

Reflections on the Meeting of the Synod of Living Waters, January 24, 2022

Thank you to the Presbytery of Transylvania for appointing me to participate in the Synod of Living Waters annual meeting. I worked as contract staff for the Synod of Lincoln Trails for many years. I appreciate the role that synods play in our denomination.

This meeting was to be a hybrid. I predict hybrid meetings will evolve and be commonplace. First Presbyterian Church in Maysville is making that a priority this spring. But it was not to be. The 25 commissioners, 17 corresponding members, and five visiting members were all on Zoom.

I agree with the Synod's Stated Clerk that "the heart of the meeting was the greetings from General Assembly representatives and Covenant partners." Forthwith:

- Eighty-four congregations in our Synod have committed to being Matthew 25 entities.
- Representatives from the Synod's covenant partners at Tusculum College, Rhodes College, Stillman College, and Maryville College passionately delivered detailed reports.

The Budget and Finance Committee went next, reporting the good news that "the Synod remains in a very positive financial position."

I was glad to hear that Living Waters for the World (LWW), celebrating its 29th year, is doing well. Maysville Presbyterian installed a water purification system in the Yucatan in 2019 with LWW. Executive Director Steve Young shared a video that you can view at the link <https://vimeo.com/lwwmission/lightoftheworld>.

- The Rev. Allison Wehrung reported on UKirk. I was surprised the University of Pikeville is the only UKirk in the Presbytery.
- Jan Albert, Synod Moderator of Presbyterian Woman, announced that the summer 2022 Triennium would be held virtually.
- The Synod concurred with a commissioner resolution to the General Assembly from The Presbytery of Mid Kentucky to reinstate the position of Parish Associate to the Book of Order.
- The Synod meeting offering of \$1,400 went for the Presbytery of Western Kentucky's tornado relief efforts. You may send additional gifts to the Presbytery of Western Kentucky at PO Box 624, Hopkinsville, KY 42241.

After approximately two hours, the meeting was adjourned with prayer.

Cheers,

Jim Dougans

Commissioned Pastor

First Presbyterian Church, Maysville

Gratitude, Adaptation, and Inspiration!
Highlights from the Meeting of the Synod of Living Waters, January 24, 2022

Once again, the careful planning for a hybrid meeting of the Synod was scuttled out of an abundance of love and caution due to the current covid surge. Still, the meeting's 50 participants gathered virtually to worship together, support each other, and do the business of the church. After a joyful time of meeting old friends and new in our little zoom squares, the meeting was called to order by Moderator Susan Sumrall and prayer was offered by the Rev. Charlie Evans.

Our worship began with music by Rev. Will Berger on the piano. His lively rendition of the classic spiritual "I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me" set the tone both for worship and the meeting as a whole. The Rev. Greg Bentley, Co-Moderator of the General Assembly and pastor in Huntsville, AL, brought a powerful message based on Psalm 1 in which he invited us all to expand our view of blessing by remembering that blessing is tied to behavior, to our state of being and our commitment to belonging. Using the rich imagery of the Psalm, Rev. Bentley encouraged us to plant ourselves deeply into our Source and practice being "peace like a river in the midst of the mess."

Moderator Sumrall's report gave thanks for the creativity and perseverance of the leaders of the Synod who consistently found ways forward in uncharted pandemic territory. Stated Clerk Charlie Evans reported that all presbytery minutes had been reviewed and approved without exception. He thanked each presbytery clerk for his/her careful attention to their record keeping. Our Synod Executive, the Rev. Greg Goodwiller added his thanks to those of earlier speakers for the flexibility and adaptability of Synod leaders. He reminded us that the last-minute change to a fully virtual meeting, while disappointing, also gave leaders a chance to practice new skills and hold plans with an open hand. Even unanticipated 'tech pauses' gave us a chance to give thanks.

The heart of the meeting was the greetings from General Assembly representatives and Covenant partners. Mr. William McConnell of the General Assembly Mission Agency reported that 936 congregations nationwide, 74 presbyteries, 10 synods and 51 other groups, including 84 congregations in our synod, have committed to being Matthew 25 entities. This churchwide initiative was adopted by the General Assembly in 2016 and 2018. Based on Jesus' teaching on the Judgment of the Nations in Matthew 25:31-46, this commitment has three foci: 1. Building congregational vitality, 2. Dismantling systemic racism and 3. Eradicating systemic poverty. He pointed us to new resources for understanding and interpreting General Assembly per capita giving which will remain the same this year as last at \$8.98 per member. Resources are available at <https://pcusa.org/>. He also shared with us a new and streamlined process for supporting mission co-workers around the world. He encouraged us to pray for our mission co-workers and to use the consolidated fund D500115 to make gifts to support them. Gifts may be made in honor of particular mission co-workers, if desired. He reiterated that the work of our mission co-workers is the responsibility of the whole church and thanked us for our ongoing support.

Board of Pensions Representative Keenan Rogers shared a number of updates to our pensions and insurance programs including expanded assistance programs for members in need, debt relief for pastors, increased access to counseling services and a new care navigation network <https://www.pensions.org/your-path-to-wholeness/care-navigation> to help members more easily find needed care. New insurance cards will be mailed in March and new services available April one. These services are provided with no increase in dues. Details are available on the Board of Pensions website and representatives are available to answer questions.

Gratitude, adaptation, and passion were the themes of reports from our covenant partners at Tusculum College, Rhodes College, Stillman College and Maryville College. We met college presidents, deans, chaplains, and faculty members and heard how each is meeting the challenges of educating students in a time of pandemic. Each institution reported inspiring resiliency, gratitude for partnerships with synod and local congregations, and unwavering commitment to their students, faculty, and staff. Each had a celebration to share from **Tusculum's** annual theme of 'With all your heart, mind and strength' and it's new wellness center, to **Rhodes'** commitment to inclusivity and helping students ask daring questions as they find their place in the world, to **Stillman's** celebration of a new president, dedication to its historic Presbyterian roots, and the conversion of the Hallie Paxson Winsborough residence hall into a new residential community for seniors that will include intergenerational learning opportunities for both students and residents, to **Maryville College's** commitment to student health by requiring vaccinations, experiencing increased enrollment and increases in funding. Please continue to pray for and support these vital ministries. Synod's Covenant Relations Committee is working on new and updated covenant agreements with our partners.

The Rev. Wayne Steele, chair of the Budget and Finance Committee, introduced Carie Turner to walk us through the budget. A review of accounts has been completed and accounts found in order. She presented the balanced Budget for 2022 and highlighted a few changes from last year including a modest 6% cost of living increase for staff, and an increase in the line item for the popular Leadership Formation program set up to assist and train new presbytery executives. We continue to include significant support for campus ministries. The Synod remains in a very positive financial position. Copies of the budget are always available to any who desire a closer look.

The Rev. Lina Hart reporting for the Communications and Technology Team, highlighted plans to launch a Virtual Voice digital newsletter and the distribution of \$255, 000 in funds to support presbyteries and their congregations to update technology skills and infrastructure.

Living Waters for the World, celebrating its 29th year, gave thanks for the years of synod support for this life saving ministry and shared an inspiring video that is available for use in congregations at the link <https://vimeo.com/lwwmission/lightoftheworld>.

The Rev. Allison Wehrung, Campus pastor at UKirk Ole Miss, and Board Member for the national UKirk network, thanked participants for the creative ways that congregations have found to support students. She pointed us to worship resources to help congregations plan for College and Young Adult Sunday <https://ukirk.org/>. She urged us to get involved and to let campus ministries know

of students from our congregations who will be attending college so that ministries can reach out to them.

Jan Albert, Synod Moderator of Presbyterian Woman, announced that the summer 2022 Triennium will be held virtually. Updates will follow. She reminded us that, whether or not active in local programming, every woman who is a member of a Presbyterian Church is a Presbyterian Woman and encouraged all to take advantage of the organization's ministries.

The Presbytery of Mid Kentucky asked that we concur in a commissioner resolution to the General Assembly to reinstate the position of Parish Associate to the Book of Order. The language offered would give an ecclesiastical standard and consistency to help presbyteries appropriately use the gifts and skills of members to serve churches in need of pastoral support. Motion carried without objection. A copy of the motion is available in the minutes.

The Synod meeting offering was designated for the Presbytery of Western Kentucky's tornado relief efforts. The Rev. Charlie Evans of Bowling Green announced that communities affected by the devastating tornadoes are grateful for, and still in need of, help with recovery. Not only were churches damaged or destroyed, many members' homes and farms were heavily damaged as well. Additional gifts may be sent to the Presbytery of Western Kentucky at PO Box 624, Hopkinsville, KY 42241.

The meeting was adjourned with prayer. The Synod will meet next on January 30, 2023.