

Next Council Meeting: May 13, 2025 (Zoom.us) – 9:15 a.m.

GENERAL COUNCIL of THE PRESBYTERY OF GENEVA

Minutes of Meeting

April 8, 2025 ~ 9:15 a.m. ~ Zoom.us

Our Presbytery Purpose

The Presbytery of Geneva lives to
support and equip congregations and leaders
to be Christ in the Finger Lakes
and in the world.

Our Presbytery Vision

Radiating the light of Christ,
the Presbytery of Geneva thrives
as a community of servants, lifting up
every congregation and leader
in ministering together.

Our Council Purpose

Organize the life of the Presbytery, holding the Presbytery accountable to God's call to mission by coordinating the implementation of the Presbytery's purpose, vision, strategy, and structure.

DRAFT

MEMBERS

P	Rev. Anita Milne (Waterloo, First) Chair, General Council	P	CRE Connie Franks (Shortsville) Presbytery Moderator	P	Rev. Evan Hansen (Elmira, North) Presbytery Vice-Moderator
	Vitality Committee	P	Elder Virginia Champlin (Geneva) Presbyterian Women Rep.	P	Rev. David Preisendanz (Painted Post, United) Camp Whitman Committee Rep.
EX	Rev. H. Leigh Holder (Phelps) Committee on Ministry (COM).	P	Elder Sandra Ansley (Geneva) Operations Committee Rep.	P	Elder Joanne (Juana) Tunison (Lares, PR, Iglesia Presbiteriana) Mission & Witness Committee Rep.
P	Elder Kerm Bossard (Spencer, CTKF) At-Large - Ruling Elder.	P	Rev. Michelle Serra (Canisteo, First) At-Large - Teaching Elder	P	Rev. Aaron Frank (Horseheads, First) Synod Commissioner
P	Elder Donna Colvin (Pulteney, First) Leader Care Committee Rep.	P	Rev. Leah Ntuala (Seneca Falls, First) General Assembly Commissioner		

EX-OFFICIO (voice, not vote)

P	Rev. Marjorie Ackerman Presbytery Leader	P	Rev. Amy Loving Austin Stated Clerk	EX	Rev. Sabrina Slater (Spencer, CTKF) Committee on Representation
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Guests (voice not vote): Rev. David Ashby (AL), Treasurer

CALL TO ORDER and the FIRST THINGS

A quorum being present, Anita called the meeting to order at 9:15am with prayer.

Donna Colvin offered devotions.

The General Council shared joys and concerns. Anita offered prayer.

The General Council VOTED to:

- **Approve** the docket for the meeting.
- **Approve** the minutes of the March 11, 2025 meeting of the General Council.
- **Approve** all submitted written reports.

BUSINESS OF THE COUNCIL

- Multi-presbytery group
 - The Council had a robust conversation about the many ways we may be able to partner, join, or merge with other presbyteries. As we move forward in new ways, we need to consider things like:
 - how ideas and actions are communicated to our congregations (we do not want anything to be misunderstood to be an “edict from on high”)
 - how the cultures of our congregations / leadership mesh

- the health of the other presbyteries
 - the geography and its impact on meetings / gatherings
- The General Council VOTED to **approve** the Presbytery of Geneva entering into discussions with The Presbytery of Cayuga-Syracuse and The Presbytery of Susquehanna Valley exploring possible mergers or other collaborative efforts and to appoint persons to participate in those specific conversations.
- The Council appoints David Ashby, Connie Franks, Anita Milne, and Aaron Frank to participate in these conversations.
- Stated Clerk
 - The General Council VOTED to **call a meeting of the Presbytery** to be held at 11am on Tuesday, April 29, 2025, via Zoom for the purpose of acting on specific motions from the COM (and, if available, motions from the COR).
- Presbytery Leader
 - Marji has been working with the COM to address congregational conflicts.
 - Pulpit Supply workshops are in the works (to begin later this Spring).
 - The Synod is working on partnering with Dubuque Seminary to provide CRE training. Marji is looking into ways that we may be able to provide some sort of Clinical Pastoral Education experience for CREs.
- Committee on Operations
 - The committee will meet next week.
- Treasurer
 - The Treasurer presented the report.
- Committee on Camp Whitman
 - Staffing and site preparations for this Summer are going well.
 - Fundraisers are scheduled and will be advertised.
 - The Camp Director and the Treasurer are working on how to make the camp become its own non-profit organization. Evan will share contact information for a lawyer he knows who is experienced with these sorts of transitions.
- Committee on Representation
 - No report.
- Members at Large
 - Kerm and Michelle are working on nominations for persons to serve the COR.
- Committee on Mission & Witness
 - The committee is meeting soon to review grant applications. They have received \$87,000 in requests – most of which are for programs that combat food insecurity.
- Committee on Vitality
 - No report.
- Committee on Leader Care
 - A gathering for retired pastors/CREs is scheduled.
- Committee on Ministry
 - Park Presbyterian Church has called their next pastor. The call will go before the Presbytery for their approval at the Called Meeting on April 29th.
- Committee on Preparation for Ministry
 - We are having conversations with neighboring presbyteries about how we may work together to provide CPM oversight.
- Synod
 - See written report (end of minutes)
 - The Synod Leader will be attending our May 20th meeting of the Presbytery.
- Presbyterian Women
 - Hibernation continues for now.
- General Assembly / Bills & Overtures

- Some overtures have already passed a majority of presbyteries to be added to the next edition of the *Book of Order*. For a recent article discussing this, see *The Presbyterian Outlook*: <https://pres-outlook.org/2025/03/votes-for-book-of-order-changes-on-track-to-pass/>

OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO IMPLEMENT PRESBYTERY MEETINGS

- Moderator
 - The retreat coming up in May is looking good. Please try to be there!
 - The General Council VOTED to **approve** having \$200 be made available to help cover the cost of one meal for Geneva Presbytery members attending the May retreat (if they submit a request for reimbursement).
- Vice-Moderator
 - No report.

OTHER BUSINESS

- Presbytery-Wide Mission Events – no report

NEW BUSINESS & REMINDERS

- Workplace Sexual Harassment Prevention Training
 - *Please* remember: NYS only requires one training, and there are several to choose from when utilizing Armatus; the training Preventing Sexual Harassment: Employee Edition (New York) is the one that is required. ***All Presbytery Officers and Staff need to complete this annual training by December 31, 2025.*** When you have completed the training, please send a copy of your completion certificate to the Office Admin.
- Manual of Operations updates
 - If you or your committee has any suggested edits/updates/changes, please share those with the Stated Clerk.

CLOSING

The Council did not select who will provide devotions for the May Council meeting.
The next meeting is scheduled for May 13, 2025.
Anita closed the meeting with prayer at 10:58am.

UPCOMING COUNCIL MEETINGS AND DEVOTION LEADERS

May 13, 2025

Devotions:

2025 PRESBYTERY MEETINGS

Tuesday, April 29 at 11am (Zoom) [called meeting]
Tuesday, May 20 at 10 am (in person) at Camp Whitman
Tuesday, September 23 at 10 am (hybrid)
Tuesday, November 18 at 1pm (hybrid)
Saturday, January 24, 2026 at 10:00 am (Zoom)

April 2025 Written Council Reports

History of our multi-presbytery collaborations

For action:

Approve discussions with The Presbytery of Cayuga-Syracuse and The Presbytery of Susquehanna Valley exploring possible mergers or other collaborative efforts and to appoint three persons to the working group.

For Information:

Going back into the 2010s and the reorganization of the Synod of the Northeast, presbyteries in the Synod collaborated together in what were then “presbytery partnership groups (PPGs),” primarily for mission funding, but that allowed greater familiarity among the presbytery participants. We were part of the Western NY PPG, comprising Western NY, Genesee Valley, Geneva, and Cayuga-Syracuse. Five-way talks last year lagged. While roundtable discussion have been cordial, possible cooperation with Genesee Valley and westward seem unlikely.

An important player in the cross-boundary discussions has been the Synod of the Northeast, which as both a framework for combining presbyteries, resources, and funding. The previously seven presbyteries of New Jersey have merged into four with markedly different geographical boundaries. This took lots of effort and time, and followed a detailed structure provided by the Synod. Opinions vary about the process and its applicability to upstate NY.

Cayuga-Syracuse and Susquehanna Valley Presbyteries have been in conversations about sharing resources, and in the past months both acted to pursue officially merging together. Because we have contacts between presbyteries, Geneva was invited into their conversations.

Our group in the recent multi-presbytery conversation learned that Northern NY Presbytery is dividing between Albany (the long ago Champlain Valley Presbytery) and Utica (the Adirondacks and west). This answers part of the who goes with whom that has been hanging over Central NY, setting the eastern border of possibilities since Utica and Albany will be cooperating more with their sharing NNY congregations.

For discussion:

None of the currently-configured presbyteries are in medium- or long-term good financial situations, and it will get less possible to continue in the current configuration. Finances, resources, and, especially, people to serve are getting tighter. There is no way we can function as now bounded for more than 3-5 more years.

Geneva Presbytery does not have many reserves. We have \$70k in reserves, mostly in the Foundation, a tight annual budget, and several churches which have not shared per capita or mission funding. Camp Whitman is valued at around \$1.2 million, but as the saying goes, land rich but dollar poor.

There are degrees of “merger” or collaboration. The most common meaning is to merge two or more corporations into a new corporation, or one can be subsumed existing Presbytery (the Champlain Valley by Albany). The separate presbytery corporations could continue with sharing activities and staff and committees, with minimal corporation meetings to fulfill state requirements and ecclesiastical functions to fulfill the Book of Order while functioning as “one” entity. Corporate and financial arrangements will be, perhaps, the most difficult to fully merge, so the equivalent of a yoke agreement might serve for a time.

Synod of the Northeast

The Synod of the Northeast continues to empower, educate, and connect congregants, church leaders, congregations and presbyteries through multiple ongoing ministries.

In addition to the Synod’s monthly newsletter, which was forwarded to the Presbytery by Gretchen Duffy (and I encourage you to sign up to get it directly from the Synod), I want to highlight a few items.

- On April 22 nd at 11am and 7pm there will be virtual town hall meetings to present an update on the “**Visioning Process**.” For the last two years the Leadership team and the Discernment Team have been working together to listen to the needs of our churches and presbyteries, to assess the Synod’s current gifts and talents, and to create a framework to better serve our churches and

presbyteries in the future. These townhalls will be an update on that work and set the stage for the November 15 vote on the Synod's new vision.

- **Early Ministry Institute (EMI)** is fast approaching, May 19-23, 2025. For pastors new the Synod and the first years of their career EMI is a great program to meet for three years with other pastors – to learn from more seasoned pastors, to share experiences, joys and struggles, and to create a network of colleagues one can turn to in the years to come.

<https://www.synodne.org/early-ministry-institute>

- **Indigenous Mission Day, June 14, 2025.** Within the bonds of the Synod there are a number of historic Indigenous churches. Unfortunately, some have fallen into significant disrepair. On June 14 you are invited to gather at Jimersontown Presbyterian Church (3602 Center Rd Salamanca, NY 14779) or Wright Memorial Presbyterian Church (12672 Route 438, Irving, NY 14081) to support the ministries of these churches.

<https://www.synodne.org/blog/2025/3/26/join-us-for-synod-mission-day-at-seneca-nation-churches>

- **Meeting.** The Synod Commission will meet on April 25-26 in East Syracuse, NY for its spring meetings.

- **Grants.** Wurffel-Sills Student Aid grants are available for undergraduate and seminary students.

<https://www.synodne.org/blog/2025/3/26/apply-for-wurffel-sills-student-aid>

- **Emerging Gospel Community Grants.** The Synod of the Northeast is committed to supporting new expressions of community formed around a commitment to Christian faith and the teachings of Jesus. Applications are due by August 20, 2025.

<https://www.synodne.org/emerging-gospel-community-application>