

Presbytery Meeting Summary May 23, 2023 Stated Meeting

The Beaver-Butler Presbytery held its stated meeting at 6:00 P.M. Tuesday, May 23, 2023, using a Hybrid format, in-person and via Zoom. Moderator was Elder Carolyn Paulsen, Vice-Moderator Rev. Jamie Fowler; the meeting was hosted by First Presbyterian Church, Beaver Falls, where the Rev. Dr. David S. Oyler Jr. serves as Pastor.

OPENING WORSHIP:

First Church Pastor Rev. Dr. David Oyler spoke from John 4, Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan Woman. He noted that many religious leaders of the day would avoid Samaria, due to the risk of travelling through a territory of non-believers. But instead of considering the conversation, David spoke about the verses *before* the exchange.

Perhaps God directed Jesus to travel through an area others might have avoided. David asked the Presbyters to think, maybe God was pushing *us* to travel through a territory where *we* might be uncomfortable. A mission trip? A conversation with someone with whom we've never spoken? An opportunity to speak the "Good News?" Perhaps Jesus is "nudging us along" beyond our comfort zone, our circle of friends, beyond where we Christians might be uncomfortable.

ACTIONS TAKEN BY THE PRESBYTERY:

- *Approved* the Presbytery Meeting Minutes, March 28, 2023
- *Received* the Coordinating Team Minutes, March 1, 2023
- *Received* the Stated Clerk Report, March – April 2023
- *Received* the Treasurer's Report, Balance Sheet and Profit & Loss, March 31, 2023
- *Approved* the Beaver-Butler Presbytery Mission Statement
- *Examined and approved* Rev. Dr. Rebecca Anne Kahnt (Eastminster Presbytery) as Pastor at North Sewickley Presbyterian Church, Ellwood City. *If the way be clear*, Becky will be installed at a later date.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FROM THE COORDINATING TEAM:

The CT affirmed Covenant, Butler's plans to sell their building, and continue worshipping as a congregation in a new space at Trinity Church, Butler (Covenant's final worship service, with de-commissioning of the sanctuary, was May 21).

EXPLORATORY MISSION TEAM (EMT):

The EMT was formed after the closure of the Refreshing Springs Mission Church, to explore other mission possibilities in southern Beaver County. After many months of work, investigations, discernment, and prayer, the EMT has decided it was time to cease their efforts for the time being. The Presbytery received the EMT's Final Report, as well as remarks from Team Members.

ADDITIONAL ITEMS FROM MINISTRY & VOCATION:

MVC approved a part-time Supply contract between Highland, Slippery Rock, and Rev. Jeff Curtis.

FROM THE STATED CLERK, REV. RANDALL CLOW:

Randall thanked everyone who attended the various *Session* Minutes reviews. He attended the recent Synod-wide *Presbytery* Minutes Review, and our Minutes were received and approved, with Commendation. Randall thanked Assistant Stated Clerk Rev. James Steiner for his contribution.

EXECUTIVE PRESBYTER REPORT:

Rev. Dr. Thomas Harmon informed the Presbyters about a “redesign initiative” from the Board of Pensions, *Season of Rebuilding*. Changes will occur in early 2025, and will come over the following months. Several monthly online Town Hall meetings will take place, over the summer. For more information, folks are encouraged to go to seasonsofrebuilding.pensions.org for more information.

Tom spent several minutes highlighting a recent study, “Twenty Years of Congregational Change: The 2020 Faith Communities Today Overview” – [Faith Communities Today](#). It was a national survey of congregations, looking at churches over twenty years from 2000 until the beginning of the Pandemic. Not surprisingly, church attendance in America has declined, to the point where 70% of all churches in the U.S. have fewer than 100 in the pews.

On the other hand, the larger a congregation is, and the faster it grows, the study shows a significant decline in individual giving. Also, the larger a church gets, the less likely members are to volunteer – not just at church, but anywhere.

The smallest 70% of congregations – those with attendance less than 100:

- Have the highest level of member commitment;
- Had more participation in weekly worship;
- Have members who give more money per person and were more likely to volunteer, and
- Spend less on staffing, and gave higher percentages missions and charity.

The mission and ministry of smaller churches is not to be ignored! And our Executive Presbyter is blessed to lead this faithful community.

Tom closed his comments with a reflection on the closure of the Covenant Church building, but the congregation’s continuing commitment to ministry in partnership with Trinity.

COLLABORATION, FELLOWSHIP, & YOUTH MINISTRY:

Rev. Leigh Benish reminded the Presbyters about the new Grant, “**Strengthening Congregational Connections.**” Congregations can join forces for ministry and outreach, and receive financial support from the Presbytery. Leigh encouraged churches to join forces to apply!

NEXT MEETING: Tuesday, July 25, 2023, 6:00 P.M, Hill United Presbyterian Church, Butler, “hybrid” format – In-person and Zoom. (*Presbytery office will close early that day.*)

OTHER INFORMATION:

- There were a total of 77 participants at the meeting:
 - 29 Teaching Elders
 - 29 Ruling Elders from 24 Churches
 - 1 Corresponding Member
 - 3 Ruling Elders who are officers, CT, or Chair of a Committee or Unit
 - 15 Visitors