

Summary of the Special Meeting of the Shenandoah Presbytery  
Tuesday, February 23, 2016

The Special Meeting convened in the sanctuary of Cooks Creek Presbyterian Church, Harrisonburg, Virginia, who made their wonderful facility available to the presbytery, making this possible given only a week to be sure “that the way be clear!” Thank you to Cooks Creek Presbyterian Church.

The attendance that day totaled 145 with Voting Ruling Elders counted at 58 and Teaching Elders counted at 67 with the visitor total standing at 20

The meeting opened at 10:00 a.m., with Moderator Cushwa gaveling us together and offering a prayer. An opening devotion was provided by TE’s Amy Fetterman and Jonathan Ytterock. Upon determining a quorum present, processing through the meeting protocols, and with the adoption of the docket, the meeting began, in earnest, at 10:28 a.m.

At 3:54 p.m. the presbytery voted with a voice vote of all “YES” to add four (4) new members to the Administrative Commission. What this action means in practical terms can be found on page 7 of the Policy for Discernment toward Reconciliation or Gracious Separation of Congregations in Shenandoah Presbytery (adopted August 23, 2014), section i., as copied now: *“In the event that the presbytery does not approve the proposed plan, the AC shall be presbytery’s representative in reporting this action back to the congregation and reviewing with the session and congregation the next step.”*

Should the reader so desire clarification as to what constitutes the gap in time from 10:28 a.m. to 3:54 p.m., they may continue to read what follows.

Our official time together opened with a proposed point of order and ruling by the moderator, which lead to an appeal to overrule the moderator, which received a second, followed by discussion, with 7 individuals offering insight into this process, culminating in an 84 to 30 vote sustaining the action of the moderator.

A few moments of clarification followed, with a time of education on policy in this matter, to give the methodology of the report presentation.

At 10:44 a.m. the chair of the Administrative Commission, TE Beth Pyles, McDowell PC, began the presentation of the work of the AC. Introductions of the AC members were included, with TE Philip Sieck, honorably retired member of presbytery, RE Faye Bottenfield, Augusta Stone PC, and RE Kenny Campbell, Mt. Carmel PC being identified.

At 10:49, TE Philip Sieck brought additional findings to the body. This included some timeline data, process items, results gained, number of meetings with pastor and/or session, and the notation of the January 27, 2016 meeting with the Warm Springs Presbyterian Church session and pastor at Augusta Stone Presbyterian Church in which the documents were presented, in the hopes of signatures being obtained and the proposal agreed to. After deliberation on-site by the Warm Springs Presbyterian leadership, no signatures were penned, but a handwritten and signed letter from the session was given to the AC by TE Reed.

At 10:56 a.m. a time for questions concerning process and fact finding ensued. During this time, 19 individuals gave insights into the proceedings, with TE Rob Sherrard asking for and offering a prayer at 12:05 p.m.

In the interlude provided, it was noted that perhaps a meal could be brought in, and with the assistance of the Transitional Presbytery and the host pastor of Cooks Creek (TE Evans), the necessary steps were taken to make this an "Order of the Day."

It was now 12:17 p.m. and two speakers offered their insights. At 12:20 p.m. the AC concluded their portion of the report for the day, and yielded the floor to TE Charles Reed of Warm Springs Presbyterian Church.

Beginning at 12:21 p.m. and continuing to 12:34 TE Reed offered explanation and detail, as found in their letter included in the docket, and in responding to concerns raised during the previous presentation.

At 12:35, TE Reed passed to microphone to RE Bill Fields of Warm Springs Presbyterian Church, bringing further insight into the process.

12:43 was the time for questions concerning the Warm Springs response to begin, and eleven individuals brought questions to the group. As was true in the previous portion of the meeting, answers were provided as best as possible.

The Order of the Day was announced at 1:22 p.m., with a prayer of the meal and a request that not more than thirty minutes elapse before our resuming of the meeting.

Dominos delivered pizza of various formulations, two types of salad, and a gluten free alternative as well. Your Stated Clerk is not aware of who provided the beverages, but is making the assumption that our host congregation of Cooks Creek Presbyterian Church was our provider. As of the writing of this summary, the exact nature of who purchased the lunch is unknown.

The presbytery reconvened at 1:57 p.m. Nine individuals continued the offering of insights, until 2:16 p.m., when a motion to refer back to the AC was made that further inquiry be undertaken, and it was seconded. In short order, another motion was offered and seconded, prompted a time for parliamentary education and clarity. In the sorting out process, seven individuals spoke. Following proper protocols, the substitute motion was voted upon and failed, 38 to 62.

At 2:39 p.m., the original motion to refer back to the AC for further inquiry was now on the floor, with one individual giving insight, and the resulting vote, taken by standing to be counted, resulted in 4 standing to refer, and a much larger group standing in opposition (a visual count occurred here and the moderator rules on the vote count). The motion failed.

By 2:42 p.m., TE Philip Sieck, on behalf of the AC, presented the work of the AC as a motion, as detailed in their written report found in the docket. The motion offered concerned the status of TE Charles Reed of Warm Springs Presbyterian Church. After so being moved, a substitute motion was offered from the floor, was ruled against by the moderator, prompting an appeal to the moderator. Seven insights were offered from various members of the presbytery, and when called to give guidance, the presbytery voted 83 to 19 to sustain the action of the moderator.

The AC motion then proceeded at 2:57 p.m., and was offered in its entirety. From the floor, several individual items were perfected, or attempts made to do so. In one instance, a vote of 45-46 kept intact the item in question.

By 3:08 p.m. the AC's motion was established now, again, as the main motion. Ten individuals brought their insights to the presbytery, with a vote taking place around 3:20 p.m. or so. To facilitate the counting of the paper ballots that were used, TE David Witt, Opequon Presbyterian Church, and TE Carl Howard, Honorably Retired, were appointed by the moderator. The ballots were passed out and retrieved, with the assistant clerk and administrative assistant counting the ballots.

At 3:23 p.m., give or take a moment, the tally came in with 41 YES votes and 67 NO votes, and the motion concerning TE Charles Reed failed.

Starting at 3:24 p.m. TE Philip Sieck brought page 10 of the AC's report to the floor for action. At 3:30 p.m., TE Beth Pyles of the AC moved to remove items #1 and #4 from the motion, as they were nullified following the previous action of presbytery. The motion to amend the motion of the AC was passed unanimously by voice vote.

By 3:34 p.m., insight was offered for the motion, and a moment of clarification by the parliamentarian procured a second, friendly amendment to the motion on the floor to add the phrase "subject to future presbytery actions" on item #2. This was confirmed by voice vote, and the amended motion of the AC went to ballot. Following the giving, retrieving and counting of the ballots, the motion failed by a count of 47 YES votes to 61 NO votes.

By 3:51 p.m. TE Philip Sieck made to motion noted much earlier in this report to change the make-up of the AC for the task ahead of them, and as noted, it was passed.

At the end of the meeting, TE Melissa Harmon closed our meeting with prayer, and the moderator announced our adjournment at 4:01 p.m. Which was good, as Cooks Creek Presbyterian Church officially closes for the day at 4:15 p.m. sharp.

A moment of commentary from the Stated Clerk: Should the reader be inclined to wonder about the necessity of the meeting, the presbytery in this meeting fully complied with its duty to honor the work of this, and any, Administrative Committee, to see, as best as possible, that all sides of an issue could be heard, and to ensure that the voice of commissioners in attendance are heard and tallied. As it should be in all of our actions, individuals are chosen and commissioned to do the work of the presbytery, to the best of their God-given and Spirit-driven abilities, in whatever the capacity the commissioning may be, and as our polity requires, the assembled commissioners of the congregations that constitute what is the presbytery, will gather and further the work of God by the actions we so undertake as a body. This is who we are called to be, imperfect as we may be, the fodder of foolishness, that God will make perfect and wise.

Respectfully submitted,

Pastor Kerry Foster  
Stated Clerk of Shenandoah  
Teaching Elder, Bridgewater Presbyterian Church