

**Minutes of the Called Meeting of the Session
Westlake Hills Presbyterian Church
August 2, 2011**

Members present were:

Rev. Dr. Peter Barnes
Alex Allemann
Laurence Ligon
Ray Mashburn
Julie Smith
Wally Warrenburg

Rev. Dr. Carol Friesen
Betty Hood
Jim Little
Mary Mills
Mike Ussery
Weldon Whiteside

Rev. Peter Haas
Barbra Humphrey
Liza Martin
Dennis Pauling
Mike Ward
Fred Wilder

Guests: Rev. Dr. Jim Bankhead and Rev. Amy Hanschen

Members excused: Drew Beckley, Mike Douglas, Sheryl Streder-Becker, Phil Haag, Jim Johnson, and Rick Milvenan

Dr. Barnes called the meeting to order.

Season of Prayer:

Dr. Barnes began by reading a passage from Ephesians, inviting members of the Session to offer prayers to open the meeting. Rev. Jim Bankhead, followed by other members of the Session who also responded.

Prayer and Revelation:

Dr. Barnes asked the Session members to reflect on one thing that the Lord has revealed to him or her in the last month during the period of discernment, and most of the members of the Session shared their reflections.

A Report on the Listening Session:

The Moderator then asked for a report on the listening sessions that had been held over the past few weeks. The following summarizes observations from several Elders who had attended them.

- The first two sessions were more contentious than the last two; they had a “partisan” character, as people voiced their views regarding the acceptance of gay and lesbian life styles. And these two sessions were attended by many of the same people.

- A number of Elders agreed that the observations provided by Phil Haag's email summarizing his observations were consistent with their own.¹ The process of listening and responding has been very important.
- People were concerned that the Session was rushing to an August decision, and appear to be relieved that the decision process will take more time.
- The Session's commitment to transparency and communication was very welcome.
- The blog by Susan Whiteside has been very much appreciated.
- People seem to realize how the decisions facing the Session are very difficult and have expressed their appreciation regardless of their views.
- There is an expressed desire on the part of a number of people to have more theological education; to have a public panel or other venue where the pastors and others can speak to the theological arguments supporting both sides of the issue.
- Several Session members agreed that the Session itself needed guidance on key issues of scripture that continue to arise in the debate.

Commitment to Provide Theological Education on the Ordination Issue:

Dr. Barnes offered to be sure the congregation had an opportunity to participate in a theological discussion of the Biblical interpretation supporting both sides of the ordination debate. This could be in the form of a Sunday school class or other venue.

A Report on the Meeting with Representatives of Presbytery:

Dr. Barnes opened the discussion of the recent meeting with representatives of Mission Presbytery. He expressed gratitude to Rob Mueller, the moderator of the presbytery, for his leadership in organizing and leading the meeting. Attending for Mission Presbytery were members of the General Council, several trustees, the executive presbyter and the stated clerk. Others attending the meeting included representatives from WHPC and six other churches, which are in discussion about the concept of an "overlay" presbytery.

At Dr. Barnes' request, Amy Hanschen gave a summary of the meeting. A total of 23 persons attended, and the meeting lasted about 3 hours. The conversation was very cordial, informative, and constructive. Larry Coulter, pastor of Sheppard of the Hills, made a key point by noting that people who objected to the new ordination standards "need a place to stand." Rev. Joseph Kim of the Austin Korean Presbyterian Church made a very moving appeal for relief of conscience, since members of his congregation have been "attacked" by other Korean protestant churches because of the actions of the PC(USA). He noted that his congregation could affiliate with a non-geographical Korean language presbytery, but he would prefer not to follow that course. Amy noted that Peter Barnes briefly characterized the work of WHPC as "ongoing" and that no decisions have been reached by our Session. The nine options, as developed by our Denominational Relations Committee, were presented and each of them briefly discussed. There was some surprise that

¹ A copy of the email is attached and made a part of the minutes.

WHPC had not made a decision, and some appreciation expressed for the amount of work that had been done in identifying the options available to congregations in responding to the new standards. Peter Barnes, Larry Coulter, Karl Slaikeu, and Amy Hanschen will be part of the team helping to plan the next meeting with Mission Presbytery representatives, now scheduled for August 30.

Peter Haas, who was also at the meeting as a member of the General Council, noted that Miles White, the Stated Clerk, was very helpful in responding to a question about the authority of local churches (and other ordaining bodies) to use a conservative interpretation of scripture in evaluating candidates. According to the Stated Clerk, the ordaining body can use any interpretation of scripture as a standard for examination, but it can only be applied in the examination itself. No “separate” standard can be published and applied *a priori* to any class of persons. Anyone must be able to apply.

A Look at the Revised Nine Options:

A revised copy of “Possible Responses to the Passage of Amendment 10-A” containing a list of the nine options was reviewed and briefly discussed by the Session.² Several members of the Session expressed interest in beginning to winnow down the nine to two or three, of which more information may be needed before a decision can be made from among the smaller number.

The discussion turned to the need to keep the congregation informed on the role of WHPC and leadership in the ongoing effort, especially with regard to the idea of an overlay presbytery. It was generally agreed that WHPC, as a large church with substantial resources, has and should be of assistance to others in seeking reconciliation of any critical issue facing the presbytery – such as the possible creation of an overlay presbytery – even if our Session ultimately decided not to become a member thereof. A part of this effort, the Session reaffirmed its commitment to understand what is happening across the country, in part by supporting the trip by Dr. Barnes and others to Minnesota in August. We have an obligation to our denomination to work for gracious solutions to any difficult problem.

Amy Hanschen handed out memos providing summary information on the Evangelical Presbyterian Church and the Reformed Church in America, which were identified as reformed bodies in correspondence with the PC(USA), as requested by the Session.³ Information on the Cumberland Presbyterian Church is forthcoming.

Advise to the Congregational Nominating Committee:

The Session reviewed the current standards followed by the Nominating Committee in its selection and recommendation of church officers. These currently include, among others: attendance, giving, and affirming the ordination vows. In addition, we require one-year lapse between service on the deaconate and nomination to the Session; a one-term limit on each entity; neither church staff nor immediate family members of current officers or members of the Congregational Nominating

² A copy of the revised list of options is attached.

³ Copies of the two memos are attached.

Committee are eligible; divorce is not a disqualification; and persons must be members for at least 2 years.

There was discussion about further amending these requirements, especially those relating to terms of office, but no action was taken. The Session concluded that no additional standards were necessary at this time, instructing the Congregational Nominating Committee to proceed as usual.

Discussion to Define a Process Forward:

The Session discussed how to move forward, now that the listening sessions were complete. Some consensus developed around the need to reduce the nine options to a more workable number and to collect additional information (including the trip to Minneapolis and from Mission Presbytery). Other thoughts included perhaps using the Preferred Path approach within the Session itself to “drill down” into these options, to define a period of continuing prayer and discernment, and to set a date for making a decision.

The Denomination Relations Committee will be asked to develop an understanding of the possible “outcomes” of the various options as part of the information gathering process.

Communications and Matters of Record:

A motion was received and approved to ratify the actions of Elders Mike Ussery, Alex Allemann, Liza Martin, and Betty Hood in examining and receiving the following new members on July 31, 2011. Each of these prospective members responded affirmatively to the questions of membership in the Book of Order.⁴

By Reaffirmation of Faith:

Alexis and Chris Guggenheim
Susanna and David Neahusan
Heidi and Charlie Rasner
Nicole Ruiz

By Certificate of Transfer:

Peggy and Ben Alexander
Rebeka and Paul Bonde
Marie and Thomas Jeah
Bill and Jo Laughlin
Amy Paylor
Charlie Sack

By Profession of Faith (already Baptized):

Morgan and Kyle Bender

⁴ A copy of the motion is attached as part of the minutes.

The Meeting Adjourned with Small Groups in Prayer:

Members of the Session broke up into to pairs to pray for the work of the Session, our congregation, and the larger church.

Respectfully submitted,

Phil Barnes
Clerk of the Session