



The Synod of Lakes and Prairies held its annual meeting, April 26-28, 2026, at Mount Olivet Conference and Retreat Center, Farmington, Minn. Joining the Synod for this meeting were Ken Green, Board of Pensions, Jim Hitson, New Covenant Trust Co., and Rachel Anderson, Global Ecumenical Liaison, Presbyterian Life and Witness.

Elona Street-Stewart, Delaware Nanticoke, Synod Executive, offered the first report for the plenary session following worship and fellowship activities. She presented the two years long process to gather input from churches, leaders and mission partners across the synod to create the roadmap for a new strategic plan. Since the 2025 Fall Synod meeting a work team organized those ideas and experiences for future strategic support, resources, financial services, leadership opportunities and innovative communication. It was essential that the next strategic plan reflect our values in action and align the vision and leadership to the people, partners, and priorities of the church as the synod faces new challenges moving forward. The proposed plan, recommended by the Steering Committee, is more concise about lessons of vitality, effectiveness and belonging and highlights the creativity and hope of staff, presbyteries and church leadership.

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Mission Statement

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The Synod adopted a new Mission, Purpose, Values, and Strategic Directions plan, see page 5. Following the approval of this document, each committee worked on ways to further this ministry. Each of the four worship services focused on one of the elements of Faith, Hope, Love, and Witness from our Purpose Statement.

MEETING SUMMARY



Ann Gibbs, Presbyter for Ministry Vitality, Presbytery of Milwaukee, gave an update on General Assembly, which will be held at the Baird Center in Milwaukee, June 27 - July 2, 2026. Community Day, June 27, features service and education opportunities, ministry fair, and community gatherings. The day will begin with a public witness focussing on gun violence prevention, **Healing Not Harm: A Walk to End Gun Violence**. The Synod will have a booth at the ministry fair.



The presbytery has issued a call for volunteers to assist at GA. There are all kinds of jobs for all kinds of people such as Communion server, airport hospitality, worship service greeter, usher, Baird Center hospitality and more. Please scan the code or go to [Volunteer to Help](https://www.pbymilwaukee.org/) (<https://www.pbymilwaukee.org/>) and find out more.



A panel led the Synod in reflecting on “Hope in Times of Chrisis.”

Kathy Lee-Cornell, Associate for National Disaster Response, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, reflected on the power of witness in her journey as one who lost her home during Hurricane Katrina. As we walk along congregations in crisis, we are actually helping heal the whole community. Showing up is what matters.

Christina Cosby, Office of Public Witness, Representative for Domestic Issues & Environmental Justice, reminded us of the importance of pausing to pray and reflect DISCERN before simply reacting to the chaos around us. She noted we all carry stories of chaos, trauma, and disaster but also stories of hospitality, hope, resilience and joy.

Catherine Gordon, Office of Public Witness, Representative for International Issues, spoke about international catastrophes noted the temptation to turn away and the struggle to stay present. She noted that staying can't depend upon improvement and cited Victor Frankl's thought about the power of the human capacity to respond. Hope is found in people who tell the truth and people who refuse to disappear.



Panelists on screen Catherine Gordon, top left, Christina Cosby, bottom left, Kathy Lee-Cornell, bottom right. Seated left to right Bill Davnie, Jim Bear Jacobs, Anna Kendig Flores, and Scott Prouty, vice-moderator.

Continued on next page.

Anna Kendig Flores, Interim Co-Executive Presbyter and Anti-Racism Coordinator for the Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area, began with the need to show up in a personal way. She highlighted that the Church has work to do partially in repair for previous harms and we have to be careful not to simply react. We can't do all things and need to find the lane that uses our skills and identities. We need to work our muscle memory in responding to injustice and reflect spiritually on the sense of "urgency" that abounds.

Jim Bear Jacobs, Mohican, Co-Director of MN Interfaith Power and Light, quoted a poster from the Standing Rock protest, "We, the resilient, have been here before." He spoke about the recent ICE surge in the Twin Cities metro area and noted that each killing is spiritually and mentally exhausting. Resilience has, however, come from strengthening networks and expanding understanding of home and neighbor. He commented that the Church has responsibility to be present because throughout history the Church has been responsible for the oppression.

Bill Davnie, Commissioner Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area and retired foreign service officer, recently returned from Israel, where he worked as one of six witnesses at a Christian Palestinian farm. He spoke about the power of presence, the inclusiveness of love, and the importance of community in finding hope in times of chaos.

The theme of showing up and seeing each other was woven through worship and these presentations.

The Synod adopted an Anti-Racism Policy and a Harassment Policy, both of which are required by the Book of Order for all councils.

The **Finance Committee** recommended and Synod approved to not raise per capita in 2027, leaving it at \$5.50, the same rate it has been since 2018. We continue to give \$10,000 to each presbytery and \$21,000 to Dakota Presbytery on an annual basis. The presbyteries get back \$1.10 in services for every dollar they give to the Synod.

The **Strategic Service and Witness Committee** announced five areas of grants: Collegiate Ministries (up to \$4,000), Camps and Conferences (up to \$4,000), Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (up to \$4,000), Matthew 25 Initiatives (up to \$5,000) and A New Thing Initiative (up to \$7,000). All applications are available on the Synod website: <https://www.lakesandprairies.org/grants>.

The **Committee on Racial Equity Ministry** reported giving \$27,000 in scholarships to 15 college students and \$7,000 to 13 Tribal Colleges in Montana, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wisconsin and the American Indian College Fund.

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We exist to glorify God by nurturing a vibrant, connectional church that proclaims Christ's love and justice for the world. Together we are called to support presbyteries, congregations, and mission partners to flourish, share resources, develop leaders, and build communities that sustain vital ministries through faith, hope, love and witness.

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The **Self-Development of People Committee** is interested in learning about groups within the Synod that may qualify for an SDOP grant. The application deadline is July 15, 2026 and will be available on the website: <https://www.lakesandprairies.org/self-development-of-people>.

The **Communications Committee** shared their project on Congregations in Transitions – a series of videos that are being developed to assist Sessions, Congregations, and Pastor Nominating Committees. The full set of videos will be on the Synod website by Fall. More information will be shared as the videos become available.

The **Personnel Committee** reported that annual staff reviews were completed in 2025. The committee is in the process of reviewing and updating personnel policies as necessary.



Pictured are musicians playing during worship, Sara Sutter, xylophone and John Thedens, flügelhorn.

Restorative Actions Team provided updates: The Indigenous Trust has named a second trustee and plans to begin their work in the Fall. Over \$240,000 was distributed in 2025 from the African American Trust. Team members are available to assist in dialogue or with resources to approach conversations in churches and presbyteries. There are short videos (4-5 minutes) to aid in conversation available at:

<https://pcusa.org/resource/journey-repair-oak-grove-church>.

The **Presbyterian Women in the Synod** reported that many have volunteered to help at General Assembly. They have established four scholarships at two tribal colleges and hope to establish a fifth. Anyone may contribute to the scholarship fund. “Sit & Sip” is a monthly online gathering to discuss various topics. All women are invited to join, you do not have to be a member of a PW group. To participate in the Horizons Bible Study or “Sit & Sip” contact [Kathleen Keefer](#). Read their newsletter at:

<https://www.lakesandprairies.org/presbyterian-women>

Carolyn Grice reported on the **2026 United Nations Commission on the Status of Women**. She noted that the United States has not provided expected financial support to the UN which made lead to the closure of the UN in July 2026. No where in the world have women achieved equality with men according to the Commission. She shared a number of strategies to continue to improve situations for women and children around the world. The goal is to live in a world without violence against women and children. There is a worldwide commitment to wear black on Thursdays in solidarity with the 33% of women who suffer from violence.

Staff members reported on their various activities including a Minutes Review, ongoing programs of the Synod including Synod School, The Academy, Transitional Ministry training, Leadership Summit, and the expansion of financial services to the presbyteries.

The next Synod Meeting will be September 27-28, 2026, online.

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

Synod of Lakes and Prairies

Mission Purpose Values Strategic Directions

This Is Our Next Road Map

Mission

Who we intend to be.

The Synod of Lakes and Prairies supports, connects and equips the presbyteries we serve as they empower congregations to thrive and embody Christ's love to neighbors near and far.

Purpose

Why we are relevant.

We exist to glorify God by nurturing a vibrant, connectional church that proclaims Christ's love and justice for the world. Together we are called to support presbyteries, congregations and mission partners to flourish, share resources, develop leaders, and build communities that sustain vital ministries through faith, hope, love and witness.

Values

What guides our work.

- Hope
- Inclusion and Diversity
- Connectional governance
- Leadership
- Respect

Strategic Directions

 How we direct our energy.

- Welcome hope as an action. Our mission must be bold, restorative and faith based.
- Implement Matthew 25 focus areas to be foundational to our mission
Build Congregational Vitality, Dismantle Structural Racism, Eradicate Systemic Poverty
- Embrace wholeness and build community based on collaboration and partnerships.
- Invest resources with accountability and steward generosity for sustainability and growth.
- Inform with clarity, communicate with respect and engage with equity and trust
- Innovate ministry through creativity, flexibility and mutuality.
- Equip and empower multi-faceted leadership based on shared proactive and learned experience to serve local ministries and the larger church now and for future generations.