



**Minutes of the Synod of the Covenant Assembly
January 30, 2024
Via Zoom**

MEETING ORIENTATION: Heather Johnston, Office Manager, provided an orientation to meeting technology/protocols just prior to the meeting.

CALL TO ORDER, OPENING PRAYER AND DECLARATION OF QUORUM: Rev. Sandy Seaton-Todd (Western Reserve), moderator, called the meeting to order at 4:40 p.m. with prayer. A quorum was present. Rev. Seaton-Todd welcomed guests, visitors, and corresponding members.

(ATTACHMENT A)

APPROVAL OF THE DOCKET: A motion prevailed to approve the docket with the addition of the Report of the Administrative Commission to the Presbytery of Detroit.

APPROVAL OF THE CONSENT AGENDA AND CLERK'S REPORT: Item #2 of the Clerk's Report, the Report of the Administrative Commission for the Presbytery of Detroit, was removed from the consent agenda and was placed on the docket for discussion. A motion prevailed to approve the Consent Agenda and the Clerk's Report, which included the following items:

**Synod of the Covenant Assembly
Meeting Consent Agenda and Clerk's
Report January 31, 2023**

1. **To seat** as corresponding members the following executive presbyters, general presbyters, presbytery leaders, and stated clerks in attendance at this meeting: Melissa Allison (Detroit), Alison Blondheim (Muskingum Valley), Barry Chance (Eastminster), Erwin Goedicke (Cincinnati), Fran Lane-Lawrence (Lake Michigan), Kay Morrill (Mackinac), Leslie Mott (Detroit).
2. **To excuse** the following commissioners at their request: Elder Mary Jean Blackmon (Miami Valley), Ted Fines (Mackinac), Elder Andy Thorburn (Lake Michigan), and Mike Wakeman (Miami Valley).
3. **To seat** as corresponding members guest teaching elders and ruling elders from congregations within the Synod of the Covenant in attendance at this meeting: Una Matu Ngare (Detroit), Jim Wilson (Scioto Valley)
4. **To approve** the Minutes of the Assembly of the Synod of the Covenant and Annual Meeting of the Corporation held on October 27- October 28, 2023.
5. **REPORT OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE:** **To receive** the following report of the Synod of the Covenant Finance Committee. The Finance Committee approved a

motion to authorize the Treasurer to open FDIC-covered bank accounts for the Lilly Grant, including both checking and/or savings and investment accounts for laddering CDs. In response, a checking account, a savings account, and individual CDs were opened with PNC Bank and PNC Investments into which the \$1.25 million dollars awarded to the Synod of the Covenant by the Lily Foundation was deposited.

6. **TREASURER’S REPORT: To receive** the Treasurer’s Report. (ATTACHMENTS B & C)
7. **REPORT OF THE SCHOLARSHIP TEAM: To receive** the annual report of the Scholarship Team as follows:

Grants and Scholarships Team 2023 Annual Report

January 30, 2024

In 2023, the Synod’s Grants and Scholarship Committee continued to refine its processes for awarding higher education scholarships and grants to churches and parachurch organizations. The committee continues in all its work to align itself with the Synod’s mission to reflect the Matthew 25 Initiatives of addressing structural racism and poverty and building congregational vitality.

Higher Education Scholarships

While holding this as a priority for all our grants and scholarships, this year the Committee experimented with adopting a rubric that helped focus our higher education scholarships toward those who were most in need financially. These scholarships, though a modest amount financially, can make a significant impact on our young Christian leaders and bind them closer not only to their home church but also to their presbytery and synod, reminding them of the blessings of our connectional denomination. Awardees made thank you videos which were shown in their home presbyteries. This year, on behalf of the Synod, we awarded over \$40,000 in scholarships to 44 students from 9 presbyteries and 19 different churches. These awards ranged from \$500 to \$2000 and were given for 35 bachelor’s degrees, 2 associate degrees, and 7 theology degrees. 52% of the scholarships went to students who self-identified as Black, Korean, Asian, or African.

Church/Parachurch Matthew 25 Grants

Applicants for our Matthew 25 grants identify and describe in detail projects that address one or more of the three Matthew 25 Initiatives. The Committee reviewed 38 applications, revealing that our Synod is blessed with an abundance of “energy, intelligence, imagination, and love.” As we did last year, the Committee offered video instruction and coaching to assist with application completion. This year, on behalf of the Synod, we awarded \$50,000 in grants to 17 congregations and ministries in 9 presbyteries. These awards ranged from \$600 to \$5000. We continue the process of reviewing the grants at the 6-month and 12-month mark to help us refine our process and to both celebrate and evaluate how these grants are bearing the fruit of Christ’s love in their communities.

I am grateful for the dedication and thoughtfulness of the committee members who do this work faithfully, earnestly participating in fulfilling the mission of the Synod through the generous budget that has been entrusted to us. Committee members in 2023 included Ministers of Word and Sacrament Betty Angelini, Barry Chance, Erin Guzman, Skip Jackson, and Matt Meinke, and Ruling Elders Lisa Allgood, Jackie Humphreys, and

Georgia McCall. Thank you to our Synod Executive, Chip Hardwick for his thoughtful leadership and for staff support from him and Heather Johnston, who kept all our applications organized. It is a blessing and honor to do this work on behalf of our Synod and to God's glory.

Respectfully submitted, Rev. Amy Duiker, Moderator

8. **RECOMMENDATION TO COMMISSION THE CREATION OF THE ASSOCIATE EXECUTIVE FOR RACIAL JUSTICE POSITION DESCRIPTION:** To approve the following recommendation of the Leadership Team: that the Steering Committee for the Organizer for Communities of Color, in consultation with the Human Resources Committee and the Stated Clerk, be commissioned to create the position description for the Associate Executive for Racial Justice and that the Steering Committee for the Organizer for Communities of Color and the Leadership Committee, acting together, be commissioned to approve the position description. The Associate Executive for Racial Justice will focus on organizing, equipping Communities of Color, and leading strategy for anti-racism and anti-oppression work in the Synod.
9. **REPORT FROM THE HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE:** To receive the Position Description for the Director of Cultivating the Gift of Preaching Initiative.

Position Description: Director, Cultivating the Gift of Preaching Initiative

Purpose

The primary purpose of the Director of the Cultivating the Gift of Preaching (CGP) initiative is to coordinate this Compelling Preaching grant funded by the Lilly Endowment, as it identifies, trains, and supports 140 new preachers through four eighteen-month cycles beginning in summer 2024. The Director will initiate, facilitate, review, and improve the ministry while coordinating a team of subject matter experts to work with participants. The Director will work closely with grant partners Alma College (annual conference host; content providers), Johnson C. Smith Theological Seminary (theological acumen; leadership network), and the Presbytery of Cincinnati (back office support; mid-council advocacy) as well as the presbyteries of the Synod of the Covenant.

Responsibilities

1. Implement the structure and execute the mission/vision for CGP, as described in the grant request, working closely with the dean of curriculum (the Synod executive) and grant partners.
2. Contract with church leaders to serve as preacher-mentors, guest homileticians, and conference leaders for program participants and Alma College students to process written sermon feedback.
3. Initiate, learn from, and work alongside the CGP Steering Team of constituents (alumni, presbytery leaders, etc.).
4. Keep thorough and accurate records for all activities and transactions, ensuring accuracy for audit purposes, and work closely with the Executive on reports and meetings with the Lilly Endowment.
5. In consultation with the Executive, Synod financial staff, and finance committee, develop a working CGP budget and report any significant

modifications from the grant proposal to Lilly.

6. Publicize CGP offerings throughout the Synod's presbyteries, including digital/ written resources and travel to presbytery meetings and other gatherings.
7. Work in a collaborative and professional manner with the staff of the Synod and provide reports to the Leadership Committee and Assembly as needed and requested.
8. Practice discernment and relationship-building with church leaders, participants, congregations, and presbyteries as well as grant partners Alma College and Johnson C. Smith Theological Seminary.
9. Work with the administrator to oversee and manage all details of the ministry.

Relationships

The CGP Director reports to the Synod Executive, learns from/works alongside the CGP Steering Team and Grant Partners, regularly interacts with presbytery leaders and CREs, and supervises the CGP administrator.

Meetings

The Director will regularly attend Synod Assemblies, steering committees, and weekly Synod staff meetings, almost all of which are virtual.

Resources

The Synod provides a laptop computer, an office phone number, and a cellphone subsidy. A half-time administrator will support this ministry and position.

Qualifications, Skills, and Experiences

- Teaching or Ruling Elder in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).
- Exceptional strategic, organizational, financial, and discernment skills.
- Excellent initiative and networking, organizational, verbal & written communication skills.
- Strong relational skills toward all constituents, serving with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love.
- Commitment to Anti-Racism.
- Successful Background check.
- Willingness to travel throughout Ohio and Michigan for approximately two overnights per month
- Preferred Experiences/Capacities
 - Academic background in Homiletics/Preaching
 - Membership within the Synod of the Covenant (this position is remote so no specific locale is necessary/preferable within the geographic bounds of the Synod)

Compensation

This half-time position is budgeted at \$35,000 annually and includes full Board of Pensions benefits (retirement and health care) and continuing education and travel budgets.

Evaluation

The coordinator's performance will be formally evaluated annually, and there will be regular conversations about strengths and opportunities to improve.

10. REPORT FROM THE HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE: To receive the Position Description for the CRE Coordinator.

Position Description: Commissioned Ruling Elder/Commissioned Pastor Coordinator

Purpose

Commissioned Ruling Elders/Commissioned Pastors (CREs) have a critical leadership role within the Synod of the Covenant, a role which will only become more important. The purpose of the CRE Coordinator is to work with and among the Synod's presbyteries to identify (encourage ruling elders into this expanded ministry), train (build skills), and support (spiritually nurture) CREs to live out their call to serve churches. The Coordinator will encourage cooperation and joint ministry between presbyteries. Because different presbyteries are at different stages in their support for and development of CREs, the CRE Coordinator will also work with each presbytery on their specific needs.

Responsibilities

1. Establish and maintain regular contact with presbytery staff leaders to understand each presbytery's unique situation with respect to CREs, and how the CRE Coordinator can support them.
2. Facilitate conversation about minimum standards for training across presbyteries, and support presbytery leaders' work to formalize these standards.
3. Initiate, learn from, and work alongside CRE Steering Team composed of knowledgeable constituents (CREs, presbytery leaders, etc.).
4. Develop synod-wide programming to train and support CREs, such as cohort groups, periodic continuing education/equipping events, mentoring, etc. Supervise any provider contractor called for these purposes.
5. Advocate for the critical role of CREs throughout the Synod.
6. Report to each stated meeting of the Synod Assembly on ministry activity.
7. Other duties as required to reach the expected outcomes (below).

Expected Outcomes

- Increased numbers of CREs serving congregations fruitfully throughout the Synod.
- More creative and thorough training and support opportunities for CREs, with participation of critical mass.
- Strong relationships with presbytery leaders and steering team.

Relationships

The CRE Coordinator reports to the Synod Executive, learns from/works alongside the CRE Steering Team, and regularly interacts with presbytery leaders and CREs.

Meetings

The Coordinator will attend the Assembly, steering team, and periodic staff meetings (and is welcome to all staff meetings as the Organizer desires).

Resources

The Synod provides an office phone number and any software necessary for the work.

Qualifications, Skills and Experiences

- Commissioned Ruling Elder (preferred) or Teaching/Ruling Elder within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).
- Membership within the Synod of the Covenant strongly preferred.
- Excellent initiative and networking, organizational, verbal & written communication skills.
- Commitment to Anti-Racism.
- Background check.

Compensation

This ten-hour/week position includes the employer portion of FICA and a modest travel budget.

Evaluation

The coordinator's performance will be formally evaluated annually, with regular conversations about strengths and opportunities to improve along the way.

11. RECOMMENDATION THAT THE ANNUAL ASSEMBLY FOR 2024 BE RESCHEDULED: To approve the recommendation from the Leadership Committee that the date for the Annual Assembly be rescheduled to October 31, 2024 – November 2, 2024.

12. RECOMMENDATION TO APPROVE DATES AND LOCATIONS FOR SYNOD ASSEMBLIES IN 2025 AND 2026: To approve the following dates and locations for Synod Assemblies and the Annual Meeting of the Synod in 2025 and 2026:

Dates and Locations in 2025

1. Tuesday, February 4, 2025, at 4:30 p.m. via Zoom
2. Tuesday, May 6, 2025, at 4:30 p.m. via Zoom
3. Thursday, October 23 through Saturday, October 25, 2025, Annual Assembly at Maumee Bay Lodge and Conference Center in Oregon, Ohio

Dates and Locations in 2026

1. Tuesday, February 3, 2026, at 4:30 p.m. via Zoom
2. Tuesday, May 5, 2026, at 4:30 p.m. via Zoom

3. Thursday, October 22 through Saturday, October 24, 2026, Annual Assembly at Maumee Bay Lodge and Conference Center in Oregon, Ohio

13. **FIRST READ OF PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO THE BYLAWS:** To receive the following as a first read of a proposed amendment to the Synod of the Covenant Bylaws: 40:80 In order to fulfill the principles of participation and representation, the Synod shall elect three ruling elders and three teaching elders as at-large members as follows: two people of African descent, two people of Asian, Asian American, or Pacific Islander (AAPI) descent, and 2 people from marginalized communities within the bounds of the Synod (member of another racialized identity, immigrants, those whose first language is not English). Two of those elected will be assigned to serve on the Leadership Team, and the other four will be assigned to one of the other standing committees by the Nominating Committee.

1. Each at-large member shall be elected to serve terms of three years and may be eligible for election. However, no at-large members shall serve more than six consecutive years, and any at-large member who has served six consecutive years shall be ineligible for election as an at-large member for at least one year.
2. At-large members will have voice and vote on the committees to which they are appointed, as well as voice and vote at Synod Assemblies.
3. Each at-large member shall be a ruling elder or a teaching elder.
4. Each at-large member shall be a member of a presbytery or congregation within the bounds of the Synod of the Covenant.
5. Not more than one (1) at-large member from each presbytery can serve at the same time.

Rationale: At the Annual Assembly in October 2023, Commissioners approved the following motion: To increase the number of Synod Commissioners by six. The composition of those six will be designated as follows: two Commissioners of African descent, two commissioners of Asian, Asian American, or Pacific Islander (AAPI) descent, and 2 Commissioners from marginalized communities within the bounds of the Synod (member of another racialized identity, immigrants, those whose first language is not English). Two of these commissioners will serve on the Leadership Team, and the other four will be appointed to the other standing committees.

Constitutional Support: F-1.0403, G-3.0103, G-3.0401

14. **To receive** the Report of the Stated Clerk for today as follows:

***Report of the Stated Clerk
Fran Lane-Lawrence
January 30, 2024***

1. Former members of the Synod of the Covenant Permanent Judicial Commission for the last six years who may be called upon when necessary to constitute a quorum (D- 5.0206b).

Class of 2022: Lori Schmidt, Stefanie Lewis, Sung Yang

Class of 2020: Catherine Borchart, Richard Mickley, Rhonda O'Reilly

THIS ENDS THE CONSENT AGENDA AND REPORT OF THE STATED CLERK

WORSHIP: Mx. Matt Bruce led the Assembly in a time of devotion focusing on the Beatitudes and collects.

INTRODUCTION OF NEW SYNOD STAFF MEMBERS: Rev. Dr. Charles B. Hardwick introduced Mx. Matt Bruce, Director of Cultivating the Gift of Preaching Initiative, and Commissioned Ruling Elder Tim Pollock, CRE Coordinator. Both shared information about themselves and the new ministries they will be leading.

REPORT OF THE LEADERSHIP COMMITTEE: Elder Adrienne Adams (Detroit), moderator of the Leadership Committee, made the following recommendation on behalf of the Leadership Committee: That the Advisory Committee, in consultation with the Human Resources Committee and the Stated Clerk, be commissioned to create the position description for the Associate Executive for Racial Justice and that the Advisory Committee and the Leadership Team, acting together, be commissioned to approve the position description. **A motion prevailed** to approve the recommendation.

REPORT OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE COMMISSION TO THE PRESBYTERY OF DETROIT:

Elder Adrienne Adams (Detroit) asked that the Report of the Administrative Commission (below) be removed from the Consent Agenda for discussion. Elder Adams expressed that she, some members of the Presbytery of Detroit, and some members of the Michigan Black Presbyterian Caucus who are also members of the Presbytery have concerns that the majority of individuals nominated to serve in leadership positions within the Presbytery of Detroit were White and that People of Color were not adequately represented. She is concerned that the Administrative Commission is not doing enough to assure equity in representation within presbytery leadership. She offered the following motion which received support and was placed before the Assembly: *that the Synod of the Covenant direct the Administrative Commission for the Presbytery of Detroit to pay particular attention to matters of representation in all their actions.*

Elder Jim Wilson (Scioto Valley), a member of the Administrative Commission, spoke on behalf of the Commission. The AC provided that the issues of race have been a constant conversation within the AC, and the AC feels it has been attentive to matters of representation in its decision-making. There is the mistaken presumption that the AC selected those placed in nomination. The AC has allowed the presbytery nominating committee to continue to function, but now has serious questions, in light of the concerns raised, as to whether they can continue to allow the presbytery nominating committee to continue. The AC can appreciate the intention of the motion, but the AC's diverse membership has been working hard to ensure equitable representation. The tone of the motion implies they have not. Members of the AC would receive approval of the motion as a rebuke and urged the Assembly not to approve the motion.

After a time of discussion, **a motion prevailed** to lay on the table the main motion until the Assembly has more information and can make a more informed decision. The Synod of the Covenant Leadership Committee will bring more information to the Synod Assembly in May.

The following report was removed from the consent agenda for discussion:

Report to Synod of the Covenant Meeting
Synod of the Covenant's Presbytery of Detroit Administrative Commission
January 30, 2024

Context

This report summarizes major events and activities since our last report in October 2023.

Overview

1. Elected the Rev. Dr. Leslie Mott to serve as the Presbytery of Detroit as its Temporary Executive Presbyter. She began her work in early January 2024.
2. Worked extensively on a variety of issues related to the absence of Charon Barconey, Associate General Presbyter for the Presbytery of Detroit. This absence began approximately four months ago. The AC communicated frequently with office staff and with functionaries within the PoD regarding tasks and responsibilities to be fulfilled during this absence. The AC communicated extensively with Commissioned Ruling Elder Barconey regarding applicable provisions of established policies related to leave. It has been sensitive to the changing dynamics for Mx. Barconey during this leave while respecting her desire for appropriate levels of privacy.
3. Consulted with the Synod's law firm when and where appropriate.
4. Worked closely with the Stated Clerk for PoD, Dr. Melissa Allison, who has provided research and documents as well as serving as a vital liaison to many functionaries within the PoD.
5. Following consultation with the PoD's Vision and Planning Committee who recommended a six-month temporary budget, it was decided to extend the 2023 approved PoD budget through June 30, 2024.
6. Nominations and Elections
 - A. Worked with the Nominations Committee in their efforts to identify and recruit nominees to serve in a variety of functions within the PoD. Publicized the names of nominees recruited by the Nominations Committee to the PoD.
 - B. Held a zoom meeting on January 17, 2024, to receive input from members of the PoD to assist the AC in their election of functionaries for the PoD.
 - C. Decided on January 18, 2024, to extend the terms of the 2023 Moderator and Vice- Moderator to provide organizational continuity with the budget and transitional assistance for the Temporary Executive Presbyter.
 - D. Elected the following to serve at General Assembly:
Teaching Elder Commissioners
Teresa Peterson (Geneva, Canton)
Anders Edstrom (Greenfield, Berkley)
Laura Kelsey (Pontiac First)

No Teaching Elder Alternate Commissioner

Ruling Elder Commissioners

Joshua Archey (Crossroads, Walled Lake)
Richard Nkosu (Park United)
Kevin Smith (Warren)

Ruling Elder Alternate Commissioner

Elizabeth Ngare (Calvary)

Young Adult Advisory Delegate

Devyn Baumgart (St. Thomas, Shelby)

Elections of Richard Nkosu and Elizabeth Ngare are contingent upon receipt of endorsement by their respective Sessions within 30 days.

- 7. Approved the request to serve communion during the January 27, 2024, worship service.
- 8. Approved the following Corporate Officers to serve the PoD in 2024:
 - President: Karen Strandholm
 - Vice President: Ben Beale
 - Corporate Secretary: Melissa Allison
 - Treasurer: Michael Gaubatz
 - Assistant Treasurer: Sarah Leight

9. COM/CPM -

Approved the election and/or reappointment of the following:

Class of 2026

Wendy Beck	RE	Bloomfield Hills, Kirk in the Hills
Adam Grosch	TE	St. Clair Shores, Lake Shore
Ruth Herrington	TE	Member at Large
Ron Hughes	RE	Livonia, Rosedale Garden
Michelle Janes	TE	Novi Faith Community
Richard Lapehn	TE	Orchard Lake Community
Tim Marvil	TE	Allen Park Presbyterian

Class of 2025

Phil Reed	TE	Honorably Retired
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Approved

- A. Document entitled “Commission for Examination for Ordination and Installation of Ministers of the Word and Sacrament and Examination of Commissioned Pastors.”
- B. Rev. Emma Nickel (1st Royal Oak) and Rev. Ben Larson-Wolbrink (Northbrook Beverly Hills) as CPM Co-chairs.

C. Rev. Paul Stunkel (HR), Elder Stefanie Lewis (Hope), Elder Joelle Jarrett (1st Royal Oak) and Rev. Anders Edstrom (Greenfield Berkley) as Ordination Exam Readers.

10. Staff Compensation

Approved cost of living increases to Tanya Kudla, Unah Mutio Matu Nygare, and Melissa Allison of 3 % effective January 1, 2024. Tabled consideration of Associate Presbyterian compensation until after she returns to work.

11. Continued the work on clarifying roles, responsibilities, procedures, and divergent practices to bring into harmony what has been written, assumed and/or practiced.

12. Worked closely with the Trustees to address issues related to grants, requests for funding, dismissing, or extending the functions of Administrative Commissions previously appointed by the PoD, as well as sales of church property.

13. Approved per Capita amounts for 2024:

General Assembly \$9.80 (\$.05 decrease from 2023)

Synod of the Covenant \$3.25 (remains the same)

Presbytery of Detroit (\$22.85)

Total \$35.90

Observations of the AC

The AC previously asserted that "...the disorder within the Presbytery of Detroit is pervasive, intertwined, and appears to affect virtually every aspect of the PoD. The disorder affects the body in multiple ways." This continues to be the case.

The disorder affecting the PoD is exacerbated by the dissemination of information, often on social media, which often presents "some facts" perceived by the author or authors, without providing additional facts or context within which the decisions or actions were made.

Assertions that actions were motivated by racism, ageism, or a desire to consolidate power, without full consideration of other possible factors often results in judgmentalism and demonstrates little grace for those who see things differently. The disorder has been present for many years and it will not be eradicated in a few months. By God's grace we will come together to fulfill the mission to which all in the Presbytery of Detroit have been called.

AC Gratitude and Request:

We thank you for and continue to solicit your prayers for discernment and wisdom,

Jesse MacMillan, Moderator

Alice McCollum

Jeanne Gay

Robert

Sullivan Jim

Wilson

Cal Bremer, Clerk

ADJOURNMENT AND PRAYER: As there was no other business to address, the moderator,

Rev. Sandy Seaton-Todd declared the meeting adjourned at 6:03 p.m. and closed the meeting in prayer.

Respectfully submitted,

Fran Lane-Lawrence

Rev. Fran Lane-Lawrence
Stated Clerk

THIS ENDS THE MINUTES OF THE SYNOD ASSEMBLY OF JANUARY 31, 2022

**The Next Synod Assembly is scheduled for
May 7, 2024 at 4:30 p.m. via Zoom**



The Synod of the Covenant
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)