

November 2017

PRESBYTERY MEETING REFLECTION

By Sheppards & Lapsley Moderator, J. Shannon Webster



The Fall 2017 stated meeting of the of Sheppards and Lapsley convened on November 9 at Living River Camp and Conference Center, the Presbytery's own retreat on the Cahaba. We were welcomed (beyond any doubt) by Living River's Director, the effusive and irrepressible Betty Angelini, and Lee Walthall of the Camp Board. Angelini also delivered the sermon in the opening communion service, titled "Ready, Set, Go!" That became something of a keynote for all our work that day; it was quoted often by other speakers during an upbeat and enjoyable meeting that concluded again ahead of docket. It was a great meeting for Presbyterian swag, ranging from John Knox backscratchers to UKirk stickers, to a map of the Cahaba watershed, to diverse pins and mints!

For all that, some very important work was done that day. After two years of hard work, we approved (with a couple of refining amendments) a Child/Youth Protection Policy that will be in force for future Presbytery events. And in response to a directive from a previous meeting, the Executive Council reports good progress in creating an Anti-Racism Team, establishing a membership of 12. The EC narrowed the many diverse nominations down to that number, and 8 have already agreed to serve.

Presbytery examined and approved two candidates for ordination – Leigh Ann Min, who will be Chaplain/Program Manager at Walker Baptist Medical, as well as Director of Ruth and Naomi Senior Outreach; and Heather Butler, whose call is Associate for Community Ministries at Immanuel Montgomery. Min's ordination will take place Nov. 26 at First Birmingham, and Butler's in January at Immanuel. Catherine Oliver was approved for service as Transitional Associate Minister, where Cat Goodrich has stepped into Head of Staff role.



An extensive Nominating Committee Report was offered by Cathy Hoop, a celebration of names of our people who are offering their time and skill for our councils and commissions for 2018, to do the will of Christ (we pray) in central Alabama and beyond, including service on Boards we must ratify from Living River to several Presbyterian Manors. We also elected commissioners to Synod and General Assembly. Our commissioner to the 2018 General Assembly in St. Louis are Ministers Ed Hurley and Leanne Scarbrough; Ruling Elders Deborah Thomas (First Auburn) and Mark Hopkins (Southminster Birmingham); and Youth Advisory Delegate Julie Potts (member of 1st Tuscaloosa and Director of Youth Ministries at 1st Birmingham).

In regard to congregations, Presbytery empowered an Administrative Commission with the ability, should they be called on, to assist in any mergers Chapel in the Pines, Riverchase and Oakmont may (or may not) pursue. Reminder: an AC has such powers as presbytery gives to it to act in the presbytery's stead. In the right setting, this can save time and effort. Presbytery also added SECA to the minimum compensation standards for eligible pastors. In a less pleasant task, and in a fairly closely divided voice vote, Presbytery voted to allow Ramsey Memorial Church to leave-with their property – for the Evangelical Presbyterian Church denomination. Repeated vote divisions when this happens indicate that we are not of one mind, we are unsettled, on what is the best action in these circumstances.



On the other side of that reality, we have received from the GA seed grants for New Worshiping Communities, one in Jacksonville, and another for Auburn-Montgomery University work with students. We also heard encouraging reports from campus ministries in Auburn, Tuscaloosa's UKirk/UPerk coffee house, and a growing UKirk Birmingham.

Presbytery passed a 2018 budget that aims to move us ever closer to a balanced budget. One thing that may help us get there is the Finance Commission's proposal for a TLC (The Larger Church) program. It proposes that each member set aside a mere \$1 per week, supplemented with a quarterly loose offering from churches, ½ of which stays with the local congregation to help cover their Per Capita contributions, the other ½ to Presbytery to supplement the Church's regular Mission Giving. When you see this on the remittance form, that's what it is!

Look forward to February, where our next meeting on February 23 at First Tuscaloosa leads us into the Main Event. General Assembly Moderator Denise Anderson will be with us, as will the famous Stillman College Choir. Also present will be United Church of Christ pastor Rob Lee, descendent of Robert E. Lee and a sought-after speaker when he had to resign his call after his advocacy for removal of Confederate memorials.



The Moderator would like to note, with thanks, that Transitional Executive Jay Wilkins is a person we turn to more and more – as we did at this meeting – for gentle, logical, faithful and visionary leadership. I have known more church executives than most people, and want you to know that you are being well served.

Lastly, there were three retirement recognitions – Cary Speaker, who we retired and recognized, and myself; you voted this on August, but I have stayed through this meeting. Sid Burgess, in his deeper-than-God's stentorian voice, channeled the spirit of former doorkeeper of the House, Fishbait Miller, as he began "Mistah Speakah..." and spoke of Speaker's faithful and exemplary service throughout this presbytery. Jonathon Yarboro rehearsed some of my theological imperatives, and with his guitar led the Presbytery in song. The Presbytery recognized Linda Burrowes retirement after 20 years of service, with plaque and gifts, with thanksgiving and praise, congratulatory oratory, and multiple standing ovations. We are grateful for her 23 years of faithful service, and will miss her friendship and support.



Because I do not know yet where I will be in February, we installed Elder Jane Clayton (Montevallo) as Moderator; and Rev. Susan Clayton as Vice-Moderator. Your Moderator referred to them as Clayton 1 and Clayton 2. Perhaps you should not.



The Moderator commends the commissioners and minister members for their attention to and care for the church, and for doing the work of God for this presbytery and the whole church of Jesus Christ. Thank you for allowing me to serve among you these 11 years, and for allowing me to serve First Presbyterian in Birmingham (the finest starship in the fleet). It has been a joy and a pleasure.



More photos from the meeting



*Grace and Peace,
J. Shannon Webster*

