



Siblings in Christ,

Happy New Year! As I am writing this letter, I am looking out the window at a snowy yard. If the weather reports are true, there is more snow on the way. My daughter has been in heaven. She was so excited about sledding the other night that she had trouble sleeping. Add in at least one snow day, so far, and it has been a good week for her. It is especially exciting because we haven't had snow in over two years. New weather patterns developed that created the right combination of moisture and temperature for snow.

Isn't it amazing how introducing a new pattern can completely shift the outlook of something. There has been a lot of articles recently about the state of the church. It seems that every day there is a new article about pastorless congregations, why clergy are leaving ministry, the nones and dones, or the great de-churching. There is certainly value in these articles, but I would suggest the church isn't dying, it is changing. We are always reformed, always being reformed by the Holy Spirit! Just like the weather, in any organization, including the church, new patterns can completely shift the outlook of something!

What new patterns are emerging in the church? What patterns are we creating to faithfully follow Christ as we move into the future? At our meeting next Tuesday, January 23rd, we will take a look at what some of those patterns may be. We will consider a motion that will allow Clarendon Presbyterian Church to enter into redevelopment, transforming their property to better serve both the community and the congregation. Refer to Report #4: Clarendon Redevelopment Packet which includes a video outlining their process. We will also be voting on creating an Administrative Commission to assist Warner Memorial Presbyterian as they move into the future. We will see a new pattern of enabling equipped people to serve the church more expediently, when we consider a motion from the CPM to expedite the ordination process for two candidates, as well as another motion for an exception allowing Rev. Rachel Vaagenes to transition from Stated Supply to Installed. Finally, with all these patterns emerging, Bills and Overtures see the need for wisdom as we guide the church and has proposed adding "wisdom" to W-4.0404h in the Book of Order.

We should not ignore the warning signs about the church that have been ignored for too long. We also shouldn't spend our time wringing our hands. The church has not always looked like it does today and it will not always look this way. We should put in the hard work of praying, discerning God's will for our congregations and the greater churches, and look for the patterns that emerge and determine if they are assisting or detracting from the mission of the church. We also need to look for patterns that need to emerge to create positive change.

Romans 12:2: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God-- what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Faithfully,

Chris Deacon

Moderator, National Capital Presbytery

**Stated Meeting
National Capital Presbytery
January 23, 2024
6:00PM via Zoom
We Gather in Community**

- 6:00 PM CALL TO ORDER Rev. Dr. Chris Deacon, Moderator
- OPENING PRAYER AND DEVOTION Rev. Juli Wilson-Black & Rev. Carla Gorrell, Co-Chairs
Commission on Ministry
- 6:05 PM FORMATION OF THE ROLL, DOCKET, OMNIBUS MOTION (p. 3) Rev. David Baer, Stated Clerk
- 6:10 PM TRANSITIONS / PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION Rev. John Molina-Moore,
General Presbyter
- 6:20 PM CELEBRATION OF LAJUAN QUANDER’S 40 YEARS OF SERVICE Rev. John Molina-Moore
- 6:30 PM LEADERSHIP COUNCIL – CLARENDON REDEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL (p. 4)
Elder Miriam Dewhurst, Chair
- 6:50 PM COMMISSION ON MINISTRY (p. 5 & p. 6) Rev. Carla Gorrell & Rev. Juli Wilson-Black, Co-Chairs
- 7:10 PM COMMISSION ON PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY (p. 8) Rev. Megan Klose, Chair
- 7:20 PM COMMITTEE ON BILLS AND OVERTURES (p. 9) Elder Mark Eakin, Chair
- 7:35 PM NEW BUSINESS Rev. Dr. Chris Deacon, Moderator
- 7:40 PM CHARGE AND BLESSING Rev. Dr. Chris Deacon, Moderator

Meeting Leaders

Rev. David A. Baer, Stated Clerk
Rev. Dr. Chris Deacon, Moderator
Elder Miriam Dewhurst, Leadership Council Chair
Elder Lou Durden, NCP Vice Moderator
Elder Mark Eakin, Bills and Overtures Committee Chair
Rev. Carla Gorrell, Commission on Ministry Co-Chair
Rev. Megan Klose, Commission on Preparation for Ministry Chair
Rev. John Molina-Moore, General Presbyter
Rev. Juli Wilson-Black, Commission on Ministry Co-Chair

*This document, the Packet, contains the **action items** for the Stated Meeting.
Please refer to the additional reports posted on the NCP web site
for important information about the work of our officers and committees.*

OMNIBUS MOTION FOR THE JANUARY 23, 2024, PRESBYTERY MEETING

From the Stated Clerk

- The Stated Clerk recommends the **APPROVAL** of the minutes of the November 14, 2023, NCP meeting.
- The Stated Clerk recommends that the decision of the Permanent Judicial Commission of the Synod of the Mid-Atlantic in the matter of *Rev. Dr. Willie J. Keaton Jr. vs. National Capital Presbytery*, included in the Stated Clerk's report, be **SPREAD** upon the minutes of the Presbytery.
- The Stated Clerk recommends that the Presbytery **ACCEPT** the resignation of the Rev. Hope Lee from Leadership Council, effective January 6, 2024.
- The Stated Clerk recommends that, in accordance with the *Book of Order* G-2.0404, the Presbytery **GRANT** a waiver of officer term limits to the Church of the Redeemer, upon their written request, so that the following officers may be eligible to serve an additional 3-year term:
 - Elder Michelle Cole
 - Elder Nichelle Lenhardt
 - Elder Kevin Moore
 - Deacon Cynthia Payne-Johnson

From the Nominating Committee

The Nominating Committee places the following names in nomination for election:

Administrative Commission on Congregational Property

Madison Kloster (Ruling Elder, Lewinsville), Class of 2025

Church Development Commission

Casey Wait (Teaching Elder, John Calvin), Class of 2025

Committee on Ministry

Susan Graceson (Teaching Elder, Rockville), Class of 2026

Leadership Council

Mary Rodgers (Teaching Elder, Providence), Class of 2026

Permanent Judicial Commission

Cathy Saunders (Ruling Elder, Lewinsville), Class of 2029

Ed Taylor (Teaching Elder, Honorably Retired), Class of 2029

ACTION ITEMS FOR JANUARY 23, 2024 NCP MEETING

ACTION ITEM #1

Report of the Leadership Council

Motion: that the Presbytery **APPROVE** Clarendon Presbyterian Church's conveyance of their worship and non-worship property located at 1301 and 1305 North Jackson Street, 1308 North Irving Street, and four lots with no assigned street addresses on North Irving Street, Arlington, VA to Arlington Partnership for Affordable Housing or its assigns (APAH) for the price of \$7,820,000.00 for purpose of developing the property in accordance with the terms presented in the Letter of Intent considered at the December 21, 2023 and January 4, 2024 ACCP meetings.

Further request that this approval authorize officer(s) of National Capital Presbytery Inc. to sign and execute all documents related to this conveyance (including contracts, closing documents, etc.) provided there are no material changes to their content. Leadership Council through the Administrative Commission on Congregational Property will serve as the reviewing body on final documentation.

For the rationale and further information, including the Letter of Intent, please see the background and summary document included with the reports posted to the NCP web site.

ACTION ITEM #2

Commission on Ministry

The Commission on Ministry **MOVES** that the Presbytery **ESTABLISH** an administrative commission for Warner Memorial Presbyterian Church. This commission shall have the following powers and responsibilities:

1. To visit the Session of Warner Memorial Presbyterian Church, inquiring into reported difficulties affecting the ability of the Session to govern the congregation, acting as a mediator and counsellor (G-3.0303d).
2. To exercise the authority of the presbytery to direct the Session to meet (G-3.0203), and to call a meeting of the congregation (G-1.0502). The Commission may exercise this authority for any appropriate purpose as it may determine, but it is anticipated in particular that the Commission will need to call a congregational meeting to elect officers, if the Session is unable to do so.
3. To assume original jurisdiction from the Session, in accordance with Book of Order G-3.0303e, if the Commission determines, after a thorough investigation, and after full opportunity to be heard has been accorded to the Session, that the Session is not able to exercise its authority. In the event that it assumes original jurisdiction, the Commission shall exercise the full powers of the Session, but should work diligently to provide for the election, training, and ordination/installation of new elders, with the aim of returning jurisdiction to a reconstituted Session.
4. To assist the Session in developing proposed revisions to the congregational bylaws for approval by the congregation.

The Commission shall consist of shall consist of at least five and no more than seven members, divided as nearly equally as possible between teaching elders and ruling elders. The Moderator of the Presbytery shall appoint the members of the Commission, including the chair.

Rationale: In November the co-chairs of the Commission on Ministry were made aware that the Session of Warner Memorial Presbyterian Church was on the verge of not being able to function, due to a lack of members. At a recent congregational meeting, the nominating committee did not bring forward any nominees for the Session. A number of those current Session members whose terms were expiring, but who were eligible to serve another term, declined to be nominated. Unless the congregation acts to correct the situation, as of the end of January 2024, the membership of the Session will consist of only one active elder and the installed pastor.

When a session's numbers are so greatly reduced that it is unable to function, the intervention of the presbytery is required, even for the purpose of calling a congregational meeting to elect elders, which is a necessary step in resolving the situation.

ACTION ITEM #3

Commission on Ministry

MOTION: The Commission on Ministry, pursuant to Book of Order G-2.0504(c) and the Presbytery's Policy on Changes in Pastoral Roles within a Congregation, recommends that the Presbytery **GRANT** an **EXCEPTION** to allow the Rev. Rachel Landers Vaagenes, who is currently serving as a Stated Supply Pastor at Capitol Hill Presbyterian Church, to be eligible to be called and installed as Pastor.

Rationale: The Book of Order recognizes the special role played by ministers in temporary pastoral relationships, as they work with congregations through periods of transition, and accordingly provides that "[a] minister of Word and Sacrament in a temporary pastoral relationship is *ordinarily* not eligible to serve as the next installed pastor, co-pastor, or associate pastor" (G-2.0504(b), emphasis added). Nonetheless, our polity also recognizes that in certain circumstances, the mission of the church may be better served by allowing a minister serving in a temporary pastoral relationship to make a transition to an installed pastoral relationship. Therefore, G-2.0504(c) allows a presbytery to grant an exception to the ordinary practice, with the approval of at least three quarters of those present and voting.

National Capital Presbytery's Policy on Changes in Pastoral Roles within a Congregation establishes a process whereby a minister in a temporary pastoral relationship who feels called to move to an installed position in the same congregation can work with both the COM and the session to discern whether such a move is appropriate. The minister begins by discussing the transition with representatives of the COM. The Congregational Transitions Commission (CTC), if it approves, then grants permission for the session of the church to begin a period of discernment with the congregation, guided by a number of key questions. If, following the period of discernment, the session wishes to proceed with the transition in role for the minister, it notifies the CTC, which brings the matter to the presbytery for approval under G-2.0504(c).

In 2021, Rev. Vaagenes was called to CHPC as a two-year Designated Pastor. In the salary negotiations, she and CHPC agreed that she would not initially take the Board of Pensions health insurance mandated for installed pastors. They did this with the misunderstanding that a Designated pastor is not initially installed. When the Board of Pensions notified them of the error and billed them for the medical dues, they received COM guidance and approval to shift Rev. Vaagenes' status to Temporary Stated Supply in order to be in compliance with Board of Pensions requirements.

Now that over two years have passed and the church is in a position to pay the Board of Pensions medical dues, the congregation and Rev. Vaagenes both feel called to make this an installed position, as originally intended.

Following conversation between Rev. Vaagenes and representatives of the CTC, the session of Capitol Hill Presbyterian was granted permission to begin its discernment with the congregation, and has affirmed its sense that the pastoral relationship is positive and fruitful, and should transition to the open-ended installed relationship that was the outcome envisioned when Rev. Vaagenes was called as designated pastor.

Accordingly, the COM recommends that the presbytery grant this exception to the ordinary rule governing eligibility for installed service.

ACTION ITEM #4

Commission on Preparation for Ministry

Motion #1: The Commission on Preparation for Ministry moves that Luke Bultena (Trinity Arlington) be allowed to be enrolled as an Inquirer in the expedited process, effective November 13, 2023, according to the Book of Order G-2.0610: *“When a presbytery concludes there are good and sufficient reasons for accommodations to the particular circumstances of an individual seeking ordination, it may, by a three-fourths vote, waive any of the requirements for ordination in G-2.06, except for those of G-2.0607d [ordination exams].”* The expedited process simply removes the 2-year time requirement (G-2.0602).

Rationale: Luke Bultena completed his MDiv at Princeton in 2023. He completed his CPE at Washington Hospital Center. Luke has already completed his psych evaluation and passed the Bible Content Exam. He preaches and leads ministry in his home church, Trinity Pres, in Arlington, VA. He currently works as program associate for a democracy-building organization and feels called to congregational ministry.

Motion #2: The Commission on Preparation for Ministry moves that A.R. (Flanny) Flanigan (Church of the Pilgrims) be allowed to enter the expedited process, effective November 9, 2023, according to the Book of Order G-2.0610 *“When a presbytery concludes there are good and sufficient reasons for accommodations to the particular circumstances of an individual seeking ordination, it may, by a three-fourths vote, waive any of the requirements for ordination in G-2.06, except for those of G-2.0607d [ordination exams].”* The expedited process simply removes the 2-year time requirement (G-2.0602).

Rationale: Flanny Flanagan completed their MDiv at Vanderbilt in 2020 and passed the Bible Content Exam in 2023. Flanny’s ministerial experience includes a seminary internship at Second Presbyterian Church in Nashville; PCUSA Young Adult Volunteer internship in the Philippines 2016-17; CPE internship at St. Elizabeth’s Hospital 2020-21; and resident chaplaincy at Georgetown University since 2021. Flanny is a Ruling Elder at Church of the Pilgrims in DC and works in that church’s food insecurity ministry.

ACTION ITEM #5

Bills and Overtures Committee

The Committee on Bills and Overtures **MOVES** that the Presbytery **OVERTURE** the General Assembly to ADOPT the amendment to the Book of Order found below with accompanying rationale.

Background: The Bills and Overtures Committee received the proposed amendment and accompanying rationale from the Session of the First United Presbyterian Church of Dale City, which adopted a resolution urging the Presbytery to send it to the General Assembly for consideration. An overture from a presbytery requires a concurrence, and it is expected that the Presbytery of the James will take up the same amendment at its February Stated Meeting, at the request of the Session of Culpeper Presbyterian Church.

Amendments to the Book of Order require the approval of the General Assembly, and the subsequent approval of a majority of the presbyteries of the PCUSA.

Wisdom Overture

W-4.0404h

Will you pray for and seek to serve the people with *wisdom*, energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?

Rationale:

James 1:5 “If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you.”

While Presbyterians have historically placed a high value on education and intelligence, church officers are now called to lead in a context for which very few have had adequate training. Knowledge of best practices and techniques are only beginning to emerge, and even the most intelligent among us are struggling to adapt to the changing ministry landscape. Many well meaning and intelligently developed church strategies are proving woefully insufficient in the wake of the pandemic and the other cultural shifts that have emerged and accelerated over the past five years.

Scripture offers us another leadership gift: wisdom. “How much better to get wisdom than gold! To get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver,” (Proverbs 16:16). Wisdom allows us to discern what God is doing in the world, and how we can faithfully follow. During times of cultural upheaval, it becomes essential. As the church desires “to joyfully submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life” (G-2.0104b), we acknowledge that human knowledge and strategy have limits. Adding wisdom to the list of gifts with which our leaders seek to serve the people is an expression of discipleship. It teaches leaders in the church to integrate God’s gifts of knowledge, experience, and faith into an understanding not only of what is possible, but also what is faithful. Wisdom, in scripture and in the life of the Church, seeks to understand what God is doing in the world and to put that experience of grace into practice.

The ministries of church officers (compassion and service, discernment and governance, teaching and pastoral care,) are not once-for-all-time achievements awarded at the completion of a period of study and preparation or conferred in an ordination service. They are ongoing acts of discipleship. Asking our leaders to pray for and serve the people with wisdom, as well as energy, intelligence, imagination, and love, emphasizes the lifelong growth in ministry which is essential for faithful leadership of the people in God's changing world.