

PRESBYTERY REFLECTION

By Sheppards and Lapsley Vice Moderator, Jonathan Yarboro

AUGUST 2024

HOST: MOUNTAIN BROOK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Highlights of the August Presbytery meeting



Ministry within our Presbytery



The Presbytery of Sheppards and Lapsley convened for its quarterly meeting on August 15, 2024 at Mountain Brook Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, Alabama. We were encouraged that the majority of participants opted to join the meeting in person and grateful that we were able to provide Zoom access to those who could not. The meeting opened with prayer by Vice Moderator Rev. Jonathan Yarboro.

Following seating of corresponding members, introduction of visitors, and first-time commissioners, the body proceeded to adopt the Omnibus Motion for the day. The remaining scheduled meeting of the year will be held November 21, 2024 at Cahaba Springs Presbyterian Church in Trussville. We were welcomed by Rev. Madison Roberts, Pastor of Mountain Brook and invited to join in worship.



The body began to worship in prayer and song. We were treated to a musical proclamation by soloist Allison Sanders and Gary Smoke *Ride On, King Jesus*. Rev. Roberts shared a sermon entitled *Bird vs. Magic*, which highlighted the variety of divine gift and the blessings of interdependence, among other things. We shared in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and closed the service singing *Lift High the Cross* together.

Executive Council presented its reports, which did not contain any action items, but featured updates on the continued efforts towards good stewardship manifest in the EC. For its Matthew 25 update, mission partners Living River and the Presbyterian Home for Children were called up to share how their respective ministries are fulfilling the Matthew 25 call. The EC will continue to feature Matthew 25 updates at subsequent meetings.



Ministry Within our Presbytery



Nicole Newton, Moderator of PSL CPM presented Inquirer Annabelle Beavers for advancement to the Candidacy phase of the CPM process. Annabelle shared insights gleaned from her time in seminary and her internships. She answered questions from the floor and engaged in theological reflection with the body. The examination was closed and she was approved for Candidacy. She graduates from Union Theological Seminary in Richmond in May.



Our new Presbyterian Foundation Ministry Relations Officer turns out to be a familiar name and face in this presbytery. Dana Waters V became the officer for our region recently. He shared detailed information on how the foundation partners with congregations to fulfill a variety of ministry needs. Dana was joined in attendance by his father and grandfather.



PSL's three representatives from the recently held 226th General Assembly came forward to share initial reflections on their time at the meeting. Young Adult Delegate Abby Bunn, who spent her summer as summer director for Living River, presented first. She was followed by Ruling Elder Commissioner Debra Love (Westminster Presbyterian Church, Birmingham) and Rev. Nick Reed, Teaching Elder Commissioner (First Presbyterian Church, Auburn).



Our representatives shared their collective experience of the civility of the assembly in general. Each noted that in committee and in plenary, there was a noticeable commitment to being respectful in

debate and to be active listeners. Each felt that the actions recommended represented reasonable paths forward on potentially divisive issues. Stated Clerk Jay Wilkins announced that the Executive Council would begin discernment for a process for receiving and responding to actions being sent to presbyteries from the 226th GA.



A lovely lunch was followed by good news from churches and a report from our General Presbyter, Sue Westfall. Her "balcony reflection" focused primarily on the way we interact as a presbytery. In that reflection, Sue commented, "This presbytery seems to have and to foster the sense that we are in this together to serve Christ faithfully in central Alabama and beyond."

Borrowing from the book *Bowling Alone* by Harvard Sociologist Robert Putnam, Sue pointed out that this seemingly natural behavior is countercultural. She invited participants to spend a few moments in reflection and small group conversation about the two kinds of social capital Putnam presents: bonding and bridging. She lifted up the ease of bonding and encouraged us as churches and a presbytery to move further into the practices of bridging.

COM presented reflections on the ministry and witness of two pastors who were recently approved for honorable retirement. Rev. Bruce McClendon and Rev. Richard Hanna were both celebrated for their service and faithfulness in ministry. CRE Bev Dodson's retirement from leading the CRE program was noted, but a celebration of that service was postponed until the November meeting.

Ministry Within our Presbytery



COM presented Cherie Fancher for approval as Commissioned Ruling Elder for pulpit supply within the presbytery. Cherie shared her personal sense of calling to ministry. She was examined and approved. Rev. Cort Gatliff was presented for approval as Senior Pastor for South Highland Presbyterian Church, Birmingham. Cort was examined and fielded questions from the floor along with the PNC. His examination was sustained and the call was approved by the required $\frac{3}{4}$ margin.



COM also presented a Plan of Union for Edgewood Presbyterian Church and Second Presbyterian Church, both of Birmingham. Members of the merger committee from both congregations highlighted the process of discernment and shared the outpouring of blessings since the two congregations began to worship together as one. The merger was approved and the first Sunday for the newly formed Edgewood Presbyterian Church will be Sunday, October 6th.



Ralls Coston, PSL Volunteer Mission Coordinator, presented an update on mission happenings across the presbytery. The Anti-Racism Committee presented its DEI statement for a second read. The statement was fully endorsed by the body and the committee was directed to submit it to all elected officials serving in or on behalf of the state of Alabama.



Kathy Tracey provided an update on Presbyterian Women activities and highlighted the most recent Horizons Bible Study. The Finance Committee presented a proposed 2025 budget for review. Rick Atkerson, Moderator of PSL Nominating, asked everyone to begin to consider nominations for leadership positions within the presbytery for 2025 and beyond.

Lant Davis, Moderator of PSL Trustees, presented a request for transfer of the former Trinity Presbyterian Church property. The transfer was requested by Vine Church, who purchased the property through a third party and now wishes to secure their own funding. The request was approved.



Stated Clerk Jay Wilkins presented his report, which included reminders and resources for all in need of mandatory background checks and / or boundary training. Session minutes continue to be read in designated locations through the presbytery. Sessions are required to have their minutes read and approved on a yearly basis. Churches who have paid their per capita were thanked and those who have not were encouraged to do so.

There being no new business items or further business on the agenda, the meeting adjourned. Rev. Madison Roberts led the assembly in a final benediction and closing prayer. The next meeting of presbytery will be November 21, 2024 at Cahaba Springs Presbyterian Church, Trussville.

Respectfully submitted,
Jonathan Yarboro / PSL Vice Moderator

Additional Highlights from the Meeting

