

Summary of the 178th Stated Meeting of the Presbytery of the Midwest February 10-11, 2023
(Please share this at your next Session meeting and with members as a way of staying connected.)

The 178th stated meeting of the MWP took place at College Corner Presbyterian Church in the beautiful 150 year-old Sanctuary of the church building. We were welcomed by Pastor Jeff Schrage and a home team of elders and volunteers who prepared every part of the meeting from registration to technology to a Taco Buffet and perpetual snacks to a Worship time on Friday evening and Saturday morning.

RE Bruce Shown moderated his first meeting of the year. He came well prepared in prayer and in the advanced reading of Roberts Rules and the Book of Order. We had a total of 70 Commissioners at the church, and another 30 who joined us on line. There were 95% of our active churches represented at the meeting.

We welcomed several first time commissioners as well as representatives from two new churches who had come to be formally examined and welcomed into the EPC Midwest Presbytery. A third church beyond our membership expressed interest, and was invited to send observers to see how we conduct business.

After prayer and establishing a quorum, we approved the Docket and two other administrative items and moved on to committee business.

Ministerial & Candidates Committee

Presented by TE Andrew Winter

TE Michael Daling came to the floor to be examined so that he might transfer his ordination credentials from the RCA into the EPC. This was the culmination of a process that began in 2022. It included initial contacts with Michael followed by visits to Christ's Community Church in Fort Wayne to meet with their Consistory and members of the church. Michael passed his examination with the Ministerial Committee in January 2023 and then passed his examination on the floor of Presbytery at this meeting. His Elders and Deacons also passed examinations and by the end of our meeting, we had received them all and set a date for the pastor and church leaders to be ordained and installed in the EPC.

TE Josh Boehr was called forward to be recognized by the Midwest Presbytery with a call changed from Assistant Pastor to Associate Pastor at Knox Presbyterian Church, Ann Arbor, MI. Josh was examined by the Ministerial Candidates Committee before the meeting, so this occasion served as a time to celebrate the 20 years of ministry he has already offered at Knox Presbyterian and to establish the Terms of Call and Installation details for this new call by the church.

Ashley Gray was called forward next. She came to be examined to come under care of the Midwest Presbytery. Ashley was endorsed by the Session of Ward Church for candidacy. She was examined by the Ministerial & Candidates Committee in advance of this meeting. On the floor of Presbytery Ashley shared her Christian experience of the saving grace of God and her call to prepare for gospel ministry in the EPC. She was approved and assigned an advisor who will shepherd her through this process until she comes for ordination.

Overture on Paedobaptism: TE Aaron White presented an overture from the Session of First Presbyterian Church, South Charleston, OH. After he framed the issue and made the motion, the commissioners addressed the motion of referring it to the Ministerial Committee for additional study and recommendations. After considerable constructive comments were made, a substitute motion was put forth. The substitute motion moved that the pastoral letter written by the Stated Clerk of the Midwest Presbytery be accepted as guidance for TEs and Sessions with regard to Infant Baptism and

Dedications. It was approved for discussion and then was approved in a vote by the commissioners to the Midwest Presbytery. A copy of the Pastoral Letter is attached.

Church Health Committee

Presented by TE Bill Teague

TE Bill Teague introduced the Ruling Elders of Clifton United Presbyterian Church, Clifton, OH to the commissioners. This church petitioned to transfer its membership from the Presbytery of the Miami Valley (PCUSA) to the EPC Midwest Presbytery. All dismissal requirements were met by the church. In addition, the church received elder training, shared their individual and collective testimonies to the grace of God and subsequently passed an examination by representatives of the Ministerial Committee. We joyfully prayed for this congregation and extended the right hand of fellowship to them. We will provide a moderator for them and recommend pulpit supply as needed until such time as they are able to call a pastor.

TE Bill Teague completed the process of Christ's Community Church's (Fort Wayne, IN) approval as a member church in the EPC Midwest Presbytery by leading us in a prayer for them and announcing the day of their transfer of ordination and installation by an appointed Installation Commission of the MWP (February 26, 2023).

The Church Health Committee had a "pilot year" in 2022 and has now been formally recognized. The committee clarified its goal to promote vitality in our churches throughout the Midwest Presbytery. The means of fulfilling that goal includes calling us to emphasize evangelism, church revitalization and transitional pastor training in all of our churches. TE Andy Gilman was appointed Coordinator of Church Health. He is busy training coaches, writing step by step curriculum and engaging with churches in all three states.

The Oakland Revitalization Commission has managed a Revitalization Fund for three years. It has made contributions to 12 churches in the EPC for the purpose of promoting revitalization projects (totaling \$77,575). That Commission's work was completed with appreciation and the remainder of resources were entrusted to the Church Health Committee to distribute (\$24,425). The Church Health Coordinator is engaged with these churches to discover how these gifts have impacted the churches who received the funds.

Church Planting Committee

Presented by TE Terence Gray

Several Church plants are going forward at this time including Abundant Mercy Church and 5point7 Church in Detroit and Crossway EPC in Mt. Clemens, MI. New City Church in South Bend became a local church in 2021.

Now it is time to dream of the next church plant. Ideas have been shared with stakeholders in all three states and we are prayerfully waiting for tangible proposals to emerge. To help stimulate our thoughts and prayers, TE Terence Gray asked Commissioned Pastor Brian Evans to come forward for an interview. Here's the essence of his message: "While strategies and methods are good, being close to God is better. We remain hungry for God, dependent on God and crying out to him in prayer." Terence's final word on the question of why plant new churches was simply this: "New churches reach new people with the gospel."

The concluding segment of this report came from TE Sean Carroll who introduced Thrive, a two year residency for prospective pastors to be led by the staff and ministry leaders of Ward Church, Northville, MI. Opportunities to see all facets of ministry in the local church and to be linked with seminary education and church planting experts will be part of this residency.

Program Committee**Presented by TE Aaron White**

TE Aaron White introduced us to RE Roy Yanke, the Director of PIR ministries. He presented a seminar on the topic: The Power of Rest – From Sabbath to Sabbaticals. The seminar was clear, compelling and practical in its various dimensions. On the second day of our presbytery docket, a panel discussion took place with a model of sabbatical offered by TE Patrick Allen. Surprisingly few Teaching Elders have taken sabbaticals. The presenter was willing to encourage others to consider this by making additional resources available.

Nominating Committee**Presented by TE Kelly Kurth**

The Presbytery flourishes when well qualified people serve in the areas of their gifts to advance God's Kingdom goals within the Midwest Presbytery. To that end, TE Kelly Kurth stepped forward to remind us of the opportunities available. He actually did double duty by presenting the available positions at the General Assembly level as well.

Session Records Committee**Presented by TE Brandon Jolley**

Every Session presents electronic copies of their minutes to the Session Review Committee each January. The process has been implemented over the last three years. It has been working very well. TE Brandon Jolley acknowledged the help he has gotten to review the minutes and return them with constructive feedback for each church.

Friday Evening Worship

After adjourning for a wonderful fellowship meal, the commissioners were called back to participate in Worship by way of prayers, hymns, scripture readings and the preaching of the Word. TE Jeff Schrage led us in an exposition of Galatians 5:7-12 entitled, "Persevering in Christ." We closed in prayer.

Saturday Morning Worship

We worshiped the Lord again on Saturday morning with hymns and prayers and an exposition of Scripture from Nahum 2. Our presenter was Matthew Liethen, a candidate under care of the Midwest Presbytery. His calling is into the chaplaincy. His topic was drawn from the text in which the prophet provides "A Refuge from Bullies." "The way God dealt with Assyria as a Bully informs the way we may live with confidence in difficult times. At the time of his choosing, God will mete out judgment, meanwhile he invites us to come to him for refuge under his divine protection."

World Outreach Committee**Presented by TE Andrew Morton and RE Jim Foote**

World Outreach always presents exciting descriptions of how God is at work around the world. This presentation featured reports from College Students who attended the Urbana Mission Conference. One student's note after another presented the wider vision for mission engagement received.

Video presentations from Steven Kelly and Sam Lloyd and a presentation by Jim Foote about the Tyumen Bible College all helped reminded us of our global commitments. The Report ended with an appeal by TE Mike Frison for financial support for the people of Turkey and Syria devastated by an earthquake that has so far killed 35,000 people.

Council Report**Presented by TE Rich Lanning**

Our Moderator Elect reminded everyone of the Annual Church Reports to the GA that are due at the end of February. He also brought us the good news that 95% of our churches have contributed to our Presbytery's per member asking (PMA). As a result, we ended the year with a surplus which will be added to our reserves.

He highlighted the reports of our three Next Gen Commissioners. They were appointed to help us work collaboratively within the presbytery to promote ministries for children and youth "from cradle to college."

TE Peter Scribner then presented a slate of candidates for a Stated Clerk Search Committee. The proposed members of the committee represent all three states, and are comprised of both REs and TEs. The slate was approved (TE Pete Scribner, Chair, TE Rich Lanning, TES J Winter, RE Bruce Shown, RE Rick Martin and RE Charlie Yother).

Stated Clerk's Report**Presented by TE David Brown**

The Stated Clerk typically gathers the joys, and sorrows, celebrations and losses and puts them before the commissioners for prayer. He did so and presented the way forward by offering a meditation based on Mark 8:34-35. Jesus stated that the way forward is by self-denial, cross bearing and following him.

He also commented on the themes of "find your one and "let us be engaged with others" by describing how God called him to impact his neighbors and get engaged with a brother in Christ who is revitalizing his community within the inner city.

Every church is in a neighborhood and can influence it if we will only look and find our one.

The meeting closed with the singing of "O Sacred Head Now Wounded." After that we received the benediction from Number 6:24-26.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

David Brown, Stated Clerk of the Midwest Presbytery Andy Warner, Assistant Stated Clerk



EPC

*A Global Movement of
Evangelical Presbyterian Churches*

PRESBYTERY OF THE MIDWEST, E.P.C.

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Pastoral Letter on Baptism – David Brown, Midwest Presbytery Stated Clerk
January 14, 2023, Revised January 31, 2023

Background:

Ordination examinations always include questions about Theology and Sacraments on the floor of Presbytery. In the Midwest Presbytery this includes an opportunity for Commissioners to ask questions as a follow up to those asked by the Ministerial Committee Examiner.

At the September 2022 MWP Presbytery meeting, several questions were asked concerning the sacrament of Baptism, the inclusion of infants in the sacrament and the issue of pastoral care for those who are unwilling to pursue the sacrament of baptism for their children. The line of questions pertaining to this at the last MWP meeting precipitated a discussion during the ensuing break. It was the desire of some to bring this topic up again. The Moderator, TE Peter Scribner, noted that the question was raised during one of the ordination examinations regarding infant baptism vs. infant dedication. This issue was referred to the MWP Ministerial Committee for further study and for a recommendation just prior to adjournment.

First Presbyterian Church of South Charleston, OH discussed the issue raised at the September 2022 meeting at its January Session meeting and drafted an overture to the MWP Ministerial Committee. Their request was that “the Ministerial Committee examine and report on the EPC’s understanding of the practice of paedobaptism in the Reformed and Confessional heritage and its application thereunto.” The Ministerial Committee members read the overture and the WCF references included in the South Charleston EPC’s overture. It also brought information from the General Assembly office (via its Chief Parliamentarian and from its history of addressing the subject). It was also provided with a teaching resource from one of the founding churches of the EPC.

The Ministerial Committee members did not feel led to act as a theology commission on this topic. However, on the basis of the Ministerial Committee’s discussion, the proposal to offer the alternative of a brief pastoral letter by the MWP Stated Clerk was approved (no vote was taken but was approved without objection). One of our members on the Ministerial Committee was from South Charleston EPC. He was asked about his willingness to ask the Session to withdraw its overture in light of the discussion. He agreed to do so since the church’s main point was to gain clarity of EPC practice and to avoid contentious debate on the floor of presbytery during ordination examinations.

From the Stated Clerk’s perspective, the following points summarize the theology and practice of the churches of the Midwest Presbytery on the subject of the Sacrament of Baptism, including the baptism of infants, known as paedobaptism, and the variant of offering dedication of infants.

1. The Sacrament of Baptism is the normative practice of the Teaching Elders in all the churches in the Midwest Presbytery. This baptism is for believers and for the children of believers in covenant families. The ordinary means of grace are, after all, Word, Sacraments and Prayer. It is our understanding that

teaching on the sacraments is an ongoing part of the teaching ministry of the churches, whether in membership classes, parenting classes, sermons, or in Christian Education venues. We agree with the Book of Worship that "God's grace and salvation are not inseparably connected to this sacrament. Some who are baptized will be lost and some not baptized will be saved. Nevertheless, it is a great sin to make light of or to neglect this sacrament.

2. Infant dedication is an allowed approach in many of our churches based on several factors. In some cases, candidates for membership come from non-reformed or reformed Baptist backgrounds where infant baptism is not accepted or practiced. When such candidates come into membership classes or into classes on baptism, a Teaching Elder's responsibility is to include education and encouragement concerning the sacraments and the covenants of grace in Scripture. The goal is that both members and those candidates for membership may be convinced that the baptism of their infant children is an appropriate response to God's grace as a sign and seal of that covenant of grace.

Some prospective members or parents may still not agree to baptize their infants. What shall we do in such cases? Many of our churches agree to offer a service of dedication of infants. One of our churches carefully distinguishes between baptism and dedication and explains it this way: "Dedication is not a sacrament. It is a human act in which parents, with the support of the congregation, dedicate their child to God. The action is a human action, albeit a very important one." The difference between the two actions is summarized as follows: "Dedication is a symbol of human commitment; baptism is a symbol of divine commitment." (Ward Church "The Baptism of Children").

Parents who dedicate their children are urged to train up their children and point them to the day when they will respond to the grace of God and be baptized on the profession of their faith.

3. The Ethos of the EPC is one of acceptance of people who are coming to faith in response to the grace of God. This has included a generous response to people who are not yet convinced of the appropriateness of covenant baptism. Whether this is officially included under the heading of "in non-essentials, liberty," it is the way the EPC has operated over the 45 years of its existence. In light of this ethos, we refer the issue of baptismal practices back to the Sessions of the local EPC congregations.

David Brown, Stated Clerk of the Midwest Presbytery