the Clergy Program at the Davidson Center for the Professions at the COM's recommendation, Rev. Irmer met with the Care Team of the COM on August 23, 2023, and expressed his desire to return from his leave. Following this meeting, the Care Team and Rev. Leasure established "a process of reconciliation" requiring both Rev. Irmer and the session to exchange lists of three things that they and the other party must do to resolve the conflicts. Both the session and Rev. Irmer complied on September 23, 2023, and Rev. Irmer asked to meet with the session to discuss the lists.

LVPC's session met on October 4, moderated by Rev. Leasure, without notice to Rev. Irmer. At this meeting, session members discussed Rev. Irmer's list and voted to inform COM of their request to dissolve the pastoral relationship. Rev. Redak and Rev. Young sent Rev. Irmer a

letter on October 20, 2023, informing him that a congregational meeting would be held to vote on a request for the dissolution and a corresponding severance package. The letter offered Rev. Irmer two opportunities to share his “concerns about the process, the severance package, and moving forward.” On November 5, the congregational meeting was held, and the recommendation to request the Presbytery dissolve the pastoral relationship was passed. Rev. Irmer was excluded from this congregational meeting.

The COM met on November 7. Rev. Irmer was in attendance, invited to submit documentation, and given twenty minutes to speak. Rev. Irmer was not informed that an administrative leave pending a psychological evaluation was under consideration. After Rev. Irmer was excused from the meeting, the COM voted to: (1) dissolve the pastoral relationship between Rev. Irmer and LVPC, (2) approve the proposed severance, and (3) place Rev. Irmer on administrative leave pending a “Presbytery paid psychological evaluation, through Physis Associates, and a review by a team appointed by the COM.” Rev. Irmer was not aware of the COM’s decision until receiving a letter the next day detailing this decision. The letter explained that Physis Associates is the same group the Presbytery’s Commission on the Preparation for Ministry uses for candidates under care for ministry.

These actions of the COM were reported to the stated meeting of the Presbytery on November 14, 2023, a meeting from which Rev. Irmer was excluded as a condition of the imposed administrative leave. The actions were reported in the consent agenda, which was approved without comment.

On November 30, Rev. Irmer filed a remedial complaint with the Permanent Judicial Commission of the Synod of the Northeast, seeking a stay of enforcement of LVPC’s vote to request the dissolution of the pastoral relationship, the vote of the COM to dissolve the relationship, and the imposition of administrative leave. A stay of the imposition of administrative leave was entered on December 18. The Presbytery challenged the stay, and a hearing on that challenge was scheduled for March 8, 2024.

On January 31, 2024, Rev. Irmer filed a second complaint, alleging that continuing statements and actions by the Presbytery were interfering with his search for a new call, violating the stay, and thus seeking a more detailed and comprehensive stay of enforcement. A stay was entered on February 20, and the Presbytery challenged the stay. A hearing on March 8 addressed both stays and challenges, and on March 14 the SPJC combined the two stays into one and kept that stay in place throughout the proceeding.

The SPJC conducted a trial on April 16, 2024. In its decision and order, dated April 26, the SPJC sustained three of Rev. Irmer’s claims of irregularity: (1) that the COM acted erroneously in dissolving the pastoral relationship, per G-3.0109b, by exceeding its delegated authority; (2) that the COM lacked constitutional authority pursuant to D-7.0902 or otherwise to place Rev. Irmer on administrative leave or to impose conditions or restrictions on his functions as a pastor or his search for a new call; and (3) that the Presbytery acted unconstitutionally in denying Rev. Irmer access to the presbytery meeting on November 14. The decision ordered that the action of the November 14 presbytery meeting placing Rev. Irmer on administrative leave be vacated, and further prohibited the Presbytery from communicating that Rev. Irmer had been

placed on “Administrative Leave pending appropriate assessments,” “administrative leave,” or “leave.” The Presbytery was also ordered to allow Rev. Irmer to “participate in the process of transfer of membership to another presbytery as it would any other minister member of the presbytery.”

The Presbytery appealed the SPJC’s decision to this Commission on June 7, 2024, and sought a stay of enforcement of portions of the SPJC’s order. On June 11, Rev. Irmer filed a cross-appeal of the SPJC’s decision and order. The officers of this Commission accepted the Presbytery’s appeal on June 14. On June 20, the officers of this Commission issued an order dismissing Rev. Irmer’s cross-appeal as untimely. On June 24, the stay requested by the Presbytery was entered, specifying “those portions of the decision and order concerning the intent to, or effect of, restricting, inhibiting, limiting or otherwise interfering, directly or indirectly with the presbytery’s obligation and responsibility for care and oversight in requiring a psychological exam of Rev. Irmer prior to transfer to a new call in any presbytery.”

Rev. Irmer challenged the dismissal of the cross-appeal on July 19, and the Presbytery objected that this challenge was untimely. On July 25, Rev. Irmer challenged the stay of enforcement of portions of the SPJC’s order. In a Preliminary Order dated September 6, this Commission overruled the Presbytery’s objection to the timeliness of Rev. Irmer’s challenge to the dismissal of the cross-appeal and set a hearing date of October 18, 2024, for all of the remaining issues in the case, including: (1) the merits of the Presbytery’s appeal, (2) Rev. Irmer’s challenge to the entry of a stay, (3) Rev. Irmer’s challenge to the dismissal of the cross-appeal, and (4) if the second challenge was sustained, the merits of Rev. Irmer’s cross-appeal. This hearing occurred as scheduled. The GAPJC commissioners convened in person in Louisville, Kentucky, with the parties and their counsel participating by videoconference.

Introduction to Challenges and Appeal

Permanent judicial commissions have long-standing and broad authority to restate, group, consolidate, and summarize, but not omit, specifications of error presented in an appeal for purposes of clarity (*Book of Order*, D-6.1203). See *Lewellen v. Presbytery of Los Ranchos* (2017, 223-03). This Commission has restated the specification of error in the appeal.

First, this Decision considers the question of Rev. Irmer’s challenge to this Commission’s dismissal of his cross-appeal. Next, this Decision addresses alleged specifications of error in the appeal. Finally, this Decision concludes with Rev. Irmer’s challenge to the stay of enforcement issued by this Commission.

Appellee’s Challenge to the Dismissal of Cross-Appeal

Rev. Irmer raises two challenges to the dismissal of his cross-appeal. First, Rev. Irmer argues that the cross-appeal should be considered timely filed, because the SPJC decision was sent electronically without prior agreement of the parties, as required by D-5.0902c, and without any other additional method of delivery specified in D-4.0103b. Therefore, Rev. Irmer argues

that the date of receipt of electronic delivery ought to be considered either on the next business day, or, at the earliest, on the day after the electronic document was sent.

Second, Rev. Irmer argues that, even in the absence of a timely filed appeal of his own, under the definition of an appeal in a remedial case found in D-6.0101, when this Commission accepted the Presbytery's appeal, the entire case was transferred to this Commission for review. Rev. Irmer requests that this Commission consider his alleged specifications of error as a response to Appellant's appeal under this Commission's jurisdiction to "review...the proceedings and [issue] a decision to correct, modify, set aside, or reverse the decision" (*Book of Order*, D-6.0101).

Decision in Appellee's Challenge to the Dismissal of Cross-Appeal

D-4.0103b provides for the filing of documents in remedial cases "by United States Postal Service certified mail, return receipt requested; commercial courier, with delivery receipt requested; personal delivery; or electronically when so permitted [in Church Discipline]." D-4.0302 provides that communication beyond the filing of the remedial complaint may be handled electronically at the written agreement of both parties. D-5.0902c provides that decisions of permanent judicial commissions "shall immediately be delivered to the parties in accordance with D-4.0103b, or electronically, if agreed upon in advance by the parties."

Rev. Irmer argues that, even though he acknowledges that he had made extensive use of electronic filing throughout this case when it was before the SPJC, he had not explicitly agreed in advance to electronic distribution of the SPJC final decision. This Commission notes that electronic delivery poses unique challenges, including determining when a document is received by a party where the timing of that receipt is relevant to deadlines, such as under D-4.0103a. Without prior agreement and an agreed-upon means of acknowledging receipt, electronic communication could be disrupted, delayed, or sent to spam folders. The sharing of electronic communication among the parties without affirmative agreement for document delivery does not imply future agreement where required under Church Discipline.

This Commission strongly recommends that, at the initiation of proceedings, stated clerks and permanent judicial commissions request if all parties explicitly agree in writing to electronic distribution of documents, including final decisions.

In this case, however, Rev. Irmer acknowledged awareness of the SPJC decision in his email inbox after the close of business hours on Friday, April 26, 2024. Under these circumstances, this Commission finds that this satisfies the requirement for receipt and delivery under D-5.0905 and D-6.0201. This started the timing for applying D-4.0103a, which states:

In determining whether or not a document is timely filed, the day following the event giving rise to the time limit begins the count as day one (for example, the day following the date on which a council action is taken, or on which a party receives a decision). All seven days of every week are included in the count, including holidays, and the document shall be deemed timely filed if it is received by the

person or persons to whom it is required to be sent on or before the final day of the count. When the final date of the count falls on a weekend or holiday, the document shall be deemed timely filed if it is received on the next business day after the final day of the count.

Contrary to what Rev. Irmer argues, there is nothing in that language that allows for the date of initial receipt in electronic transmission to begin on the first business day following its delivery. Rather, D-4.0103a is explicit regarding when day one begins: the day following the event giving rise to the time limit.

Accordingly, this Commission finds that Rev. Irmer received the SPJC decision on April 26, 2024. Therefore, the cross-appeal, filed on June 11, 2024, was not timely filed according to D-6.0201. Thus, this Commission confirms the decision of its officers in its Preliminary Order that D-6.0601c has been answered in the negative.

Rev. Irmer also argues that, even if his cross-appeal was not timely, this Commission has discretion under D-6.0101 to address the additional issues raised in his notice of appeal and brief. This Commission notes that D-6.0101 and D-6.0803 do give judicial commissions discretion to address additional issues raised by an appellee when a case has been transferred to that permanent judicial commission on appeal. While those provisions provide the discretion to address additional issues, specifications of error are ordinarily required to be raised through the filing of a separate notice of appeal as described in D-6.01 and D-6.02, within the requirements of those provisions. This Commission declines to address these additional issues under D-6.0101 and D-6.0803.

D-6.0603 states that “If the permanent judicial commission determines the answer to any of the four preliminary questions has been answered in the negative, the commission shall dismiss the appeal.”

Therefore, the challenge to the Preliminary Order is not sustained, and the cross-appeal is dismissed.

Specification of Error in the Appeal

Specification of Error No. 1 (Appeal): The SPJC erred, as a matter of constitutional interpretation, by failing to address whether and to what extent the Presbytery has the authority to require Rev. Irmer to undergo a psychological evaluation to determine his fitness for ministry or prior to transfer to another presbytery.

This specification of error is sustained in part and not sustained in part. (See Decision below.)

Decision in the Appeal

This Commission sustains the specification of error only to the extent that the SPJC did not explicitly address the question of authority for the Presbytery to require psychological evaluations. None of the other issues before the SPJC were challenged on appeal.

In its decision, the SPJC addressed ten issues of constitutional interpretation as stipulated by the parties. The Presbytery centers its appeal on the second issue (Issue 2) addressed by the SPJC, which was sustained: “Complainant [Rev. Irmer] 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.”

Since a psychological evaluation was the condition or restriction on Rev. Irmer’s search for a new call in Issue 2, this Commission agrees with the Presbytery that the SPJC should have addressed directly in its decision the question of whether and to what extent a presbytery has the authority to require a psychological evaluation of one of its minister members to assess continued fitness for ministry.

The question of a presbytery’s authority to require a psychological evaluation in this case is most closely addressed by an authoritative interpretation (AI) issued as Commissioners’ Resolution 97-1: *On Requesting a Study of Use of Psychological and Psychiatric Evaluations by Presbyteries and the Potential Tort Liability of Presbyteries for Acts of Minister Members* (Minutes, 1999, Part I, pp. 65, 706). This AI confirms, in section 12.017, that a presbytery may use a psychological evaluation for any minister member in their responsibility to nurture the covenant community of disciples of Christ: “The path permitting a presbytery to use psychological and psychiatric evaluations in supervising the work of ministers is less clear on the face of the *Book of Order*, nonetheless, it is entirely constitutional for presbyteries to use such evaluations when a presbytery deems them necessary.” Further, this Commission agrees with the Presbytery that a presbytery’s responsibility for oversight of minister members does not disappear once the pastoral relationship with a congregation has been dissolved. A presbytery has the authority, when exercised within constitutional boundaries, to require psychological evaluations of its minister members as needed.

Those boundaries include fundamental fairness and, when applicable, the specific delegation of a presbytery’s authority as required by *Book of Order*, G-3.0109. In its decision on Issue 2, the SPJC found that the COM’s action to place Rev. Irmer on administrative leave pending a psychological evaluation violated fundamental fairness because he was not given notice prior to the COM meeting that he might be placed on administrative leave. This prevented him from addressing that possibility effectively at the meeting. The SPJC also held that the COM’s action was unfair because the COM lacked an established, written policy on administrative leave at the time of its meeting on November 7, 2023, and it did not otherwise create or communicate a clear definition or parameters for the imposition of administrative leave and the attendant requirement of a psychological evaluation. Additionally, when the COM actions were reported to Presbytery, Rev. Irmer was barred from the meeting and not given the opportunity to speak or respond to the imposition of this restriction on his ministry. The SPJC

found this to be fundamentally unfair. This Commission agrees and finds that a presbytery should consider sufficient safeguards to ensure fundamental fairness for psychological evaluations as well as administrative leave.

Like any authority delegated by a council, the authority to require psychological evaluations must be exercised in accordance with G-3.0109 and as delineated in *John v. Presbytery of New York City* (2020, 225-05):

This Commission further advised that “in order to avoid misunderstanding,” a presbytery should “state with particularity in the order of appointment any limitations or restrictions on the powers delegated to the administrative commission.” G-3.0109 requires councils to “state specifically the scope of authority given to a commission... and any restrictions on its powers” (*Suarez-Valera v. Presbiterio del Noroeste* (2020, 225-02)).

Here, this Commission finds that the Presbytery did not specifically delegate authority to the COM to impose involuntary administrative leave or to impose a psychological evaluation as a part of such leave or otherwise.

This Commission strongly encourages presbyteries to develop clear guidelines for the careful use of psychological evaluations as a tool for exercising oversight of minister members. This should include, at minimum, written policies describing how the need for an evaluation is determined and how a minister is informed of that determination, as well as a process for the minister to respond to the proposed requirement. These guidelines should also reflect cultural diversity and address sensitivity to differing understandings of the seriousness of psychological evaluations (see *Park et al. v. Presbytery of San Fernando*, 2024, 226-03).

In conclusion, this Commission affirms the authority of presbyteries to require psychological examinations of its minister members as the presbyteries deem necessary. At the same time, such authority must be guided by standards of fundamental fairness and clearly delegated authority.

Note

Though the Presbytery maintains that its intent in imposing administrative leave on Rev. Irmer was not disciplinary, the action nonetheless had a negative impact, in part due to the traditional disciplinary context for administrative leave in the *Book of Order*. Historically, administrative leave has been available only during the investigation of an allegation of sexual abuse. D-7.0905, added in July 2023, states: “Nothing in this section shall preclude a presbytery from establishing its own rules for administrative leave or other restrictions on a minister’s service.” While this clause rightly references the importance of a presbytery following “its own [written] rules” when determining administrative leave, the fact that this is placed under section D-7.09, “ALLEGATIONS OF SEXUAL ABUSE,” and the historic restriction on administrative leave to cases of alleged sexual abuse, complicates a presbytery’s authority to utilize leave as a valid form of support for a minister who needs it.

Because this new constitutional revision appears to address the use of administrative leave outside the disciplinary process, this Commission suggests that a further corresponding amendment to the Form of Government would be helpful to define and clarify the scope and use of administrative leave beyond the provisions of Church Discipline.

Decision on the Challenge to the Stay of Enforcement

As noted above, Rev. Irmer has challenged this Commission's stay of portions of the SPJC order. The Decision on the appeal answers fully Rev. Irmer's challenge to the stay of enforcement. Accordingly, the stay is vacated and replaced by this Commission's Order set forth below.

Order

IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED that the decision issued on April 26, 2024, by the Permanent Judicial Commission of the Synod of the Northeast is affirmed.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that nothing in the decision of the Synod of the Northeast shall preclude the Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey from requiring a psychological evaluation when it deems it necessary for its minister members, including prior to dismissal of a member to another presbytery, in a way that is consistent with the *Book of Order* as set forth in this Decision. Any such determination and requirement shall be made by the Presbytery or a commission duly and explicitly delegated the responsibility, providing for fundamental fairness including notice and opportunity to be heard.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the Stated Clerk of the Synod of the Northeast report this Decision to the Synod of the Northeast at the first meeting after receipt, that the Synod of the Northeast 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 General Assembly.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey report this Decision to the Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey at the first meeting after receipt, that the Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey 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 General Assembly.

Absences and Non-Appearances

Commissioners Cindy Kohlmann and John Welch were absent and took no part in the hearing and deliberations. The commissioner positions from the Synod of Living Waters, the Synod of the Rocky Mountains, and Sínodo Presbiteriano de Boriquén en Puerto Rico were vacant.

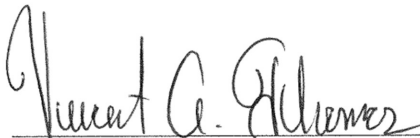
Certificates

We certify that the foregoing is a true and correct copy of the Decision of the Permanent Judicial Commission of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in Remedial Case 2024-02, *Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey, Appellant/Cross-Appellee, v. The Rev. Ryan Irmer, Appellee/Cross-Appellant*, made and announced at Louisville, Kentucky, this 20th day of October, 2024.

Dated this 20th day of October, 2024



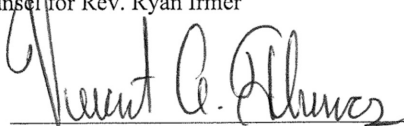
Scott Clark, Moderator
Permanent Judicial Commission of the General Assembly



Vincent A. Thomas, Clerk
Permanent Judicial Commission of the General Assembly

I certify that I did, on this 20th day of October, 2024, transmit in person a certified copy of the foregoing to Flor Vélez-Díaz for delivery to the following persons:

Rev. Ryan Irmer, Appellee/Cross-Appellant
Rev. Steve Shusset, Stated Clerk, Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey
Rev. Nancy Talbot, Stated Clerk, Synod of the Northeast
RE Tania Nemeth, counsel for Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey
Rev. Robert Eyre, counsel for Rev. Ryan Irmer

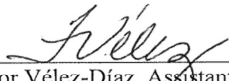


Vincent A. Thomas, Clerk
Permanent Judicial Commission of the General Assembly

I certify that I received a certified copy of the foregoing, that it is a full and correct copy of the decision of the Permanent Judicial Commission of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), sitting during an interval between meetings of the General

Assembly, in Louisville, Kentucky, on October 20th, 2024, in Remedial Case 226-02 and that it is the final judgment of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in the case.

Dated at Louisville, Kentucky, this 20th day of October, 2024.



Flor Vélez-Díaz, Assistant Stated Clerk
Manager of Judicial Process and Social Witness

**THE PERMANENT JUDICIAL COMMISSION
OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)**

**Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey,
Appellant/Cross-Appellee**

v.

**The Rev. Ryan Irmer,
Appellee/Cross-Appellant**

**Opinion Concurring in Part
and Dissenting in Part
Remedial Case 2024-02**

Opinion Concurring in Part and Dissenting in Part

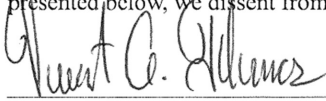
We concur in the result of the majority to the extent it sustains the order of the Synod Permanent Judicial Commission (“SPJC”). Because the appellant did not act by way of a commission delegated with appropriate powers nor provide a fundamentally fair process to appellee, we would not sustain the balance of the appeal for two reasons.

As noted in our concurrence with our colleague Commissioner Paige Bass, it does not appear that the question of appellant’s authority to order psychological evaluations (independent of the imposition of administrative leave) was presented to the SPJC. Because this issue was not raised before the SPJC, we would not consider it on appeal.

Appellant has asked us to approve its general authority as a presbytery to require psychological evaluations of minister members. We would hold this question moot for purposes of this case, as the particular direction to appellee to obtain a psychological evaluation has been rejected by the SPJC and the majority of this Commission as fundamentally unfair. Having had its request for a psychological evaluation rejected, appellant essentially asks this Commission for an advisory opinion ungrounded in the controversy of this matter – the circumstances under which it can require a psychological evaluation of a minister member. The majority of this Commission interprets the authoritative interpretation in the *Commissioner’s Resolution 97-1*, Minutes, 1997, Part I, pp. 65, 706, to permit a psychological evaluations whenever “a presbytery deems them necessary.” Our reading of the authoritative resolution is narrower. The authoritative interpretation calls out four circumstances where a presbytery may direct such an evaluation – assessment of candidates for ministry (G-14.0303 and G-14.0305), ministers transferring into a presbytery (G-11.0402, G-11.0403), ministers who are subject to a supervised rehabilitation order (D-12.0104b), and ministers being evaluated regarding of a dissolution of call (G-11.0103o)(citations to the then existing version of the *Book of Order*.) In each case, the person subject to the psychological evaluation is in a transitional moment in ministry. The authoritative interpretation specifically notes that in those circumstances, the person can avoid the psychological evaluation by not proceeding with the transition. It seems inconsistent, given the

care with which four specific circumstances are called out by the authoritative interpretation, to hold that it broadly applies to any minister member at whatever time and in whatever circumstances a presbytery deems appropriate.

A presbytery seeking clarification of its authority to require psychological evaluations may submit a request to the Advisory Committee on the Constitution (G-6.02) or directly present the issue to the General Assembly by overture. Such processes would allow for the full input and discernment of the Church. Because the issue is moot in this case and because it was not presented below, we dissent from that portion of the majority opinion.



Vincent A. Thomas
Commissioner, Synod of the Lakes and Prairies



Bennet McConaughy
Commissioner, Synod of Alaska/Northwest

**THE PERMANENT JUDICIAL COMMISSION
OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)**

**Presbytery of the Highlands of New Jersey,
Appellant/Cross-Appellee**

v.

**The Rev. Ryan Irmer,
Appellee/Cross-Appellant**

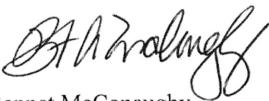
**Opinion Concurring in Part
and Dissenting in Part
Remedial Case 2024-02**

Opinion Concurring in Part and Dissenting in Part

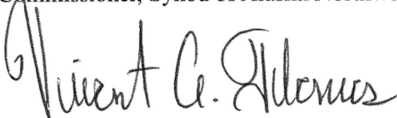
We dissent from the portion of the Decision in which the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission (this Commission) concludes that the Permanent Judicial Commission of the Synod of the Northeast (SPJC) erred in failing to determine whether a presbytery has the authority to require a psychological evaluation of one of its minister members to assess the member's fitness for ministry. We do not believe this specific issue was presented to the SPJC for determination. Nevertheless, we believe this Commission's guidance regarding a presbytery's use of a psychological evaluation for one of its minister members is helpful to both presbyteries and their minister members, and such guidance is appropriate under this Commission's authority to interpret the *Book of Order* in a remedial or disciplinary case (G-3.0501c/G-6.02). Therefore, we concur in this Commission's Decision to provide guidance on the subject and also concur in the remaining portions of this Commission's Decision and Order.



Paige Bass
Commissioner, Synod of the Sun



Bennet McConaughy
Commissioner, Synod of Alaska/Northwest



Vincent Thomas
Commissioner, Synod of the Lakes and Prairies

2025 BUDGET CREATION WORKSHEET

10/29/2024 Version

Target withdraw rate 5.5% of Mission & Ministry Acct (7/31/24)

\$4,454,281.25

Target withdraw rate 4% of Chesnutt Acct (7/31/24)

\$297,858.18

Assumptions:	Membership	10,322
	Per Capita Rate	\$43.50
	GA Per Capita	\$10.84
	Synod Per Capita	\$4.25
	Uncollected	18%
	Salary treatment	2.00% Ordained Staff
		2.00% Non Ordained Staff

Accounts	2023 Actuals	Jan-Jun 2024 Actuals	Jan-Jun 2024 Budget	Jan-Jun 2024 Variance	2024 Budget	Proposed 2025 Budget
Revenues						
Per Capita						
140100 Current Year Per Capita	378,503	191,072	238,128	(47,055)	476,255	449,007
140101 CY Uncollected Per Capita	-	-	(42,863)	42,863	(85,726)	(80,821)
140200 Prior Year Per Capita	21,487	18,856	-	18,856	-	-
140300 Future Year Per Capita	9,796	-	-	-	-	-
Total Per Capita	409,786	209,928	195,265	14,663	390,529	368,186
Missional Giving						
PRESBYTERY Missional Giving						
140132 Undesig Presbytery Missional Giving	38,389	4,264	13,500	(9,236)	27,000	27,000
Total PRESBYTERY Missional Giving	38,389	4,264	13,500	(9,236)	27,000	27,000
Interest Revenue						
140510 Interest	342	117	150	(33)	300	300
Total Interest Revenue	342	117	150	(33)	300	300
Other Revenue						
Reserve Draw						
140899 Chesnutt Fund Draw	-	4,771	4,771	-	9,541	8,314
140999 Presby Operating Reserve	200,552	103,803	103,803	-	207,605	244,985
Total Reserve Draw	200,552	108,573	108,573	-	217,146	253,300
Endowment Income						
140997 Endowment Income	8,744	4,516	4,329	187	8,658	8,658
Total Endowment Income	8,744	4,516	4,329	187	8,658	8,658
Misc Revenue						
140490 Vanco fee offset given	97	21	-	21	-	-
Total Misc Revenue	97	21	-	21	-	-
Total Other Revenue	209,392	113,110	112,902	208	225,804	261,958
Total Revenues	657,909	327,418	321,817	5,601	643,633	657,444
Expenses						
Administration						
Admin						
150111 Master Liability Insurance	2,755	533	1,396	(803)	2,671	2,671
150112 Umbrella Insurance Policy	1,321	272	967	(295)	1,133	1,133
150113 Worker Comp Insurance Policy	1,160	1,293	600	603	1,200	1,200
150114 Cyber Liability Insurance	-	518	200	318	400	400
150115 Managment Liability Insurance	856	165	92	73	184	184
150116 FSA Admin fees	94	47	-	47	-	100
150220 Fees/Payroll fees	765	434	325	109	650	1,650
150230 Presbytery Fin Review Fees	6,500	6,500	3,250	3,250	6,500	6,500
Total Admin	13,450	9,672	6,369	3,303	12,738	13,838
Facilities						
150120 Supplies	1,798	639	750	(112)	1,500	1,500
150130 Postage	873	576	325	251	650	650
150140 Communication	6,031	3,349	2,500	849	5,000	5,000
150150 Equipment	3,362	2,007	2,500	(493)	5,000	5,000
150160 Utilities	4,170	2,415	3,000	(585)	6,000	6,000
150170 Condo Association Dues	16,579	8,290	8,300	(10)	16,600	16,600
150190 Software & Technology	4,898	3,989	3,280	709	6,560	6,560
150210 Cleaning Services	1,980	1,260	1,100	160	2,200	2,200
150240 Facilities Repairs & Improvements	150	-	500	(500)	1,000	1,000
Total Facilities	39,841	22,525	22,255	270	44,510	44,510
Compensation						
Presbytery Leader/EP						
151300 PL Salary	60,447	31,131	31,131	0	62,261	64,356
151301 PL Housing	41,262	21,250	21,250	0	42,500	43,350
151310 PL Professional Expense	3,461	637	2,500	(1,863)	5,000	5,000
151330 PL Pension/Medical	39,667	20,428	20,429	(0)	40,857	39,259
151340 PL Continuing Education	1,319	45	1,000	(965)	2,000	2,000
151350 PL Travel	4,927	285	3,000	(2,715)	6,000	6,000
151380 PL SECA	7,781	4,007	4,007	0	8,014	8,174
Total Presbytery Leader/EP	158,864	77,783	83,316	(5,533)	166,632	168,139
Financial Administrator						
151410 FA Salary	64,131	33,027	33,028	(0)	66,055	67,376
151411 FA 403b	11,544	5,945	5,945	(0)	11,890	12,128
151420 FA Social Security/MED	4,803	2,203	2,527	(323)	5,053	5,154

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\$207,858.18