Highlights of the 155th Stated Meeting of the Presbytery of Middle Tennessee

February 10, 2024

Below are the highlights of the reports received and actions taken at the 155th stated meeting.

The Presbytery of Middle Tennessee met by Zoom Saturday, February 10,2024. Stated Clerk Mary Catherine Sevier provided a brief welcome and orientation for first time commissioners. Moderator Elinor Foster called the meeting to order, the agenda was approved with one correction, and the consent agenda, which contained the minutes of the 154th meeting, the minutes of the called meeting of November 30, 2023, and the minutes of the called meeting of January 11, 2024 was approved. Moderator Foster announced that worship would commence. The Rev. Stephen Yates delivered the sermon on the text John 1:43-51, and music was provided by First Lewisburg organist Naphtali Frey and the First Lewisburg choir. TE Jane Herring, RE Elinor Foster, RE Teresa Burns, RE Dina Crigger, TE Robert Montgomery, and Colin Pickle participated in worship, and TE Ray Thomas and RE Mary Catherine Sevier installed and charged Moderator Elinor Foster and Vice-Moderator Jane Herring. Following worship, Moderator Foster convened the meeting. First time commissioners were welcomed and briefly introduced.

Moderator Foster called on the Executive Presbyter, Ray Thomas, who recognized Stephen Yates for his service as moderator during 2023 and presented him with small gifts of appreciation. Rev. Thomas then made remarks about his own tenure as EP, underscoring his commitment to building relationships and reminding the body of the task which he and then co-Executive Presbyter Robin Thomas took for themselves of visiting every church in the presbytery, noting that both horizontal and vertical connections were forged under their tenure. He especially noted initiatives such as the Nueva Vida Foodbank. He also announced his covenant intention of adhering to the former pastor policy by stepping away from presbytery gatherings for a year other than attending worship with his family.

Moderator Foster recognized the Rev. Heidi Hudnut-Beumler, chair of the Personnel Task Force. She led an appreciation of Rev. Thomas, including a statement of his accomplishments and a video of thanks and well wishes from presbytery members. The Thomases were presented with a gift certificate for a weekend away and the Stated Clerk read a letter and presented a certificate of appreciation from the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly.

The following information was received and the following actions were taken by the Presbytery.

* The Rev. Jane Herring presented the Administrative Committee report. The Committee joined with the Finance Committee in creating a task force to find information regarding a long term lease with the Linden Waldorf School which Trinity PC is considering. The Rev. John Smith asked that the committees consider adding and diversifying the members of the task force, and Chair Herring agreed to that request. Rev. Smith asked that his comments be entered in the record, and it was so noted. The Rev. Will Berger then made comments and moved that the task force be dissolved and that the lease be approved. That motion was ruled out of order; the task force is under the Finance and Administrative Committees, not the presbytery, and the presbytery has not had reason to see or consider the proposed lease.
* The Committee moved that an AC be created and charged with walking alongside Decherd PC in its request to be dissolved. The motion was approved. Members of the task force are: RE Steven Elkins, FPC Murfreesboro, RE Charlotte Broyles, FPC Tullahoma, TE Tom Bagley, FPC Normandy, and TE Ellen Hill, Honorably Retired.
* RE Hal Sauer brought the report of the Finance Committee and noted that the financial state of the presbytery appears to be sound, with assets growing. RE Melinda Sanders moved that the funds from the sale of New Hope church be put into a designated fund called the New Hope fund, which would finance the unknown and possibly burgeoning expenses of a bridge EP and a transitional EP as well as a consultant to assist in the search process with the installed EP. This motion was amended by TE Mary Sellers Shaw to divide the funds between various small developments such as the UKirks and the designated fund. TE Heidi Hudnut-Beumler then moved that the proposed designated fund, the funds from the New Hope sale, and the unknown expenses of hiring EPs be referred to the Administrative and Finance Committees with input from the Personnel Task Force. This motion carried.
* RE Sauer moved from committee that an AC be charged with gathering information and dissolving the Brick Church PC. The members are: RE Chris Williams, FPC Pulaski, RE Carol Foster, FPC Fayetteville, TE Amy Stoker, FPC Pulaski, and TE Jim Moran, FPC Shelbyville. The motion carried.
* The Rev. Erin Howton-Angel made the Commission on Ministry report and recognized new members TE Zach Sasser, Downtown Presbyterian Church and TE Stephanie Hanson Boaz, minister-at-large. She also introduced Keenan Rodgers of the Board of Pensions, who made remarks.
* The Rev. Lisa Hermann made the Committee on the Preparation for Ministry report and moved that Mallory Hammond Inquirer, be moved to candidacy. She introduced Ms. Hammond, who made brief remarks on her sense of call and was questioned by the body. Her candidacy was approved unanimously.
* The Rev. John Hilley discussed the four items to admit to record from the Committee on Church Transformation. He exhorted small congregations to take advantage of the remaining “seat passes” from the Cyclicals group and noted the positive reception from churches who are participating. He asked for the job description for the bridge EP position, which Rev. Hudnut-Beumler assured him would be widely disseminated via the eNews and website.
* RE Dr. Mary Martin brought the report of the Committee on Leadership Excellence and noted that the committee is building a library of accessible resources for leaders across the congregation from newly elected REs to long time serving TEs. The Committee is planning a TE retreat during the year as well.
* The Stated Clerk reminded clerks of session to file their statistical reports by Thursday, February 15, 2024. She noted that she recently was honored to participate in the training of new ruling elders at FPC Gallatin, and she called attention to the reports of the Committee of Mutual Support, Social Justice, and the report from the synod commissioner, Will Berger.
* The clerk brought 4 items to vote, including approving a geographic boundary clarification for the Manual of Mission and Operations, clarifying the language around retired TEs by adding the designation “Retired” as well as “Honorably Retired” to the manual, and reducing the required quorum from 75 to 30, with 15 TEs, 15 REs, with at least 8 congregations represented. The actions carried.
* The Stated Clerk noted that the Committee of Counsel who represented the presbytery in three remedial complaints which were subsequently withdrawn by the complainant had served with great distinction and been dismissed. She offered sincere appreciation to these individuals: the Rev. Dr. John A. Hinkle, jr, FPC Murfreesboro, RE Donna Gibson, FPC Cookeville, and RE Debbie Fraley, FPC Fayetteville.
* The 156th Stated Meeting of the Presbytery of Middle Tennessee will be held on Saturday, May 11, 2024, in person at FPC Murfreesboro.

--- Mary Catherine Sevier, Stated Clerk