Synod of Lakes and Prairies

meeting summary


The Synod Meeting Summary is an unofficial report of synod actions published shortly after each meeting of the Synod of Lakes of Prairies. Comments regarding the publication or requests for copies should be addressed to dsweep@lakesandprairies.org.

Synod fetes Phil Brown with retirement event at fall meeting

The Synod of Lakes and Prairies played host to a reception, dinner and program Sept. 30 to recognize the service of the Rev. Phil Brown, who will retire Oct. 31 after serving as synod executive since 2004.

The program included Brown’s sons, father-in-law, colleagues and friends.

“A lot of questions have been posed to us over the last year since dad decided to retire this year,” said Brown’s son Ian.

“Being the proactive sons that dad taught us to be, we decided to sign him up for a few club memberships,” Ian said.

Sons Jess and Ian told stories of their father that fit well with “memberships” in several clubs, including, among others, the Lumberjack Society, Meetings Anonymous and Frugal Fathers of America.

Bob Cuthill, a former executive of the synod who had mentored Brown in executive leadership, told of Brown’s move from congregations to mid-council staff positions. “I have the honor,” he said, “of being told by his mother, ‘You took my son out of the ministry.’”

After being ordained in 1969, Brown served congregations in Colorado and Illinois before serving as associate and then executive in the Presbytery of Great Rivers, located in west-central Illinois, for 18 years. He served eight years as executive of the Presbytery of Milwaukee before serving the synod.

Several speakers highlighted Brown’s commitment to service leadership and relationship building, two hallmarks of his ministry.

(See “Retirement,” Page 2)
Synod Personnel Committee votes to make transitional exec full time

The Personnel Committee of the Synod of Lakes and Prairies voted to make the transitional synod executive position — the position for which a search is underway — a full-time call.

The committee also appointed Jay Wilkinson, the synod’s stated clerk and treasurer, as acting head of staff. The committee’s appointment extends to the period between Executive Phil Brown’s retirement Oct. 31 to the start date of the transitional synod executive.

Brown calls on synod to maintain, improve presbytery relationships

Synod Executive Phil Brown, who will retire at the end of October, called on the synod to continue its “commitment to walk along with our 16 presbyteries to discover what partnership means.”

Speaking of church and the future, Brown said, “If we’re anticipating anything other than change, we are wrong.”

And he stressed the necessity of relationships, urging the synod to be active in “building our relationships with each other.” He added, “There is nothing else that is going to hold us together … as faithful people of God.”

Brown addressed synod commissioners Monday morning, Oct. 1, when he presented his last report to the full body of the synod as its executive.

Brown said, “Our staff is well equipped to walk along with and to think out loud with” our presbyteries during what he called a time of “turmoil” for the church, society and the world.

Peacemaking offering used 3 ways

The Synod of Lakes and Prairies designated its accrued receipts from the Special Offering for Peacemaking to support Dakota Presbytery’s participation in the sesquicentennial (150th year) observation of the hanging of 38 Dakota warriors in Mankato, Minn., and to support the Living Waters for the World project.

The synod approved up to $5,000 for Dakota Presbytery. Earlier this year the synod approved $4,000 for the multi-synod project of just.good.food.

Remaining receipts, totaling $10,800, will go to Living Waters for the World.

The total represents two year’s accumulation of the Peacekeeping Offering. Receipts from last year’s offering and unused funds from the current year are ordinarily returned to General Assembly unless peacekeeping projects are identified.

Retirement — (from Page 1)

Facing retirement, Brown said that rather than giving advice he has noticed that he has been receiving advice. He recounted one piece of advice, “One word you really need to be aware of, and the word is, ‘yes,’ and what you need to be aware of is, ‘never use it.’”

Brown had asked that gifts be directed to work of Presbyterian Homes & Services, Hillcrest Family Services or Presbyterian Clearwater Forest. Total contributions to the efforts of those three entities amounted to more than $4,000.

Synod helps new church development

The Synod of Lakes and Prairies is helping a new church development grow into its purpose statement.

The Rev. Paul Moore, pastor of Chain of Lakes Church in Blaine, Minn., said his congregation, which started with seven families, now numbers about 40 — two-thirds of whom had no connection to a faith community.

“Every decision we make is based on our purpose statement,” he said, noting the congregation is “called to be an authentic Christian community where strangers become friends, friends become disciples and disciples impact the world.”

The congregation recently purchased property in growing residential area that has no other church facility.

“The synod,” Moore said, “was a key part in doing that,” pointing out a loan and new church development grant.

“When we can live into [our] purpose statement and when other people know us by this, then we know that we are being successful,” Moore said.
Synod o.k.’s 2 projects

The Synod of Lakes and Prairies, at its fall meeting, approved funds for two transformation projects, providing grants that will total $34,000. One grant, totaling $10,000 for 2013 and 2014, funds a Barnabas Leadership project for the Quad Presbyteries of Central Nebraska, Homestead, Missouri River Valley and Prospect Hill. A Barnabas Leadership project is designed to increase the leadership capacity throughout the presbyteries.

The synod also approved $24,000, paid over two years, to the Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area for transformation work.

Synod elects Anthony moderator, Stafford elected vice-moderator

The Synod of Lakes and Prairies elected the Rev. Stephanie Anthony to succeed the Rev. Scott Prouty as moderator, beginning with the spring meeting in 2013. Anthony currently serves as vice moderator.

The synod also elected Ruling Elder Bill Stafford, from the Presbytery of Milwaukee, to be installed as vice moderator at the spring meeting.

Anthony is pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Hudson, Wis., in the Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area. She has served in that capacity since 2008. She has also been a commissioner to the synod since 2009, serving on the Program Coordination Committee.

Anthony and her husband, Phillip, have three children, Karoline, 7, William, 5, and Margaret, 2.

Stafford has been a commissioner to the synod since 2009 and is currently serving on the session at Immanuel Presbyterian Church, Milwaukee. He also serves on the synod’s Program Coordination Committee.

Stafford recently served as a member of the General Assembly’s Mid-Councils Commission.

He and his wife, Elizabeth “Bonnie,” have two adult children and two grandchildren.

Madagascar peacemaker seeks active peace

The Rev. Hubert Rakotoarivony, an international peacemaker from Madagascar, told synod commissioners Monday of the crisis that continues to cause “economic hardship and denial of basic human rights” in his home country following a military-backed coup in 2009.

Rakotoarivony said the absence in his country is only a “passive peace.” What’s needed, he said, is an “active peace,” one that provides social justice, equity, dignity, non-discrimination and respect.

Rakotoarivony called on Presbyterians to support, through partnership efforts, the work of the Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar, for which he leads the Commission on the Life of the Country.

“People don’t care how much you know,” he said. “They want to know how much you care.”

Synod acts on Dakota property

The Synod of Lakes and Prairies, acting as an Administrative Commission for Dakota Presbytery property, approved two leases.

The first action approved, in concept, a lease of church land by the United Dakota Church for constructing the Wolf Point Community Cultural Center by the Fort Peck Tribes.

The second action approved, in concept, a lease of the Pine Ridge Retreat Center, located on the property of the Pine Ridge Presbyterian Church, Pine Ridge, S.D., to the South Dakota Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for a period of 50 years.

In both cases, the synod authorized its Finance Committee to work out the final details and give final approval of the leases.
Synod affirms multi-synod Heartland Resource Network

The Synod of Lakes and Prairies affirmed its participation in the Heartland Resource network, a collaboration with the synods of Lincoln Trails and Mid-America.

Representatives of the three synods have met and will continue to meet, looking for ways to work together.

The synod also endorsed the participation of staff and synod moderator in the planning of the network.

just.good.food. strives to use fresh produce to feed the hungry

There is a history throughout the upper Midwest, home to the synods of Lakes and Prairies, Lincoln Trails and Mid-America. It’s a history of agriculture — farming if you will.

But today there are some things more insidious — poverty and hunger.

Sarah Moore-Nokes, associate executive presbyter in Winnebago Presbytery, puts it this way: “We are people who are connected to the land.

... You don’t have to go back too many generations to find the person or family that had been a farmer, who depended on the land he or she worked.”

But there’s the other part. “We are also people with a higher than average poverty rate,” living in a food desert, “where grocery stores are less common than bars.”

Hence, there’s just.good.food., a project for local congregations that leads to collaboration with local organizations to grow and distribute “food to those who do not have enough.”

Moore-Nokes is the catalyst for the project, originally presenting the framework last winter at a meeting of a small group of leaders from the synods.

Starter packets for just.good.food. went in the mail last month to congregations and other organizations who have expressed an interest in participating in the project's pilot year. About 45 congregations across the three synods are on the list of participants.

Congregations participating in the pilot program have committed to receive curriculum, to plant a garden — perhaps a new or existing garden plot or even five-gallon buckets — to grow food for those in need, to distribute food locally through food pantries, community suppers or other similar community efforts, and to report on the success of activities.

While “starter” information has been distributed, interested congregations are able to join the ongoing mission project, just.good.food., at any time.

Congregations that would like to participate in this developing mission should contact Moore-Nokes at sarah@winnebagopresbytery.org, or Duane Sweep, associate for communications in the Synod of Lakes and Prairies, at dsweep@lakesandprairies.org.

College chaplaincies to receive grants

The synod’s Ecclesiastical Relations Committee approved grants of $10,000 to the chaplaincies of each of the seven Presbyterian-related colleges and universities within the synod.

The seven are Buena Vista University, Storm Lake, Iowa; Carroll University, Waukesha, Wis.; Coe College, Cedar Rapids, Iowa; Jamestown (N.D.) College; Macalester College, St. Paul, Minn.; and University of Dubuque, Iowa.

Clearwater Forest gets grant

The synod’s Program Coordination Committee approved a grant of $12,500 to support Clearwater Forest’s “Lead2Serve” program, an applied experience in non-profit organization leadership.

Clearwater Forest is a camp ministry of the synod and presbyteries of Minnesota Valleys, Northern Plains and Northern Waters.

The grant will be paid in 2013.