

Presbytery of New Covenant

March 16, 2013

Stated Meeting Minutes

The Presbytery of New Covenant met at Pines Presbyterian Church, Houston, for the first stated meeting of the year. Moderator W.R. Casey Jones called the meeting to order at 9:30 am, after the singing of the gathering hymn, "Revive Us Again." He also prayed to open the meeting.

The first order of the day was worship, where Rev. Paul Roberts brought us the message. Rev. Roberts is the president of Johnson C. Smith Theological Seminary in Atlanta, Georgia. The morning offering of \$2,937.00 was given to defray the expenses of the Triennium delegation from the Presbytery of New Covenant.

To begin the business meeting, Stated Clerk Lynn Hargrove declared that a quorum was present, and the revised docket was approved. Rev. Wayne Eberly, pastor of Pines Church, welcomed us and shared important information about the day. First time commissioners were asked to stand and be recognized and were welcomed by applause from those gathered. No corresponding members were in attendance.

New minister members were invited to introduce themselves and to sign the "book of life": Helen Rose Moore, Michael Homan, Robert Ferguson.

Visitors were asked to stand and be recognized: Rev. Paul Roberts (Johnson C. Smith Theological Seminary), Miguel Carlin (Presbytery of Cincinnati), Jackie Saxon (Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary).

The report of the **Stated Clerk** included an addition of the receipt of minutes for installations/ordinations, which was that of Rev. Dr. David Green as pastor of Conroe, First, which was held February 17, 2013 at 3:30 pm.

The dismissals of Galveston, West Isle, and Freeport, First were validated and approved.

The motions were:

To validate that the congregation of West Isle Presbyterian Church, Galveston, Texas has fulfilled the requirements for dismissal.

Having met the requirements for seeking dismissal, the congregation of West Isle Presbyterian Church, Galveston, Texas is dismissed to the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO) pending completion of the transfer.

To validate that the congregation of First Presbyterian Church, Freeport, Texas has fulfilled the requirements for dismissal.

Having met the requirements for seeking dismissal, the congregation of First Presbyterian Church, Freeport, Texas is dismissed to the Cumberland Presbyterian Church pending completion of the transfer.

The revised omnibus motion (in the Addendum Report) was passed. This included the amendments to the Book of Order (except 12.b voted on separately), the plan from the Synod of the Sun which included a reduction in the number of commissioners to the meetings, the 2013 presbytery budget, and the approval the offering collected at installation/ordination services to be split 50/50 between the committee for preparation for ministry and the pastor emergency fund.

After the passage of the omnibus motion, Moderator Jones made his remarks which included the naming of tellers for the meeting: Peter Lee, Johnna Cormier, Jerry Beetz and Dian Thomasson. No nominations to the nominating committee were made.

Celebration of Ministry: We welcomed Mike Wallace from Brazos Presbyterian Homes to share about the planned expansion at Bayou Manor.

The **Ecclesiastical Affairs Committee** brought for approval the revisions to the Heidelberg Catechism and proposed amendment 12-B. Rev. Becky Downs introduced RE Nell Schwartz (Missouri City, Southminster), commissioner to the 220th General Assembly who served on the Confessions of the Church committee at that GA. Nell explained the proposed changes to the Heidelberg Catechism, as well as the history of how this proposed amendment came to be. Discussion: TE Harry Slye to encourage “no” votes, TE Alan Brehm to encourage “yes” votes. The motion to receive and approve the amended version of the Heidelberg Catechism was passed 120-66.

Amendment 12.B: RE Lureen Suba, who served as the Theological Student Advisory Delegate to the committee at the 220th General Assembly, who spoke against the proposal. TE Dean Pogue encouraged approval. The motion passed.

TE Becky Downs encouraged commissioners to consider hosting a presbytery meeting in 2014.

The Order of the Day at 11:30 was to hear the State of the Presbytery address from Rev. Mike Cole, general presbyter. Mike shared words of encouragement, which included for us to spread the good news of Jesus Christ in the world. His powerpoint slides and remarks are included as an addendum to these minutes.

Open Space conversations were invited over lunch. Volunteering to host were: Casey Jones – Revival; Mary Marcotte – Christian Education; Joe McDonald – pastor’s retreat; Mike Cole & Paul Roberts – Johnson C. Smith; Anna Marion – inner prayer; David Nelson – children’s time; Caressa Murray – youth mission trips.

After lunch, we reconvened with “Shine, Jesus, Shine”, and saw the video from the General Assembly about the “One Great Hour of Sharing” denominational offering.

RE Marie Mickey, chairperson of **Committee on Examinations**, introduced Kathy Sebring, a candidate for ordination, who preached her sermon of candidacy. Kathy is from Los Ranchos Presbytery, and has received a call to the Avatar Hospice. Marie offered a prayer prior to the sermon. Kathy’s text was Luke 3:15-17, which she shared from two different translations, including *The Message*, illustrating how a more modern translation can be more engaging to today’s audience. Her message encouraged us to “clean house” in our own lives in order to experience revival. The sermon portion of her examination was sustained. Marie then opened a time of examination from the floor, and began with “which one of the essential tenets of the Reformed faith applied most to your ministry?” Dean Pogue asked, “Let’s

supposed someone comes to you and says, 'I'm spiritual but not religious.' How would you respond to that person?" Kathy answered that it would take more than one conversation, and that the two were not the same, that she would ask probing questions that would invite a sharing of her faith with that person. Marie moved on behalf of the Committee on Ministry that the presbytery approve Kathy Sebring for ordination as a Teaching Elder in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The motion was approved.

From **Ministries Division Steering Committee**: Carlton Currie reminded us about the Vision Initiative and Lynn Johnson Social Grants, with the deadlines of March 29, 2013 for application.

From **Administrative Division Steering Committee**: RE Jane Larkin introduced RE Celia Morgan, chair of the **Finance Committee**, who shared some information about the 2013 budget (which was adopted during the Omnibus Motion, to celebrate that it is not only balanced, but oversubscribed.

From **Committee on Ministry**: TE Marie Mickey (Committee on Examination) introduced RE Craig Wood and RE Jim Mayer, who are seeking to be commissioned as Ruling Elders to a Particular Service. Craig is from Timber Ridge, Woodlands, and will be serving at Caldwell, First. Jim Mayer is from Houston, St. Luke's, and is called to Solari Hospice. Marie asked them to talk about their statements of faith and their work in ministry, as well as coursework that impacted their ministry, and a scripture that informs the ministry. TE Tom Spath asked "What is going on in Caldwell?"

A motion to approve Craig Wood as a Ruling Elder to be commissioned to a particular service to serve the church in Caldwell was passed.

A motion to approve Jim Mayer as a Ruling Elder to be commissioned to a particular service to serve Solari Hospice, and a commission to a particular service at Houston, St. Luke's was passed.

RE Shelley Hernandez moved that the presbytery grant permission to Houston, Heritage, to call TE Mark Plunkett as their installed pastor forgoing the election of a Pastor Nominating Committee. The motion passed unanimously.

Services of Retirement were offered for TE David Peterson (Houston, MDPC), and TE Steve Thorney (Chaplain, M.D.Anderson Cancer Center) by TE Mike Cole, general presbyter. Both were offered a chance to speak to the presbytery for two minutes each, and they offered gratitude to God for the gift of the church in their lives. They were asked to come to the center of the sanctuary where hands were laid and a prayer of thanksgiving offered on their behalf.

Casey Jones led the service of commissioning for Craig Wood and Jim Mayer as Ruling Elders Commissioned to a Particular Pastoral Service, as found in the addendum.

Committee of Preparation for Ministry: TE Nora Fitch, chairperson, called Will Briggs (Kingwood, First) and Shelley Homeyer (Houston, First) to the platform where they were asked to share their faith journey, and answer questions.

The motion to enroll William "Will" Briggs as a candidate for ministry was passed.

The motion to enroll Shelley Homeyer as a candidate for ministry was passed.

The Committee on Preparation for Ministry and those who have supported Will and Shelley on their journeys were invited forward. RE Bill Hargrove (Houston, First) offered a charge to both Will and Shelley. RE Agnes Adair offered prayer for both.

Nominating Committee: RE Doug Arrick added the name of Christie Gurlie, Houston, St. Thomas, Congregational Resourcing Team, class of 2013.

General Council: RE John Jo shared affirmation to Kathy Sebring. The report is found in the packet. There was one item for approval which was the gift of the property at 5900 Pinemont Drive, Houston, Texas, from St. Giles Presbyterian Church to Pathways Presbyterian Church. The motion passed.

There was no new business submitted by the deadline.

Casey asked for a motion to adjourn and seconded. The motion passed. Casey closed the meeting with prayer at 2:45 pm.

The attendance for the meeting was 250 which included:

89 Teaching Elders: 67 in validated ministries; 13 honorably retired; 5 at large; 1 temporary member

3 commissioned ruling elders

110 Ruling Elder commissioners

7 Ruling Elders with privilege

5 former moderators of presbytery

3 presbytery staff: 1 voting, 2 non-voting

1 Fellow – NACBA

30 Visitors

5 Inquirers/Candidates

Respectfully submitted,

Lynn R. Hargrove
Stated and Recording Clerk

2013 State of the Presbytery
By Rev. Mike Cole
General Presbyter, Presbytery of New Covenant

On Ash Wednesday, the staff gathered as we do on every Wednesday for chapel worship together. I led the service and concluded what I thought was a meaningful worship experience ready to pronounce the benediction. I noticed, however, that the staff was looking at me rather quizzically. Finally one person broke the silence and said, "Well, are you going to administer the ashes?" I was embarrassed that I had forgotten a primary reason we had gathered that morning.

That incident reminds me that we have to remember what we are here to do – spread the good news of Jesus Christ in the world. So, how are we doing?

A Reality Check

We ended 2012 with a positive balance for the first time in 10+ years. Our 2013 budget is over-subscribed and does not include any funds from dismissed congregations. Half of those dismissal funds are set aside in reserve for a "rainy day," and the other half are designated for New Church Development and 1001 New Worshiping Communities. Happily, we have increased our presbytery giving to Synod and GA by 50%. We are the second largest presbytery in our synod and fifth in giving to the synod. We can do better.

As of today, we have dismissed five congregations with a total of 700 members. Two were dismissed to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church; two were dismissed to the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians and one was dismissed to the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. There are two congregations still in the discernment process - First Presbyterian Church of Kingwood and First Presbyterian Church of Houston, with a total of 5,000 members. The financial impact of these dismissals is minimal because only one of the five we have dismissed and one of the two who are in discernment has financially supported the presbytery in recent years. In fact the overage of pledges for 2013 exceeds the financial contributions of all the churches dismissed and in discernment. So, we will be ok financially.

On the other hand, the emotional/psychological impact of losing part of our presbytery family is enormous. The numbers don't matter. What matters are the people and our relationships. We are saddened by losing friends and colleagues who feel conscience-bound to distance themselves from us.

We have five new church developments and have chartered four in the last five years, which puts us among the leaders in our denomination in new church development.

Our presbytery consists of 102 congregations and 32,681 members and we are still the 6th largest presbytery by membership. Our presbytery, all 102 congregations gave \$9 million to local and global mission out of \$52 million received. The Vision Initiative Fund and the Lynn Johnson Social Justice Fund are still funding mission projects in our congregations. These two funds alone have provided \$391,000 in vision and mission grants to 68 congregations in the last 6 years.

What's Right with the PCUSA?

While I understand the necessity of congregations who contemplate seeking dismissal from the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to make a case for why they are unhappy with the denomination, on a personal level I get tired of hearing what's wrong with our denomination. So, I'd like to share my list of what's right with our denomination.

We have a heritage and history that pre-dates the founding of our nation. We have endured splits and reunions before and will weather this one as well. In spite of those who want to believe the worst about the PCUSA, we believe in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, the sovereignty of God, and the power of the Holy Spirit. We are not heretics and we are not apostate. We are loving, compassionate, grace-filled people of God who really do love Jesus and want to make a difference in the world.

The PCUSA has 10,000 congregations, 11,000 ministers and a little less than 2 million members. We are shrinking, yes, but we are still the largest Presbyterian denomination in the United States by far. Here are a few comparisons with the other major Presbyterian denominations in the United States. The PCUSA has a 240+ year history. The next oldest Presbyterian denomination is the Cumberland Presbyterian Church which has been in existence for 200+ years. The Cumberland Presbyterian Church has 709 congregations; 75,127 members and 899 ministers. The Presbyterian Church in America has existed for 40 years. They have 1700 congregations and 335,000 members. The Evangelical Presbyterian Church has been in existence for 32 years. They have 300 congregations and 115,000 members. The Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO) has been in existence for one year. They have 31 congregations with 17, 000 members, with 48 congregations in transition into ECO. ECO reports that there are another 80-100 congregations in various stages of consideration.

The PCUSA has an astounding legacy of hospitals, churches, schools and seminaries unmatched by other denominations.

Within the PCUSA, help is as close as the nearest PCUSA congregation and the presbytery office, because the presbytery is us.

The PCUSA works ecumenically and with other faith groups to build trust and understanding. We have a long-standing reputation of being bridge builders among Christian and other faith groups. We encourage full, open and theologically informed debate of issues that vex Christians and society.

We have a nearly 60 year history of recognizing the gifts of women for ministry. Women are encouraged and affirmed in ordination throughout the denomination, not just in some congregations or presbyteries.

Our denomination has challenged us to form 1001 new worshipping communities in the next ten years to counteract not only declining membership but also tepid evangelism in our congregations.

Top 10 Reasons it's a blessing to be in the Presbytery of New Covenant

10) We recognize that Presbytery is not "them;" it is "us."

9) Collegiality means something here. We have strong relationships and there is an increasing trust level that contributes to an atmosphere of grace, peace and hope.

8) We are committed to local and global mission - CEDEPCA, Cuba, Haiti, Mexico, Peru, Taiwan, Romania, and Sudan just to name a few areas where we are actively partnering with others in mission.

7) We have an outstanding Youth Ministry. The Presbyterian Youth Connection Council has been the premier youth ministry among presbyteries and it is getting even better under the leadership of Rev. Caressa Murray. This summer, the PYCC has arranged for two mission trips for youth from small and mid-size congregations who might not have the critical mass on their own to arrange a mission trip.

6) We have a great Clergy Retreat. I believe it's the best in the denomination, with an appropriate blend of learning and relaxing after the Lent/Easter season.

5) Our response to crises. We were exceptionally blessed to be longest lasting recovery organization on the Texas Gulf Coast following Hurricane Ike. For those of you who weren't around at the time of Hurricane Katrina, our presbytery tithed its endowments - \$340,000 - to the presbyteries of South Louisiana and Mississippi. We are an amazingly generous presbytery family.

4) We are respectful of our diversity and recognize the wealth of knowledge within the presbytery. We know that many different heads are better than many of the same.

3) Every congregation matters; the smallest to the largest congregations receive the same level of guidance, care and support.

2) We have a fabulous staff. Our mission is to serve the congregations, specializing in hospitality, professionalism and integrity.

1) We have a sense of humor. We laugh a lot, which is a sign of a healthy organization.

PNC Proud

This year the Academy awards presenters announced two movies at a time as nominees for the Best Picture award. The problem was that instead of saying, "Here is the next nominee for best picture," they all said, "Here is the nominee for the next best picture." One word was out of place but what a difference in meaning.

We are called by God not just to be the next-best picture but to be the best. After all, we've got the best producer, director and script writer around. Even though being the best for God is serious business we mustn't mistake that for taking ourselves too seriously. The reality is, as St. Paul reminds us, that we are all fools for Christ. Allowing the world to see a little of our playfulness might just make the world realize we are human after all and that Christ calls us not into an institution but a relationship.

We are PNC and proud of it!

In Joyful service to Christ,
Mike Cole

The Presbytery of New Covenant in Mission
PHOTO ALBUM



Atascocita Presbyterian Church



Baytown Faith Presbyterian Church



West Columbia, Bethel Presbyterian Church



Brenham Presbyterian Church



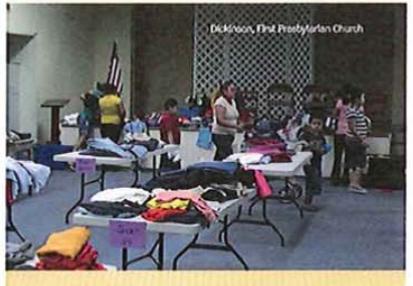
Clear Lake Presbyterian Church



Conroe, First Presbyterian Church



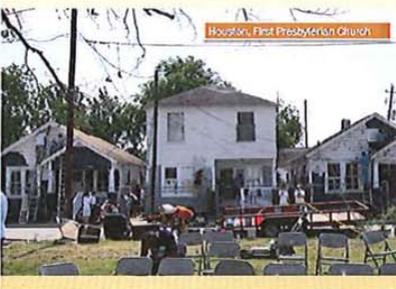
Cookeville Station, Covenant Presbyterian Church



Dickinson, First Presbyterian Church



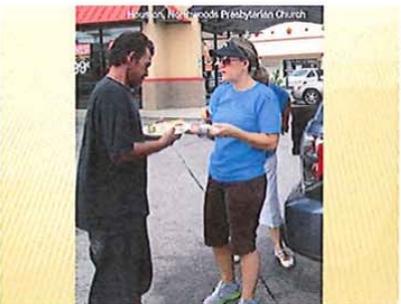
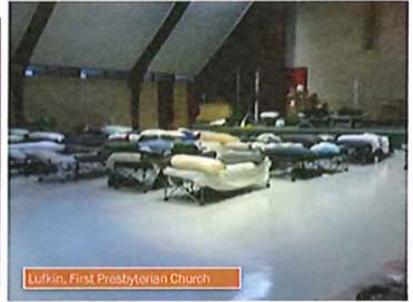
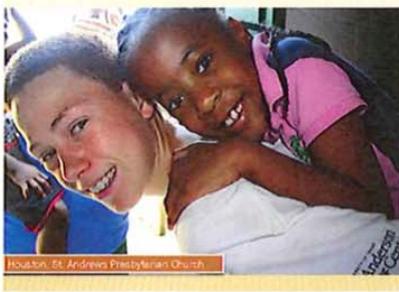
Galveston, First Presbyterian Church



Houston, First Presbyterian Church



Wood, First Presbyterian Church





**The Presbytery In Mission Is
ALL of us doing Mission
"Well done, good and faithful
servants!"**