

Summary of the 168th Stated Meeting

On a brilliant late summer afternoon, commissioners to and minister members of the Presbytery of East Iowa gathered at Vinton Presbyterian Church for the 168th Stated Meeting. The gathering convened at 4:00 pm with prayer offered by Moderator Kyle Otterbein, followed by a centering Bible study, using the Mutual Invitation process, on the scripture passage found in John 1: 43-51, one of the readings that also informed the sermon. As the body worked through a full docket of diverse initiatives, the first large item concerned the newly-articulated CRE process, a process which the body approved unanimously. As COM Associate Harry Hoyt observed in his presentation, the aim of this initiative is to provide transparency and accountability to potential CREs and their sessions as well as the Presbytery at large concerning the expectations for those persons in the program as they undertake pastoral service.

The Reverend Gradye Parsons, Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), joined the Presbytery to preach the sermon, preside at the celebration of the Lord's Supper and, towards the conclusion of the meeting, to present a brief presentation on the state of the church. Mr. Parsons will retire from service as Stated Clerk at the conclusion of the 2016 General Assembly, so it was fitting that the nominations for Commissioners to the 222nd General Assembly (2016) comprised the report from the Nominating Committee. Teaching Elders Melody Oltmann (LeClaire, First) and Tom Oak (Davenport, Newcomb) along with Ruling Elder Perry Ross (Iowa City, First) were elected as commissioners. The elected Young Adult Advisory Delegate is Mika Rangel from Wilton, First. Alternate commissioners include Teaching Elders Dottie Halverson (Cotter/Salem/Winfield) and Joe Phipps (Fairfield, First) along with Ruling Elders A. J. Plummer (CR, Westminster) and Becky Ross (Iowa City, First). Two persons were also elected to the Camp Wyoming Board: Kristy Gropel from Bettendorf PC and Jennifer Stratman, a non-Presbyterian member.

The Reverend Mary "Minner" Serovy, Regional Ministry Relations Officer from the Presbyterian Foundation, shared information concerning the many resources on offer from the Foundation. Emphasizing the Foundation's inclusion in the connectional relationships that join councils and agencies within the PCUSA, Minner shared that the Foundation is excited to work with individuals and churches concerning online giving, campaigns, investments, stewardship and donors seeking to financially support their passions in mission and ministry. A tool that provides help in assessing eight areas of financial health is available on the Foundation's website. Minner highlighted two specific initiatives: Transformational Giving in the Middle East to emphasize positive investments and the Fossil Fuel Free Investment Account.

Staffing the new structures of the Presbytery continued at this meeting with the Personnel Committee's action items concerning the Network Associate, Finance Management Consultant, and an Administrative Assistant. The body unanimously affirmed and welcomed the Reverend Sarah Feltman Hegar as the Networking Associate. A second unanimously approved action

authorized the Personnel Committee and the Trustees to contract with a part-time financial management employee for 10 hours per week at the rate of \$15-20 per hour and an administrative assistant for 30 hours per week at a rate consistent with skills and experience.

The Commission on Ministry brought two items: a resolution concerning increases in the pastor compensation structure for 2016 and a motion concerning pastoral succession referred back to the committee at the 7 March 2015 stated meeting. The first action item, approved unanimously, applies a 1.6% increase to each of the eight ranges of the *Pastor Compensation Structure* and the eight ranges of the *Compensation Structure for Commissioned Ruling Elders and Ruling Elders Serving in Temporary Pastoral Relationships* as of January 1, 2015, and also mandates that pastors and commissioned ruling elders and ruling elders serving in temporary pastoral relationships receive a COLA increase of no less than 1.6%, effective January 1, 2016.

The second action item, which occasioned some discussion, put forward a resolution concerning the motion referred back to COM in the 7 March 2015 (166th) stated meeting on Temporary, Associate and Intentional Interim Pastors succeeding to the called Pastor position in the church currently being served. After the action item was referred in March, COM sent a letter to all pastors and clerks of session in early April requesting written and verbal opinions on this action item. COM received one letter, two e-mails and two phone calls in response. At the 167th stated meeting on June 9, 2015, COM held a widely-advertised special discussion session prior to the meeting, attended by five people in addition to the COM members present, to gather further input.

The recommendation brought to this stated meeting remained unchanged from the recommendation brought by COM to the March meeting. It recommended the following:

- In a congregation served by co-pastors, if the relationship with one pastor is dissolved, the other remains the pastor with the option that the church can elect a PNC and conduct a full search process for a second co-pastor in accord with G-2.08 in the Book of Order.
- In a congregation, currently served by a single pastor, that wishes to move to a co-pastor relationship, the church must elect a PNC and conduct a full search in accord with G-2.08 in the Book of Order
- That Associate Pastors and Intentional Interim Pastors shall not be candidates for the called Pastor or Co-Pastor positions in the churches they serve unless they have not served these specific churches in any fashion, including receiving any remuneration, for at least 6 months immediately prior to becoming a candidate for the position.
- A pastor in a Temporary Pastoral Relationship may be considered as a candidate for the called Pastor or Co-Pastor position in the church currently served IF a PNC is elected and a full search conducted and IF the person is approved by three-fourths majority vote of the congregation and then by three-fourths majority vote of the Presbytery.

The body did not approve this recommendation. The consequence of this vote is to keep in effect the current definitional policy language, approved by the governing body at the October 2007 stated meeting, governing these processes, with the exception of those changes

contained in the PEIA Policy on Pastoral Relationship Categories, approved by the governing body at the June 9, 2015 stated meeting.. These policy statements are explained [here](#).

Stated Clerk Gradye Parsons shared the sermon--“Can Anything Good Come from the Church?”—informed by scripture passages from Psalm 66:1-5 and John 1:43-51. He observed that, while expectations were low for a prophet from Nazareth, Jesus revealed his divine nature and purpose in his conversation with Nathaniel, and the church still has a prophetic role to play as we discern God’s call and mission. The Reverend Mr. Parsons also co-officiated the celebration of the Lord’s Supper with the Reverend Jessica Crane Munoz.

Presbytery Vice-Moderator and Trustees moderator Pam Saturnia presented a wide range of action items on behalf of the Trustees. Each of these items was approved by unanimous vote:

- Affirmation of actions taken by the Trustees for time-sensitive property issues at Coggon, Zion and Clinton, First United
- Authorization for the Trustees to seek bids for and contract with a vendor to design and host a new website
- Allocation and disbursement of \$5,500 to fund the Group Equipping Institute at Echo Hill PC on October 2-3, 2015
- Allocation and disbursement of \$5,000 to fund the Lending Tree Initiative at West Liberty, First Church United
- Approval of a request from Mt. Pleasant, First to undertake a comprehensive building renovation project including ADA building updates
- Approval of a request from Wapello, First to expend \$26,376 for siding replacement
- Renewal of the GuideOne Commercial Package Policy and the Master Umbrella and Work Comp policies for 2016
- Establishment of a Presbytery mission partnership with Mission Starfish Haiti in Gonaives, Haiti
- Approval of a per capita rate for 2016 totaling \$33.00—this amount represents a reduction in the Presbytery per capita rate of \$1.37 (from \$22.00 in 2015 to \$20.63 in 2016). The 2016 General Assembly per capita amount is \$7.12 and the amount for the Synod of Lakes and Prairies is \$5.25.

Saving the best for last, Gradye Parsons capped off the meeting with an engaging presentation on the state of the church and the PCUSA. Offering statistics demonstrating the changes in all mainline denominations, he discussed several cultural effects that impact the future complexion of the PCUSA, including changing marriage and birth patterns, increasing cultural diversity, immigration patterns, an increasing cohort of unaffiliated persons, and shifting patterns of participation and affiliation. Observing that the old pattern of church engagement could be represented as “Believe, Behave, Belong,” Parsons noted that this sequence has been inverted in contemporary culture with many folks belonging without committing to membership or belief at the outset of their relationship with a faith community. Since the Presbyterian approach moves forward through the discernment and effort of ordered groups, we Presbyterians will need to imagine ways to incorporate these cultural dynamics into our ways of being. Parsons concluded his presentation with a hopeful view of the future, noting that survey statistics indicate

that an average of 815 people are served annually by each PCUSA congregation, a figure that amounts to 8 million folks served by PCUSA congregations nationally. Further 1.67 million Presbyterians gave \$1.8 million last year in regular offering giving. He commented, "That's you, and that's powerful service."