



**THE PRESBYTERY
OF SHENANGO
PC(USA)**

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April 21, 2014

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The Presbytery of Shenango elected us to the Executive Presbyter/Stated Clerk Nominating Committee and entrusted us with the awesome task of seeking out and nominating a successor to former Executive Presbyter, Rev. David Dawson.

After our initial organizational meeting in November with the Rev. Bruce Stevens, Synod of the Trinity Executive, the Committee met every Thursday at the Presbytery Office for prayer, discussion, and consultation. During this period of time, we wrote a position description, completed a Ministry Information Form, distributed that information to appropriate domains (i.e. Presbyterian Outlook, the vocations agency of the Office of the General Assembly, etc.), received Personal Information Forms, checked references, conducted Skype Interviews, consulted General Council of Shenango Presbytery, consulted Synod Staff, and conducted face-to-face interviews.

On Tuesday, April 15, 2014, after prayer, worship, and consultation with the Synod Office, the Committee unanimously agreed to nominate the Rev. Ralph Hawkins as the candidate-elect for Executive Presbyter/Stated Clerk of Shenango Presbytery. At the special called meeting of Shenango Presbytery on April 29, 2014 at 6:30 PM at Westminster College, Rev. Hawkins will be presented for election. Rev. Hawkins has prepared the enclosed personal data sheet for your information as you prepare for this important meeting.

As members of the Executive Presbyter/Stated Clerk Nominating Committee, we wish to thank you for your prayers, patience, and support as we have sought God's will and direction in this matter. Please continue to pray for the Presbytery of Shenango, Rev. Ralph Hawkins, and the completion of this important transition.

Yours in Christ,

The Executive Presbyter/Stated Clerk Search Committee

Rev. William McGary, Chair (*Wampum*)
Rev. Eric Peters, Vice Chair (*Fredonia*)
Rev. Beth Creekpaum, Sec. (*Sandy Lake*)
Rev. Tod Custer (*Christ*)
Kim Romig, Elder (*New Wilmington*)
Donna Heard, CRE (*Word Centered*)
Bob Loch, CRE (*1st Sharon*)

Rev. David G. Dawson
Executive Presbyter
david.dawson@shenango.org

Rev. Jerry A. Mahaffey
Stated Clerk
jerrymahaffey@zoominternet.net



New Wilmington
Presbyterian Church
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April 22, 2014
First Week of Easter

Dear Ruling and Teaching elders,

Grace and peace to you and your congregations in this unfolding Easter season.

I am, all at once, both greatly humbled and greatly energized to be the nominee to serve our presbytery as the next Executive Presbyter and Stated Clerk.

As recently as last fall, my wife and I were exploring the possibility of cross-cultural mission service through the Presbyterian Church—work not unlike what our own Steve and Brenda Stelle are now doing. I have long sensed a call to support the young global church in some meaningful way, and so we were exploring the idea of teaching in a Bible School or seminary somewhere in the developing world.

But, as you might now imagine, these recent months have been a time of great prayer and fresh discernment for my wife Elizabeth and me. Knowing the needs of our beloved regional body at this time, especially the challenge we are facing locally to stay engaged in ministry amid a great deal of denominational noise, I began to sense a strong Holy Spirit nudge toward our open EP post. When asked by the committee why I feel called to be an Executive Presbyter, I said, reflexively, "I don't! But I do sense a call to support *Shenango*, in this time and place."

I find I am less concerned about making a career move as I am about providing theologically rich leadership to our presbytery in these uncertain denominational times. Much of my ministry as a Teaching Elder has been marked by emphases on officer development and deployment, local ministry engagement, missional church practices, and cross-cultural mission partnerships. I am energized by the prospect of working on these trajectories amid our life together as a regional body. Furthermore, during my time here, Rev. David Dawson has become a beloved friend and partner in ministry—as I know he has for so many of you. Given my great respect for his ministry among us, the possibility of following him in executive service to Shenango is a true honor.

I am invested in the future faithfulness of the Presbyterian Church (USA) in general and in Shenango Presbytery in particular. These last six years of membership, involvement, and fellowship in Shenango have been a great blessing to me, and the prospect of serving this body with pastoral leadership strikes me as a tremendous responsibility, but also as a great privilege.

I look forward to our called meeting and our worship together of our risen Lord Jesus, who alone is Head of the church and hope for the world.

Gratefully,

Rev. Ralph W. Hawkins

Rev. Ralph William Hawkins

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Background

I grew up in metropolitan New Orleans, Louisiana, the third child of believing parents who were both ordained Ruling Elders and great role models of ministry in and through the church. My ecclesiastical roots are in the former Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS), the so-called "southern" branch of the American Presbyterian family tree. After some difficult teenage years, the direction of my life was dramatically altered one night before my senior year in high school when I sensed a call to attend seminary and serve in pastoral ministry. In college, I met and married the former Elizabeth Temple Hankins, and our life together these 20 years has been one of God's greater blessings to me. Together we are parents to Ella, soon to be 10 years old and a 3rd grader in Wilmington schools. I enjoy model railroading and railroad photography, as well as camping, computers, and studying the various writings of my childhood neighbor, novelist Walker Percy.

Education

Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary

Doctor of Ministry degree. Emphasis in Proclamation and Worship. My thesis researched the ways in which sermons are heard by liberal arts faculty who are also active at New Wilmington Presbyterian Church.

Columbia Theological Seminary

Master of Divinity degree. Honors in New Testament studies. I worked closely with Walter Brueggemann in scripture studies and Darrell Guder in missional theology.

King College

Bachelor of Arts degree. Bible and Religion major.

Installed Experience

New Wilmington Presbyterian Church - Senior Pastor/Head of Staff

2008 - present

Emphases in ministry have included developing missionally-minded officers, equipping the session to lead in worship and ministry, providing for growth in adult discipleship through study and service opportunities, training deacons for a ministry of "compassion, witness, and service," developing local ministry opportunities for adults, improving the nominating discernment process, expanding the Dominican Republic mission partnership, implementing a strategic staffing model, supervising 12 full- and part-time staff, and mentoring seminary and college interns preparing for ordained service.

Altavista Presbyterian Church - Pastor

1999 - 2008

Emphases in ministry included shepherding a divided flock after a difficult previous pastorate, rehabilitating the officer nominating and training process, coaching elders to share in ministries of visitation, facilitating five confirmation programs utilizing congregational mentors, developing liturgical leadership within the congregation, developed local mission opportunities for members, and supervising a seminary intern.

Jackson Presbyterian Church – Student Pastor

1997 - 1999

Preached regularly, led worship, sat with Session, and oversaw the children and youth ministry programs, including the development of mission service as an aspect of Christian formation.

Leadership Experience

Presbytery of Shenango

As a member of the Moving Forward theological task force, hoping to foster richer theological discourse among our Teaching Elders, I have contributed to the development of our recent theological statement *A Declaration of Faith for the Shenango Presbytery*. With Bill Crooks and Glenn Hink, I have worked to foster regular gatherings for pastors to stay connected and engaged during the turbulence of presbytery and denominational issues. For four years, I have taught two sessions of elder training at our annual LeaderFest event. A DVD recording was made of one of those sessions, which has been used widely around the presbytery for on-site elder training. As Vice Moderator of the Committee on Preparation for Ministry, I have supported the committee moderator in the work of dispersing more responsibility for liaison connections among the committee members and improving the preparation of candidates for examination.

New Wilmington Area Ministerium

I have served as President of the local Ministerium for four of the six years I have been involved. During that time, we launched three annual Church Leadership Summits for the lay leaders in our churches and increased the number of annual ecumenical gatherings in the community. I organized five annual community worship services.

City Rescue Mission

I am a regular volunteer at the New Castle Mission, teaching a weekly Bible Study for the men in the 12-month Recovery Program, mentoring two men who are progressing toward graduation, and preaching several times a year at their Sunday evening chapel service.

Presbytery of the Peaks

During my nine years in Peaks, I served as Vice Moderator of the presbytery, chaired the Congregational Ministry Support Committee, taught Preaching, New Testament, and Polity in the Commissioned Lay Pastor program, administered the annual Leadership Conference for three years, moderated various sessions in the absence of pastors, and served on two Administrative Commissions.

Altavista Area Ministerial Association

During my nine years as a member of the Association, I served as President or Vice President for six years. During that time, we hosted six annual church leadership gatherings for local congregational leaders.

Altavista Habitat for Humanity

I served on the board of a local Habitat affiliate for four years, chairing the Church Relations committee and increasing involvement among local congregations.



I entrust my life to Jesus, the Christ of God,
and love him as both my Savior and Sender.
I confess him Lord of all, Head of his church,
my eldest Brother and the true firstborn Son
in an ever-widening covenant family of God,
into which I have been so graciously adopted.
Through him I have come to worship one God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Through the broad witness of the scriptures,
God is worshipped as Speaker, Word, Breath:
a living communion both sublime and simple.
In Jesus' birth, Eternity stepped into our time.
By his death, our sins have been sequestered.
Since his rising, our humanity sits in Divinity.
With saints of every era, I sing the gospel song—"Christ is risen. He has risen indeed!"

I believe that the atonement of Jesus with us is the clue by which all other matters, divine and human, are to be interpreted. I can say no more about "God" than what we have seen and heard in the incarnation of Jesus: his birth, ministry, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and assured reappearance. Yet I give thanks that no more need be known for salvation or service. I believe that the same triune God who saves us from sin also sends us into ministry, and as such, the church dare not separate blessing from burden, promise from perspiration. I believe that the Holy Spirit is always and everywhere provoking the church, in all its forms, toward a continuing conversion of its common life: deeper shared discipleship and wider apostolic witness. I trust that the New Testament was providentially sanctified for that sacred purpose, and that with the Old Testament, the canon is the unique, inspired, and authoritative witness to Jesus as the one true Word of God. I gratefully receive baptism once and the communion meal again and again as signs and seals of our belonging and our vocation. I understand ordination to be a holy demotion within the universal Christian ministry, given for the equipping of Jesus' people for his purposes in the world. I welcome the great themes of the Reformed tradition – transcendence, covenant, election, providence, stewardship, etc. – as reliable wisdom for interpreting scripture, providing for worship, equipping the saints, and living Christian hope. I believe the gathered church is not an end unto itself, but exists to serve the Servant of all and to be a witness to and worker for the reign of God in this life and in the life of the world to come. I am confident that the Holy Spirit uses the authority of scripture's witness, the best of our theological heritage, and the trials of the global church to call disciples of Jesus in our own time and place to a more faithful witness in the personal, ecclesiastical, familial, vocational, political, cultural, and social relationships of life. At its best, the visible church is a provisional demonstration of what the living God intends for the whole world. At its worst, the church is a reminder to the world that all is not yet as God will have it be. Even so, the triune God remains faithful: creating, redeeming, sustaining. How do I know? Jesus is alive—present to the Father, present in the Holy Spirit. That is the strange and wonderful news I have heard, and it has made all the difference in my broken, wayward life.

In the weakness of my fallen old flesh, I am but a sinner and an orphan.
Yet in the strength of Jesus' risen new life, we are saints, children of God.

This is my story.
This is our song.