

Presbytery of Cayuga-Syracuse stated meeting, November 14, 2023
Report on Synod Mission and Ministries Commission
Elder Linda Russell, Commissioner

The Synod of the Northeast's Mission and Ministries Commission held a stated meeting on September 15-16, 2023, at Honor's Haven Retreat and Conference center in Ellenville, NY. While I was unable to attend this meeting due to a conflict with our presbytery meeting, commissioners were particularly pleased to be able to meet in person. The Commission held a special meeting via Zoom on November 3, 2023 which I was able to attend. I am assigned to the Mission Working Group.

Highlights of the September 15-16 meeting include:

Emerging Gospel Communities grants were awarded to the Sudanese Presbyterian Fellowship (\$5,000) in the presbytery of Northern New England, and to Hope Church of New York (\$20,000) which reaches out to the unchurched among Korean speaking immigrants and to English speaking 2nd and 3rd generation immigrants in the Queens area in New York City presbytery.

Wurffell-Sills scholarship funding in the amount of \$6,500 was awarded to Cayuga-Syracuse member(s) this year. Names of recipient(s) are kept confidential. The Wurffell-Sills Scholarship and Interest-Free Student Loan program is open to full-time undergraduate and full and part-time (at least half-time) seminary students (MDiv, MRE), who are members of any church within the Synod of the Northeast. The application period begins the first week of January through April 30th each year. For more information, please contact Stacy Galloway at Stacy.Galloway@synodne.org or phone 315-446-5990.

PJC in-person training was arranged by the Synod for October 17, 2023 at First Presbyterian Church in Skaneateles. Several minister members and ruling elders (including myself) from Cayuga-Syracuse attended. The whole day training was led by Elder Flor Velez-Diaz, the Office of General Assembly Manager of Judicial Process. The purpose was to review Section D (formerly called Rules of Discipline, now called Church Discipline) of the 2023-2025 Book of Order. This is the section outlining the process for filing a remedial complaint or a disciplinary allegation and the new BOO contains significant changes which Stated Clerks, PJC members, Clerks of Session, COM members and others must be aware of.

Actions taken at the November 3rd special meeting include:

Presbytery Support Grants, a new program for Synod with a 2023 budget of \$200,000, were awarded to four presbyteries: Genesee Valley (\$35,250); Northern New England (\$20,000); Southern New England (\$28,000); and Boston (\$40,000). Applications from Northern New York and Susquehanna Valley are pending the receipt of further information.

Revisions to The Immigration Advocacy Fund were proposed by the Connectional Working Group and approved by the Commission. The Fund was set up some years ago at a time when ICE was actively picking up people off the streets and there was a need to retain lawyers to assist with their cases as they were going through the system in an effort to be granted asylum. With the current climate of migrants arriving in cities in very large numbers needing housing and humanitarian support, the Fund is being expanding to address new forms of emergency situations. Because of the emergency nature of the need which this fund would address, grants are limited to a one-time grant of up to \$5,000 requested by either a Presbyterian church or a Presbytery. The Fund currently has \$40,000 available.

Other news – Discernment Team Phase I

A Special Synod Assembly meeting will be held via Zoom on December 9, 2023 for the purpose of receiving a report on the first phase of the work of the Synod's Discernment Team. Excerpts from the document Abstract follow:

"The sole purpose being to understand the impact of the current New Way Forward (NWF) Vision in three areas: strengths, connections, and transformation. ...

"Psalm 48:12-14 invites the reader to walk around, to notice strengths, the areas in need of maintenance, and the crumbling places. The report reflects the programs and processes that are holding strong, along with places that need shoring up or tearing down in order to make room for new structures and fortifications. Focusing on effective and efficient ways to do God's work, the NWF has led the Synod since 2013, to focus on creating diversity that points to God's Kingdom, developing networks, empowering young leaders, and encouraging ministry innovation. Creating unencumbered spaces for the Holy Spirit to work among gospel communities has become the tagline for the Synod's future direction. In many ways the NWF opened the way for more inclusive representation in the Synod. This effort is celebrated as one achievement of the forged vision to create a space for justice and repairing years of societal harm and denominational incongruities and structures. This work is incomplete: voices are still muted and do not resound with the resonance of the Beloved Community that is Christ's will for the Church. The relationship between the Synod and its presbyteries is in need of healing. Clearly articulated policies and fairness in the administration of resources and grants, explicit communication among mid-councils with each other and the churches, a commitment to a shared vision and faithfulness in reinforcing our mission as a Synod to the presbyteries and the churches and back to the Synod are sorely needed. These are some of the themes articulated by the Synod community. This report is but a preliminary document highlighting the path forward as God gives us discernment that we may understand not only God's statutes and decrees but Christ's mission and will for this regional body of believers, the Synod of the Northeast."

Persons with questions about the work and ministry of the Synod are welcome to contact Linda Russell at lsruss@aol.com or 315-730-6930.

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