

The General Council of the Presbytery of Shenango met in a regular stated meeting at the Northminster Presbyterian Church, New Castle, PA.

The meeting was called to order and opened with prayer and devotions by the moderator, Jim Mohr, at 9:30 a.m.

The roll was taken:

Bob Loch	Dotty Mariner
Vickie White	Helen Nichols
Bill Crooks	David Dawson
David Hoye	Jack Hanes
Adam Rogers	Kay Hilliard
Jim Mohr	Jerry Mahaffey
Alice Sacherich	Don Stanley
Arnie Morris	Bill McGary
Teresa Kendall	Jim Latta
Nancy McMillan	Andrew Jillson
Augie Hurst	Mark Arnold

The minutes of the council meeting of June 3, 2013 were approved as distributed at the June 28, 2013 meeting of presbytery.

David Dawson presented his report as Executive Presbyter. Dave called attention to various pastoral concerns in the presbytery. Dave presented information on the Pittsburgh Pastoral Institute counseling services available in the area.

Jerry Mahaffey presented his report as Stated Clerk.

The Steering Committee report was presented. Andrew Jillson reported for the Presbytery Future Committee.

*Shenango Presbytery Future Committee  
Proposal to Presbytery Council*

*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. (Hebrews 13:8).  
Everything else is likely to change.*

*The Presbytery of Shenango is in a period of change. We began 2012 with 68 congregations in the presbytery, but we have dismissed 11 congregations to other denominations with 8 more actively considering their future with us. Such abrupt loss of congregations (and potential loss of more congregations after the 2014 General Assembly, based on what we have learned from the survey and listening groups) has produced high levels of anxiety about the future, long-term shape of, and even viability of, Shenango Presbytery.*

*Not wanting to sit by passively, the Presbytery Council commissioned a Future Committee comprised of four teaching elders and three ruling elders to discern possible, constructive proposals to advise the presbytery as it moves forward in this period of change. The first task of the Future Committee was to create, conduct, and evaluate a survey taken by the ruling and teaching elders of the presbytery. The purpose of the survey was to gauge both current feelings and possible future actions of the elders and their respective congregations as they related to the presbytery and the denomination.*

*After the survey was created and conducted, members of the Future Committee held listening sessions throughout the presbytery to share the results and to listen to feedback from ruling and teaching elders*

*and others who attended. The following are some of the important discoveries which came from the survey and the listening sessions:*

*There is a high degree of concern at the local church level regarding declining church membership. There is a similar high degree of concern about recent PC(USA) denominational decisions. Any decision by the General Assembly to define Christian marriage as being between two people, rather than between a man and a woman is likely to have a significant impact on more congregations in the presbytery, resulting in further breaking of the relationship both with the presbytery and the PC(USA). A majority of survey respondents believe it is important that the churches of Shenango Presbytery remain together.*

*In response to the discoveries from the survey and listening sessions, the Presbytery Future Committee offers the following insights:*

*A. In the midst of this period of change, a strong motivating factor behind most presbytery decisions and actions has been the desire to keep the local congregation together. Our presbytery's Gracious Dismissal Policy is a reflection of the presbytery's desire to allow a congregation to be dismissed to a Reformed body for the sake of the peace, unity, and purity within the local congregation. Although the survey results indicate a desire for the presbytery to remain together, the Presbytery Future Committee believes the primary focus of the presbytery is to make sure the membership of each local congregation stays together during this period of change, even if this results in the shrinking of Shenango Presbytery.*

*B. The committee reaffirms our presbytery's position that if a local congregation (as many have already done or plan to do) finds that, for the sake of its peace, unity, and purity, its only option is to leave both the presbytery and the PC(USA) denomination, then we will abide by our Gracious Dismissal Policy and vote for dismissal with prayer and with regret.*

*C. According to the survey results, perhaps a quarter of our local congregations anticipate relatively little negative reaction to the possible redefinition of marriage at the 2014 General Assembly, at least not enough to seriously threaten the peace, unity, and purity of the local church. We anticipate these churches will choose to remain a part of the presbytery and PC(USA) denomination.*

*D. Given the anxiety/concerns of some local congregations regarding current and future denominational decisions, the committee recommends that the presbytery adopt both a theological statement and practices for ministry that distinguish and speak to who we are as the people of Shenango Presbytery and how we understand our identity as members of the PC(USA).*

*E. During the survey listening sessions, some individuals suggested that the presbytery leave as a whole to another Reformed body. It must be noted that there are no provisions in the Book of Order for such action. It also must be noted that the survey results indicated that the presbytery as a whole is not as theologically and ideologically homogeneous as we might think it is. A decision to leave PC(USA) as a whole would require an incredibly high level of unanimity about leaving the denomination; such unanimity is not clearly reflected in the survey. Therefore, the committee recommends against the presbytery leaving as a whole to another Reformed body at this time. The committee also recommends, however, that the presbytery explore what steps may need to be taken if such action becomes a more viable option in the future.*

*In summary, we believe that in this time of uncertainty, the presbytery can assist our local congregations by providing three principle options:*

- 1. Graciously assist those who must leave to do so, especially encouraging them to choose ECO and continue in partnership with Shenango Presbytery.*
- 2. Declare a distinctive position for Shenango Presbytery as proposed in item D above and thereby provide a way to stay in the PC(USA) for congregations who lack a high level of theological and/or ideological consensus.*
- 3. Summon the congregations of Shenango Presbytery to study and experiment with the principles and practices of the missional church movement, shifting their attention toward ministries and relationships that reconnect them to their surrounding neighborhoods.*

*Andrew Jillson (moderator), Barb McNeese, David Lingle, Alice Otto Sacherich, Adam Rodgers, Ralph Hawkins, Ron Cole*

The council moved to receive the report and refer it to the Steering Committee to determine the next step.

The Steering Committee recommended moving forward with a revised “Holy Cow” contract with Russ Crabtree at an estimate of \$8,900 plus expenses to assist with the search process for a new Executive Presbyter due to Dave’s retirement. Application has been made to the Synod for a “New Initiative Grant” from the Synod for \$8,000 to assist with the cost of the contract. Other funds are available in the presbytery to fund the process.

Council approved a consulting contract in principle (some dates to be modified) with “Holy Cow” Consulting for \$8,900 to assist with the process of finding a new executive.

The council approved that the Steering Committee along with two members of presbytery (to be named by Moderators of Council and Presbytery) nominate a Search Committee to presbytery at the September 24, 2013 presbytery meeting.

The Council approved the nominations for duties of the council members to various committees. These will appear in the directory.

Jim Latta reported for Evangelism Committee. A report from a church about Good News will be presented at the presbytery meeting.

Teresa Kendall reported for Christian Education Committee. Plans are underway for Leaderfest.

Miriam Gwin reported for Mission Communication and Stewardship Committee. Rev. Thomas Tut from the Sudan will be speaking at the presbytery meeting. A commissioning service for the Stelle’s will take place in November.

The Stated Clerk reported for Higher Education Committee. The following persons have received scholarships from the Presbytery:

Grace Leuenberger \$1,200 to Grove City College  
Annie Laurie Holfelder \$1,200 to Grove City College  
Daniel Wallace \$600 to Grove City College

Daisy Bowersox \$500 to Grove City College  
Katelyn Epperson \$500 to Westminster College

Kay Hilliard reported for the Camps and Conferences Committee. A retreat for confirmands will be held at Westminster Highlands, Friday, November 22 – Saturday, November 23; and Camp Lambec, Friday, November 8- Saturday, November 9.

Nancy McMillan reported for the Presbyterian Women. Nancy reported that 35 participants were served communion at their June gathering. The PW will be accepting items for Keyenta, AZ at the Fall Gathering at Tower Church, especially school items and wrapped Christmas gifts identified by age, and gender.

Vickie White reported for the Synod Commissioners. She reported that Leslie Shoup has resigned as Stated Clerk because of health problems. Wayne Yost has been named as Stated Clerk of the Synod.

The proposed docket for presbytery meeting on September 24, 2013 was approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:20 a.m. by the moderator who led the council praying in unison the Lord's Prayer. Council will meet again on October 29, 2013 at Westminster College, New Wilmington at 9:30 a.m.