

**Summary of the 179<sup>th</sup> Stated Meeting of the Presbytery of the Midwest** **May 12-13, 2023**  
(Please share this at your next Session meeting and with members as a way of staying connected.)

The 179<sup>th</sup> Stated Meeting of the Midwest Presbytery took place at North Oaks Church in Clarkston Michigan. 90 Commissioners attended and 20 more participated online via Zoom. We were welcomed by Pastor Steve Brown and well cared for by the ruling elders and volunteers at the beautifully refreshed church building. After opening prayers, we welcomed first time commissioners, World Outreach partners and special guests from Trail Life. We were especially honored to welcome the Stated Clerk of the EPC, TE Dean Weaver.

**Budget and Finance Subcommittee**

The Budget and Finance Subcommittee submitted a written report for approval. Well over 95% of our churches contributed to the PMA for the Presbytery in the last year. Some of our churches are transitioning to the Percentage of Income (POI) recommendation this year and others will follow in the coming years. The impact of COVID was seen in a 10% decline in membership in our churches. The Finance Team is tracking that as it considers setting a budget for 2024. We are praying for renewal and growth this year.

**Ministerial Committee**

**Presented by TE Jerry Van Auken, Chair**

The Ministerial Committee presented our first report. There were no candidates to examine at this meeting, but a number of administrative items were approved under the heading "Omnibus Motions." Annual Terms of Call and Annual Reviews were presented by each Teaching Elder. Out of Bounds Calls and changes in status were also recorded.

The report also contained information regarding 11 candidates under care and at various stages in the process to become ordained.

Special recognition was given to TE Kurt Gebhard on the occasion of his retirement. Kurt has been a faithful servant of the Lord throughout his years of ministry, His love for the bride of Christ is evident and his perseverance is to be commended. It was special to recognize him at this meeting as Kurt was the church planter for North Oaks Church. We also commended TE Ron Amos who will retire at the end of this month from his ministry at New Heart Church in Muskegon, MI.

**Report of The General Assembly Stated Clerk**

**Presented by TE Dean Weaver**

Stated Clerk Dean Weaver blessed us with his presentation. It included a description of his marriage to Beth and the family God has given them. Beth and Dean have 7 grown children who will share his "vast estate." Dean was a pastor for 36 years before becoming our Stated Clerk two years ago. "It was the tidal wave of the Holy Spirit that led him to accept the position. It was only afterward that he realized God had been preparing him for it his entire life."

Dean leads from a sense of vision, and the vision that we have embraced as the EPC is the fulfillment of the Great Commission. In order to fulfill this disciple-making vision, the EPC has affirmed four Gospel Priorities. This year's General Assembly will include plenary sessions on those four Gospel Priorities. In addition, the General Assembly will provide opportunities to dig deeper in training on Church Health, Church Planting, World Outreach and Effective Leadership Development. We will worship at the

beginning of each day, conduct business and enjoy fellowship over meals in the middle of the days and end in worship at the close of each day together.

A Q and A time with Dean Weaver provided an opportunity to hear about the challenges before the church in 2023. Upcoming retirements coupled with pastoral resignations from ministry accentuate the need for a new pipeline and a new approach to educating prospective Teaching Elders.

#### **World Outreach Committee Report**

**Presented by TE Adam Reasner, Chair**

World Outreach is one of our Gospel Priorities. We heard from several of our WO partners during Friday and Saturday including Emily and Kelly Green, Danie and Delia, Brad Buscher and Mark V. Vision trips are a major way in which God changes our hearts. The testimonies from these partners enabled us to look at what God has done in the world.

#### **Program Committee Presentation**

**Presented by TE Aaron White, Chair**

The Program Committee complemented the WO contribution with a presentation about “Healthy Missionaries and Helpful Senders” by retired Missionary and Missiologist, Dr. Don Grigorenko. He is a member of First Presbyterian Church of South Charleston, OH. He and his wife Peggy coach two WO partners sent out by the South Charleston Church. Dr Grigorenko addressed the definition of a missionary, strategic thinking involved in mission work, the multiplication of the work, the prospect of missionaries becoming movement catalysts and the focus on unreached and least reached people. Faithful missionaries risk failure and learn how to fail forward, learning from each failure so it can be a resource for next efforts.

#### **Church Health Committee Report**

**Presented by TEs Ian Ferguson, Andy Gilman**

TE Ian Ferguson reviewed a status of the Oakland Ave Revitalization Fund. Since inception, there have been 13 grants totaling \$77,575, out of the \$102,000 fund. There is \$24,425 remaining in the fund. Churches are encouraged to submit their revitalization plans and requests for consideration.

Our commitment to Church Health was on display in the training provided by TE Andy Gilman. He started his report by reminding us that Satan’s stronghold has been overthrown and that the gates of hell will not prevail against the church. He then told us the story of renewal that is taking place in the church he serves in Greenville, Ohio.

As our Church Health Coordinator, Andy is working with five churches at present and is raising up coaches to join him in reaching other churches who have stepped up to the vitalization challenge. Using the REFOCUS material as his teaching aid, Andy led us to see the biblical imperative of prioritizing church health and the five steps in alignment which can lead to vitalization. Andy and his coaches are ready to help our churches take the next steps toward Church Health.

#### **Church Planting Committee Report**

**Presented by TE Terence Gray, Chair**

TE Terence Gray addressed the gospel priority of Church Planting. He did so by helping us imagine planting a church in Ohio. Using a farming analogy, Terence walked us through a Survey of the Field, Plowing and Furrowing, Planting, Cultivating and Growing and Gathering phases of the process. We are praying that God will call churches and church planters to plant new churches in our Presbytery.

## **Worship at the 179<sup>th</sup> Presbytery**

**Led by North Oaks Worship Team**

Worship times on Friday evening and Saturday morning were highlights of our time together. Besides songs, prayers and Scripture readings, we heard biblical preaching from Revelation 21 by Dean Weaver and from 2 Timothy by Steve Brown. The first message focused on the Beauty of the Bride. The Church as the Bride is adorned in beauty; she is the place of God's abiding presence and she is the bride for all nations.

The second message was a word of encouragement to the pastors to stir up the gift of God, to share the strengthening grace of God, to preach the gospel to yourself every day, to be a diligent student of the word, to ensure that the ministry of the word is primary and to find your place in the ministry of evangelism. Steve's message included an exhortation based on Richard Lovelace's challenge: "Beware of the idolatrous covenant between the pastor and congregation to lose interest in being change agents in favor of permitting their flocks to remain herds of sheep cheerfully turned to their own way."

## **Nominating Committee Report**

**Presented by TE Kelly Kurth**

TE Glen Francis has agreed to serve on the Program Committee beginning in 2023. The Nominating Committee is looking for recommendations for more ruling elders to serve on committees.

## **Session Records Review Committee**

**Presented by TE Brandon Jolley**

Each church submits minutes to the Session Records Review Committee on an annual basis. The system is working and minutes are being reviewed and will be returned to Session Clerks in the coming months.

## **EPC Benefits Office Report**

**Presented by Bart Francescone, Exec Director**

Bart Francescone presented an update on EPC Health Benefits and Retirement Plans. Bart encouraged full participation from our churches in the EPC Plans. He emphasized that the Acts of Assembly clearly state that participation is required for all "ministers within member churches" and, moreover, "non-ordained employee also are expected to participate".

It is important to note that as a self-insured private plan our coverages reflect our values as Christians. The premiums our churches pay are used exclusively to provide medical care for our members and are never used to fund services and medications that run counter to our beliefs as they would be if we participated in a publicly available insurance plan. EPC member congregations are a sharing network in this regard very much in the character of the Act Chapter 2 Church.

For the EPC Retirement Plan, the minimum requirement for contributions is 10% and, importantly, distributions from the plan after retirement age are eligible for the Housing Allowance. Other retirement plans likely do not provide this feature.

## **Midwest Presbytery Council Report**

**Presented by TE Rich Lanning**

TE Rich Lanning highlighted several items including (i) encouragement to register for the 2023 General Assembly; (ii) the Annual Church reporting has been completed with 100% participation by MWP churches; (iii) dates and venues for the 2024 MWP meetings; and (iv) noting that finances are running a bit behind last year.

**Midwest Presbytery Stated Clerk's Report**

**Presented by TE David Brown, Stated Clerk**

Presbytery concluded with a call to prayer for a new Pentecost, 2023. The kinds of prayers that might be used of God toward this end were modeled in Acts 1:12-28. Everyone who was convinced of the resurrection of Jesus prayed constantly for 10 days. They acknowledged what God had done, they anticipated what he would do next, and they admitted their sins so that the fellowship of forgiven sinners was ready for the promise of power to witness at Pentecost.

The commissioners closed with these kinds of prayers and raised their voices for our denominational leaders and world outreach partners.

Sincerely yours,

David Brown, Stated Clerk

Andy Warner, Assistant Stated Clerk

**Arise, My Soul, Arise - Charles Wesley**

1 Arise, my soul, arise;  
Shake off thy guilty fears;  
The bleeding Sacrifice  
In my behalf appears:  
Before the throne my Surety stands,  
Before the throne my Surety stands:  
My name is written on His hands.

He owns me for His child;  
I can no longer fear;  
With confidence I now draw nigh,  
With confidence I now draw nigh,  
And, "Father, Abba, Father, " cry.

2 He ever lives above,  
For me to intercede,  
His all-redeeming love,  
His precious blood to plead;  
His blood atoned for every race,  
His blood atoned for every race,  
And sprinkles now the throne of grace.

3 Five bleeding wounds He bears,  
Received on Calvary;  
They pour effectual prayers,  
They strongly plead for me:  
"Forgive him, O forgive, " they cry,  
"Forgive him, O forgive, " they cry,  
"Nor let that ransomed sinner die!"

4 My God is reconciled;  
His pardoning voice I hear;