



**Presbytery Assembly Summary  
First Presbyterian Church, Bluffton, Indiana  
August 5, 2017**

- One Great Hour of Sharing offering -- \$771
- Next meeting Wednesday November 1, Faith Presbyterian Church, Indianapolis

Rev. Carol Pierson welcomed the Presbytery to the church and Bluffton. All the food was from Wells County or nearby areas. Moderator John Paulson, CRE, called the assembly to order with prayer. Commissioners expressed their appreciation for the generous hospitality.

**Quorum and Docket Approval** - Kristy Quinn, Stated Clerk, declared a quorum present. Rev. Hal Thomas presented reports on behalf of Executive Presbyter, Rev. Alan Thames, who was absent due to the death of his father-in-law.

**Stated Clerk's Report** – Kristy Quinn reported the Permanent Judicial Commission received remedial case 2017-01 and that its decision regarding the case was appealed to the Synod. Rev. Kevin Boyd was recognized as the PJC Moderator and Ms. Mary Ruth Snyder was recognized for assistance as the recorder of Presbytery minutes. Presbytery minutes were reviewed by Synod and approved without exception.

**Gratitude was expressed to Rev. Liz Kaznak-Hall**, who graciously preached and assisted with worship when the scheduled guest pastor became ill. The Presbytery Assembly continued its reflection of the Confession of Belhar with this meeting's focus on unity.

**Teaching Elders Transition – Rev. Daren Hofmann, COM**

Rev. Chelsea Benham – Associate, Indianapolis-Irvington    Rev. Bill Lane– Associate, Ft. Wayne-First

**New Ruling Elders were introduced.**

Grace Ft. Wayne	Sue Krieger
First Fort Wayne	Walter Martini
First Fort Wayne	Steve Weisner

**Order of the Day – Daren Hofmann, Committee on Ministry (COM)**

Ordination exam for Ms. Meagan Findeiss, validated ministry, Lake Fellow, Indianapolis-Second. Her ordination examination was sustained by the Presbytery.

**Special Presentation - Ed Dykstra, Stand up for Justice**

A meeting is being planned to discuss how we can better promote justice. Those who are interested were invited to meet during lunch to exchange information and engage in discussion.

**Hispanic Ministry Lead Team – Barry Sumner**

Lauren Rush and Valerie Laganschmidt recently did a women's retreat in Mexico. There were two retreats, one in 2015 and 2017.

A Woman after God's Own Heart was available in Spanish and used for the retreat. Pavel Safadit-Polanco has done a music workshop in the Dominican Republic. He has arranged for four music ministry leaders to come to a performance event with him in Indianapolis. Glenn McDonald's Disciple Making was used for a pastor couple's retreat. Mexican pastors facilitated about 70% of the retreat after spending time in their own leadership training.

**Committee on Representation – Rev. Hal Thomas**

Ruling Elders in particular were asked to consider ways they can bring their talents to the Presbytery and bring back important information and discussions to local congregations. Openings particularly for Ruling Elders: 4 on Council, 1 on COM, 2 on Sexual Misconduct Response Team, 2 on PYOCA, 2 on PJC, 3 on WNM Advisory Committee.

**Coordinating Council – Rev. Shawn Coons**

The First Read of the 2018 Budget Mission was reviewed. There were no questions. The 2018 first read budget was approved.

**Synod of Lincoln Trails (SOLT)– Richard Smith, SOLT Board Member**

The Synod announced it will pay interest from its investments to presbyteries, about 4% of the total funds. A \$10,00 check was presented to the Presbytery by Rev. Richard Smith. This gift is unrestricted. The Presbytery will use this money to support Nueva Creacion's ministry with immigrants.

## **COM Report – Daren Hofmann, COM Chair**

The Presbytery approved the 2018 Minimum Terms of Call - \$47,315, a \$763 (1.6%) increase over 2017. Board of Pensions benefits will be 37%.

The Presbytery approved the transfer of ordination credentials for Rev. Winterbourne Harrison-Jones to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Rev. Winterbourne Harrison-Jones reviewed his faith journey and his call to Witherspoon Presbyterian Church, Indianapolis. Members of Witherspoon were invited to join the Presbytery Assembly in a prayer of celebration and welcome.

### **Highlights of Panel Discussion on Reconciliation – Topic: Fort Wayne and Bluffton Declaration Concerning Welcoming Refugees**

Sister Anita, St. Francis University, Todd Steel, Beacon Heights Church of the Brethren, Rev. Carol Pierson, First-Bluffton and Rev. Liz Kaznak-Hall, Irvington-Indianapolis acting as moderator

Sister Anita – We were aghast at the travel ban and the assumption that being from the Middle East means you are a radical Muslim.

Todd – A lot of citizens took the ban as a reason to not be welcoming. There are 7000 refugees in Ft. Wayne. About 4000 come from Myanmar (Burmese communities). The other 3000 are from all over. Public schools see children that speak 43 different languages collectively. How could we provide more services to this group? I reached out to folks working on peacemaking and LGBT issues that shared an interest in social justice for refugees also.

Carol – The Declaration of Solidarity for Refugees made me see the disunity in our country particularly after the last election. I felt a need in my personal life to lift up Christ's example of welcome in Matthew 25 along with the Old Testament idea of hospitality. Limiting immigrants touched my heart and I couldn't remain silent. I reached out to folks in Ft. Wayne and thought the Declaration could be common ground to work from.

*How did you narrow in on the focus of the Declaration?* Todd – Indiana state law prohibits the formation of "sanctuary cities," which was originally where I thought we should start. So I began a conversation with like-minded folks from other denominations, a person from Catholic Charities that has been working with local immigrants. A Rabbi and an Imam joined us and the circle continued to grow. We contacted who we could think of and who we knew. The common theme was working as a people of faith. Our respective scriptures shared common themes on caring for "the least of these" and welcoming the stranger.

Sister Anita – The imperatives from Christ are to welcome the stranger and support their dignity. This moves me to action. The Declaration is a starting point for awareness, advocacy and action.

Liz – I was part of Highland Presbyterian's refugee program in Louisville. Historically it has had bipartisan support but can be politically divisive.

*How did you navigate those tricky community divisions?*

Carol – The strength of the Declaration is not how many people sign in agreement, but how many families might receive our help because of it. Our church has not endorsed the Declaration. It is a different mission direction for a church that is really engaged in local mission. It may take more information and more time to get the congregation on board.

Todd – The process to get information on the Declaration out to the community was done in an ad hoc, clunky manner. The original circle reached out to their circle, but at first no Presbyterians were invited. Some pastors (in other denominations) did turn us down thinking their congregations would reject the tenets outright. We were in sort of a time crunch to get endorsements by World Refugee Day in June. Several pastors didn't have time to work through the discussions on the issue with their congregations prior to that date. Bishop Rhodes wrote his own version of the Declaration, which led to a revision of both documents into the current version. Other signatories – Carol was the only non-Allen County signatory. The group wanted to take the statement to the Ft. Wayne mayor, so there hadn't been a lot of contact outside the county.

*What feedback have you had from the greater Ft. Wayne community?*

We got some great press. People couldn't ignore it, but most feedback has been people wanting to sign on to the Declaration. Carol – At least one member has said the more they have thought about it, they feel it ought to be discussed in the church.

*Can others still sign on?*

Yes, it is a live document, but it isn't highly structured.

*What dos and don'ts can you share with people wanting to do this in other counties?*

Email and Facebook was our way of communicating. Having good communication is critical. We probably should have thrown a wider net initially to get support from other congregations and groups.

*What are next steps?*

Study the document and ask questions about where your faith leads. Recognize that Catholic Charities and Imani Family Services are the agencies that serve immigrant groups (in Ft. Wayne), so think of ways we can support them and their work. Several congregations have done that. Continuing to educate the community is also important. The Unitarian Universalist Church will be organizing workshops to this end. It is our intent that after studying the document and the issues, that you will act, regardless of the size of your church or its denominational affiliation. In Indianapolis we have Exodus Immigration and Relocation Services, Church World Service and Catholic Charities that provide services to immigrants. Many individual congregations, like Nueva Creacion, Indianapolis, also provide services.