

**EPC MIDWEST PRESBYTERY
SUMMARY OF THE 181st STATED MEETING
FEBRUARY 9-10, 2024**

Please share this at your next Session meeting and with members as a way of staying connected.

Also, please note that selected portions of the MWP Meeting are available for viewing on the MWP Website site: <https://midwestpresbytery.org/>

The 181st Stated Meeting of the Midwest Presbytery took place at First Presbyterian Church in Greenville, Ohio. Moderator TE Rich Lanning (Christ Covenant Church, Cincinnati, OH) opened the meeting with a word from Ephesians 2:11-14 reminding us that we were once without hope and separated from God, but have been brought nearby Christ, and a word of prayer acknowledging that, “Unless the Lord builds the house those who build it labor in vain.”

After recognition of new presbyters and guests, host pastor TE Andy Gilman welcomed us to First Presbyterian, letting us know that renovations had just been completed on much of the church, and that volunteers would be readily identifiable by the bright yellow bands on the name tags.

A quorum was declared representing 91 TEs and REs present; in addition, there were 20 guests attending and an additional 25 online Zoom participants. The Docket was approved without exception or addition, and Presbytery Minutes from the 180th Stated Meeting (September 15-16, 2023) of the Midwest Presbytery and the Called Meeting (November 28, 2023) were approved.

Church Health Committee

TE Bill Teague, Retired Pastor, Auburn, IN, noted that this meeting marked the first anniversary of Church Health being recognized as an official committee of the Midwest Presbytery, and the second anniversary of them working together. [As background, effective January 2023, the former Church Development Committee was split into two committees – Church Health and Church Planting.]

He pointed out that while we enthusiastically acknowledge that true churches are those wherein the word of God is rightly preached, the sacraments rightly celebrated, and discipline is rightly administered, that we also want to refocus on reaching our communities with the Gospel, and this is also part of what we recognize as being a healthy church.

He shared with us a number of resources that we should be aware of:

- Aaron Renn’s new *book, Life in a Negative World*, noting that we have always lived in a world that is in a sense negative toward Christianity, but that Renn makes some great points.
- Kyle Nabors (Ward Church, Northville, MI) provides free help for churches looking for consulting at www.NoChargeChurchConsulting.com.
- A Church Health Transitional Pastor Training Event will be held on April 9-10, 2024 at Southport EPC in Indianapolis. It will be valuable not just for those looking to be a transitional pastor, but for anyone interested in church health. If interested, please contact TE Andy Gilman for additional information.

TE Dan Borgelt, Kirkmont Presbyterian Church, Beavercreek, OH, shared their recent experience in attempting to turn a declining church around without alienating the congregation. He encouraged us to reach out to Church Health because it forces your leaders to have healthy, productive conversations. Intentional outreach is a must, and in their context, they followed this pattern:

1. Outreach Expansion
2. Service Expansion

3. Facility Expansion
4. Location Expansion

TE Andy Gilman encouraged us once more to align behind the Great Commission and pointed us to Philippians 2:3-4 urging us to, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” He emphasized that what we are being invited into is discipleship, not just a weekend project. It will involve hard, long-term conversations, and throughout it all we must remember that what we are talking about does not replace the ordinary means of grace. Preaching, administration of the sacraments, prayer and biblical discipline must be present in all that we do.

Council

RE Chris Ockerman, Ward Church, Northville, MI, presented a report from the Finance Sub-Committee. He thanked the churches for their 100% involvement in Per Member Asking in 2023 (up from 89% in 2022). He informed us that we are in a very strong position with over a year’s worth of cash on hand, and that the sub-committee is taking advantage of strong markets by investing more money (the plan is to soon have \$175 thousand invested). In 2023, revenues were \$159,380; expenses totaled \$153,159; and we finished the year with a surplus of \$6,221.

RE Bob Wheelock, Cornerstone EPC, Brighton, MI, presented a second reading for Descending Overture 43-A amending Book of Government 17-5 which addresses deleting the one section to clarify the authority of the Session alone over all financial matters of the Local Church and eliminates outdated, ambiguous, or confusing references to financial responsibility of the Board of Deacons, and Descending Overture 43-B, amending Book of Discipline 1-1 which addresses Church Discipline not designed to deal with criminal acts apart from the authority of the civil magistrates (WCF 23-4). This preface to our practice of Ecclesiastical Discipline does not replace our responsibility to obey civil authorities and to protect the victims of abuse.

43-A passed unanimously. After a lengthy discussion dealing with concerns over the definition of “abuse,” 43-B passed by a vote of 57-19.

RE Bob Wheelock also reminded us of the Annual Reporting Requirements: (i) Annual Teaching Elder report; (ii) Session records/Minute and (iii) Annual Church Report (ACR).

TE David Tori, Trinity EPC, Plymouth, MI (along with TE Josh Fellrath, TE Stephanie Poblentz, TE Blaise Shields and TE Andrew Morton) shared about the work being done by Next Generation Ministries, and informed us of an upcoming Next Generation Summit scheduled for April 9-11, 2024 at Central Presbyterian Church, Clayton, MO. A motion passed approving Next Generation Ministries as an official Program Committee of the Midwest Presbytery.

Two invitations were issued for MWP churches to participate in upcoming events:

- TE Glenn Massey and Melissa Davis invited MWP churches to be a part of the Southport Pres Summer Kids Camp the first week of June for 3rd-5th grade (and volunteers/leaders).
- TE Blaise Shields invited MWP churches to join St. Andrew and Warsaw Presbyterian Summer Youth Trip to Miracle Camp in July 2024.

Program Committee

TE Aaron White, First Presbyterian, South Charleston, OH, prayed and introduced us to David Gustafson (Chair of the Mission and Evangelism Department, Associate Professor of Evangelism and Missional Ministry, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) who spoke to us on “Church Growth and Health within the

Context of Historic to Modern Evangelism and Missional Models.” His two presentations were split chronologically, Friday’s covering pre-Reformation and Saturday’s Reformation to Present. Saturday’s talk was followed by a brief Q&A time.

Ministerial Committee

At this meeting, we had two changes in call for Teaching Elders:

TE Terence Gray, Ward Church, Northville, MI, shared that his current responsibilities as an Assistant Pastor include teaching/discipleship and the Revelation 7:9 Fellowship (a cultural reconciliation ministry). The most distinct change with his new call as Associate Pastor will be that he will also now have a role on Session. MWP approved his new call, his terms of call and an installation commission, then TE Mike Frison led us in praying for him.

TE Jason Huff, Crossway EPC, Mt. Clemens, MI, shared with us about the remnant of 15 very faithful members, and told us of the opportunity that God had opened for them to become a part of nearby Living Hope EPC. All of the current members will join Living Hope, and TE Jason Huff will continue ministering to them as well as providing music and worship ministry at Living Hope as a part-time Assistant Pastor. TE Jim Rizer of Living Hope spoke to how this will be great fit as the congregations know each other and complement each other well. TE Jason Huff’s call was dissolved, and Crossway EPC, Mt. Clemens was dissolved as a church. Then MWP approved TE Jason Huff’s new call at Living Hope, as well as his terms of call and an installation commission. TE Jim Rizer led us in praying for him and for them.

We had a number of items related to Knox Presbyterian Church in Ann Arbor, MI. RE Jennifer Rich and RE Dick Hile (both of Knox) shared about some of the challenges and troubles Knox has gone through and about the assistance from the MWP and from the Ministerial Committee. After this, motions passed (should the way be clear) to dissolve the calls of TE Bryan Gregory and TE Josh Boehr (both of whom had submitted their resignations), effective February 11, 2024, and to move them both to the Pastors Without Call Roll. Ministerial Committee member TE Mark Fuller was approved to serve as Moderator of Session until a transitional pastor is called, and TE Dorington Little (ECO Pastor) was approved to provide pulpit supply and administer the sacraments until a transitional pastor is called. Prayer was offered for Knox.

An Omnibus Motion passed with the following items included:

- TE Rob Harrison remain on inactive list
- Approve move of TE Ian Leslie to the retired roll
- Dissolve the installation Commission for TE Andrew Morton as Pastor, First Presbyterian, Ossian, IN

After a brief discussion, a separate motion passed dissolving the membership of former members of New Heart Community Church, Muskegon, MI.

TE Brandon Jolley, Hopewell Presbyterian, Franklin, IN, shared a success story involving Ministerial Committee’s involvement in resolution of conflict at Hopewell. He encouraged Pastors/Churches to reach out quickly and early when the first sign of issues/troubles become apparent.

TEs were reminded to submit their annual reports to MWP, and were also encouraged to be actively involved in Clusters, which seem to be going well for the most part. TE Jeff Carlson is working on starting up the “rest of Michigan” group, and the Indiana Cluster is considering splitting into Northern and Southern.

Church Planting Committee

TE Terence Gray, Ward Church, Northville, MI, thanked the MWP for sending him and TE Aaron Klein to the Exponential Conference last fall. He challenged us to Think Big, Start Small and Go Deep in regard to church planting. He then gave us an “Aspirational Quiz” and a “Multiplication Quiz” to show us that our actions don’t always match up with what we say we desire. He reminded us that we are not just looking to add new people, but to create new disciples (“multiplication growth” instead of “addition growth”) and he urged us not to believe the myth that multiplication growth is just for large churches. The way forward for the MWP in this is through church planting networks, which he defined as small groups of pastors coming together as friends to plant churches. He warned us not to let Egos, Economics and Ecclesiology get in the way of creating networks, and invited us to join him on a weekly Multiplication Conversation Cohort: “New Thing” Zoom meeting on Thursday afternoons at 1 pm.

CP Brian Evans, 5point7 Church, Detroit, MI, shared about the new after school program they are launching to provide meals, tutoring, and activities for kids in their neighborhood. They are convinced that the key to changing their community is to start with the younger people and raise up a new generation, and he invited other churches in the MWP to come help out.

World Outreach Committee

TE Adam Reasner, St. Andrew Presbyterian Church, Auburn, IN, interviewed TE Josh Hanson, Gateway Church, Findlay, OH, about his recent trip to Bangladesh. TE Josh Hanson shared miraculous stories of growth and healing as he spoke about a “Theology of Going” (why it is important to not just send dollars, but to send people), emphasizing how it can be a means of discipling people as well as opening their eyes to new things. He invited us to be a part of a mission team by partnering with Gateway, and challenged TEs and REs to be an example to others and GO!!! TE Adam Reasner said resources are out there to help and that we should not let finances be a hinderance.

TE Adam Reasner shared photos and a report from S and K in Budapest.

RE Ed Warzyniec, Trinity EPC, Plymouth, MI, shared about the ministry of Footprints in Tyumen, Siberia. J and N are in St. Petersburg right now as their daughter is treated for leukemia. That said, wonderful things are still taking place in Tyumen. Work continues at the Reformed Seminary there, and Holy Trinity and the other Presbyterian church in community are working toward reconciliation. This could be a real opportunity for partnership. Finally, Sally Foote (RE Jim Foote’s wife) is having health issues. Ed led us in praying for all these situations.

Worship Services

- On Friday evening, TE Andy Gilman, First Presbyterian, Greenville, OH, preached on Lamentations 3:22-23, reminding us how the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.
- On Saturday morning, CP Jason Sewell, Faith Church, Rochester, MI, opened the Bible to Isaiah 6 and took us into the throne room of God that we might behold the holiness and glory of God and be motivated by it unto faithfulness.

Nominating Committee

TE Kelly Kurth, First EPC, Frankfort, IN, issued an appeal for involvement on committees.

Session Records Committee

RE Bob Wheelock reminded of the requirement to submit Session Minutes and shared two areas to make sure are noted:

- Make sure housing allowance is noted in minutes
- Make sure baptisms are noted in Session minutes

Fellowship Dinner

Thanks so much to the members of First Presbyterian, Greenville, OH who provided us with a wonderful meal and great hospitality so that we could gather around tables and spend great time in fellowship with each other during dinner. Throughout the meeting, in fact, they did an exemplary job of hosting us!

Stated Clerk's Report

This was the first meeting for the new stated clerk (TE Pete Scribner, Calvary Presbyterian, Flint, MI). He expressed his thanks for the opportunity to serve in this role, and then shared from Ephesians 4:15-16 on the need for us to always be "speaking the truth in love." Too often we see this as a spectrum. We are not called to be on a spectrum though somewhere between "truth" and "love." We are called to do both in every situation. And when the EPC is at its best, it does this as well as anyone.

We need each other if we are to truly be the Body of Christ. We don't each have the same strengths, gifts, tendencies, mindsets, interests, opportunities, but are instead various members of one Body, each with a part to play. And when we are gathering together, our meetings are like a family reunion, and I loved getting to see everyone, spending time with many, getting to know you better. I love worshiping with you and would love it if we were to gather around the Lord's Table not just at one meeting per year, but at all of our stated meetings.

Personal priorities that I have in my role as Stated Clerk:

- Getting to know each of our TEs better. As a "pastor to the pastors," I want to be actively involved with each pastor in our presbytery as a very available resource. I not only want to be able to minister to you, but I want to be available to you. I am open to ideas about changing the way we do things. I believe we do things well, but we can always do better.
- I want to emphasize Ruling Elder involvement, discussing ways to make it more appealing and more accessible for REs to be involved.
- Another point of emphasis will be regular attendance at our meetings for TEs. It is part of the job description of a TE.
- I want to foster relationships amongst members of the Midwest Presbytery. Clusters will continue to be emphasized, and we are going to explore the possibility of a TE retreat.
- I want to challenge us all to think creatively, to be willing to try new things, but to always hold firm to the ordinary means of grace.

After praying for our Presbytery and thanking God for all we had seen and heard at this meeting, we sang the Doxology. Then TE Rich Lanning adjourned the meeting with prayer and issued a benediction from Ephesians 3, "according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen."