

# The First Epistle



First Presbyterian Church of Moorhead • Established 1872

November 2020

## The Session:

Moderator: Robert Drake

Clerk of Session: Kim Kelsh

Treasurer: Chris Swee

Peggy Johnson, Kim Kelsh, Mary Larson, Chris Swee, Mary Skalet, Megan Wheeler, Dave Lanpher, and Diane Wray-Williams.

## The Deacons

Moderator: Barb Worman

Jim Gale, Kathy Giddings, Nicole Hestbeck, Joni Lordemann, John Ortez, Helen Pemble, Deb Piekutowski, Elizabeth Swee

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[www.firstpresmhd.org](http://www.firstpresmhd.org)

## GARDENS GALORE!

Thanks to everyone who prepared the church's gardens for winter. We have flower gardens around the church and a special flower garden in downtown Moorhead.



## POST ELECTION INDOOR WORSHIP

Sunday, November 8, 10:30am, we'll be inside the sanctuary again to worship God and partake in the Lord's Supper. No matter which way the election goes, we know that it's been a stressful election period on everyone. Join us as we remember that God is ultimately in control of the entire world. Reservations are not needed, but please call the church if you plan on attending. All COVID precautions will be followed, such as social distancing, masks, no congregational singing, and no congregating in the narthex.



# The First Presbyterian Church of Moorhead

Worship: 10:30 am

2900 Fifth Street South, Moorhead, MN 56560

[www.firstpresmhd.org](http://www.firstpresmhd.org)

218.233.1192

## E-mail Addresses:

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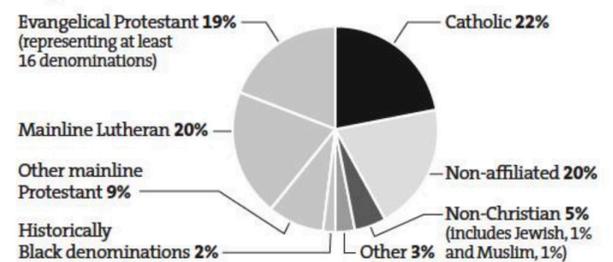
*Our mission is to be a caring community of God's people who live by Christ's teachings, reach out to others to share the love of God, and celebrate the good news of Jesus Christ through worship, prayer, thought, and action.*

## WE'RE PRESBYTERIAN, WHAT ABOUT EVERY-BODY ELSE IN MINNESOTA?

Here's a recent pie chart of information about various religious denominations in Minnesota. Presbyterians fall under the "other mainline Protestant" section.

Nearly one in four adults in Minnesota and in the nation identify as Catholic. They represent the country's largest single religious denomination and a targeted voter bloc in this election.

### Religious affiliations of Minnesota



Source: Pew Research Center

MARK BOSWELL • Star Tribune



Journal of Marital and Family Therapy  
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## **CHRISTIAN MAINLINE PROTESTANT PASTORS' BELIEFS ABOUT THE PRACTICE OF CONVERSION THERAPY: REFLECTIONS FOR FAMILY THERAPISTS**

Christi R. McGeorge   
North Dakota State University

Katelyn O. Coburn  
Kansas State University

Ashley A. Walsdorf  
University of Georgia

*Efforts to change the sexual orientation of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals to heterosexual are referred to as conversion therapy. Given the religious groundings that support the practice of conversion therapy, we sought to explore the beliefs of Christian religious leaders about this practice and what they want family therapists to know about the practice of conversion therapy. Twenty-one pastors from diverse Mainline Christian Protestant traditions were interviewed. Queer theory-informed thematic analysis revealed four themes that reflect the participants' perspectives on conversion therapy: (a) Conversion Therapy Is an Abomination, (b) Conversion Therapy Is Similar to Other Abusive Practices, (c) Conversion Therapy Represents A Misuse of Religion, and (d) Ethical Concerns About Therapists Who Practice Conversion Therapy. Implications of this study include a need for self-of-the-therapist work to address religious biases and heteronormative assumptions in order to examine beliefs that support practicing conversion therapy.*

## **PASTOR ROBERT PARTICIPATED IN LOCAL RESEARCH PAPER**

One of the benefits of a community with wonderful colleges and research universities is the opportunity to participate in academic research projects. Pastor Robert was one of the local pastor interviewed as part of a study on mainline Protestant clergy views on LGBTQ issues. The researchers published three articles so far, with one more on the way. If you would like to read the research paper (it's geared towards professional counselors, doctors, and researchers) please contact Pastor Robert.



### PASTOR REFLECTION - Good Decisions

For those of you who subscribe to *The Forum* (I know, I know, I'm just as sad as you are about the demise of their actual paper newspaper, but anyway, back to what I was saying...), you probably read the opinion columns from Rev. Jon Hauser, founder and former lead pastor at Prairie Heights Community Church. I read his columns every time, and I also read Syed Sajid Ahmad's opinion columns every time, and I also read Roxane's Solonen's articles every time. I read each of their pieces with varying degrees of enjoyment and respect, yet I still read them religiously (pun intended).

A week ago, Hauser wrote a column titled, "Leading in chaos," in which he shared a quote about leadership during times of chaos. He could not attribute the quote to a particular person, but he remarks that the quote struck him as particularly relevant for our times.

Here's the quote: "When leading in chaos, focus on making good decisions, and then better decisions, rather than right decisions."

How many times have you found yourself paralyzed while trying to make an important decision? How many times have you made no decision because you can't settle on exactly the right decision?

Don't be shy. It happens to me all the time. Everyday.

Since coming on as your pastor almost three years ago, I've made A LOT of decisions, some major, some minor, some consequential, and some trivial. And if I'm being truthful, there were many times when I was not even sure what the right decision was, though intuitively I was sensing that I was at least making a good decision.

This quote from Jon Hauser helps me understand the nature of decision making. Rarely will we know what the exact right decision is, and yet we can't be paralyzed by that lack of knowledge. Instead, we need to think and pray, and then we need to just make a *good* decision. And if the decision we made wasn't exactly right, then we can do it again, and hopefully make a *better* decision.

Way back at the end of 2017, when I first started here, we were faced with some serious financial considerations, and although we are still facing financial considerations, our fiscal health is looking really good (look for the financial chart in this newsletter). I can't really say how this happened, other than by saying we must have been making "good decisions, and then better decisions" for the last three years.

We've gotten somewhat smaller over these last few years, but we've also added quite a few wonderful new members and regular visitors to our church family. How? Again, I'm not really sure, but I think we keep making "good decisions, and then better decisions."

What about COVID? What decisions are we making during this pandemic? Well, if you look at the YouTube report (in this newsletter), you'll see that our videos have been viewed almost 2,000 times since March, and that's not counting our Facebook viewers. That's a lot of people. Our Sunday online viewing audience is larger than our in-person worship attendance pre-COVID. Why? Again, I can't point to any single decision. Instead, I think it's been a series of good decisions and increasingly better decisions made by the Worship Team (Nadine, Tim, Joni, Diane, and Dave; plus Dan on sound for the in-person worship).

And God. Let's not forget God.

Although my God-comment sounds like I'm being flippant, I'm not. God is providential over all creation. And at the same time, we humans are down here making decisions every day. It's OK to give ourselves credit for making those decisions.

So, rest assured, your church is being led right now by a group of committed volunteers all of whom are doing their best to make "good decisions, and then better decisions."

Are you wondering what you can do to help? Well first, pray. Please pray for our church as we continue to make good decisions. Second, if you would like to help, there's lots of room for more people in a variety of volunteer capacities. Just talk with Pastor Robert.

Finally, if you're struggling with making a decision, give Pastor Robert a call. You can talk, pray, and together you can make a "good decision" that will eventually lead to "better decisions."

- Pastor Robert Drake

## 2020 General Assembly Report

Prepared by Rev. Bill Boyar, pastor at United Presbyterian Church, Jamestown, ND.

It was an educational experience serving as your Teaching Elder Commissioner. Thank you for the opportunity. I included a summary of the actions of the GA later in this report. I also included in this report an excerpt from the book *Rage*, written by Bob Woodward. I think it is important that we understand the opposition to Black Lives Matter.

The issue of racial inequality was front and center during the Assembly. There was attention given to the Poor People's campaign. People were able to participate in the activity virtually.

During the plenary sessions it was evident how "white" our denomination is. There were numerous opportunities for the delegates to deal with racial inequality but they did it in a way that came across as white privilege. For instance, a substitute motion on anti-racism was approved but it turned out that the committees affected were not consulted. It added more work to those committees without giving them more resources. The committees were mandated to have a certain amount of racial-ethnic people on the committee and there are not that many.

I lift this approved measure so that we can work on it collectively. I Pastor a multicultural congregation in Jamestown and am willing to assist:

- PC(USA) churches and presbyteries would approve anti-racism policies.

In September 2020, an African family that I know in Jamestown received a cowardly note in the mail that said "Blacks Not Wanted." We have to recognize that Racism is real. I sense people do not understand the issue. That is one reason why I commend this excerpt from an interview with President Trump.

An excerpt from Woodward's book:

Woodward: What, I asked, was he trying to accomplish in two speeches he had just given over the Fourth of July weekend, one at Mount Rushmore and the other at the White House?

Both painted divisive portraits of some citizens threatening the country—a kind of reemergence in tone of "American carnage" from his inaugural address. As best I could tell, presidents of both parties universally gave unifying and inspiring speeches on July 4—a freebie of goodwill.

"In the Mount Rushmore speech you talk about a new far-left fascism," I said. He had said there was "a merciless campaign to wipe out our history. Angry mobs are trying to tear down statues of our Founders." and "this leftwing cultural revolution is designed to overthrow the American Revolution."

I said, "There's some people who represent that kind of anger, the radical left. But it's not much."

The next day, in the White House speech, Trump had said that like the American heroes who defeated the Nazis, "We are now in the process of defeating the radical left, the Marxists, the anarchist, the agitators, the looters."

I said they were no Marxists left.

Trump: "No," Trump said, "that's wrong, Bob. Black Lives Matter, what they do is they literally have it in their website that they're Marxist."

Woodward: One of the cofounders claimed in 2015 that she and other organizers of Black Lives Matter were "trained Marxists." It was not, however, on their website. The Black Lives Matter phrase has been adopted as a reformist slogan by the broader social movement for racial justice.

"What are you saying to people?" I asked the president. "In the second speech you said 'our movement' referring to your movement and your base. 'Never forget, we are one family and one nation.'"

Trump: "Right."

Woodward: "Black Lives Matter people look at all of this and they say they're not being invited in. That you've put up a wall around your base. And the question is, what's your intent?"

He didn't answer but said, "I have done more for the Black community than any other president other than Abraham Lincoln."



I said that Lyndon Johnson certainly had done more. The passing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act was a monumental achievement. It outlawed discrimination based on race, religion or sex, further mandated the desegregation of schools, the prohibition of racial discrimination in employment and protections against the unequal application of requirements for voter registration.

“But it’s about the heart,” I said.

Trump: “I have done a tremendous amount for the Black community. And honestly, I’m not feeling any love. As soon as the China virus came in—as soon as the plague, China virus, came in—as soon as it came in—those poll numbers all of a sudden started inching down 8 or 9 or 10 percent. And I don’t understand that. I don’t. Because nobody blames me for the virus.”

### **SUMMARY OF THE 224TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY (2020)**

The historic 224th General Assembly (2020) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) took place over four days: June 19, 20, 26, and 27, 2020. The scaled-down assembly gathering was the first to be held totally online with commissioners and advisory delegates participating via Zoom, while the Stated Clerk, Co-Moderators, parliamentarians, and technical personnel worked out of the Presbyterian Center in Louisville, Kentucky.

### **STATED CLERK REELECTION**

The Reverend Dr. J. Herbert Nelson, II, was reelected as Stated Clerk for another four-year term. Nelson was first elected to the post during the 222nd General Assembly (2016) in Portland, Oregon. He was unopposed in this last election. The Stated Clerk Nominating Committee said it was satisfied that Nelson sought to hear the young voices in the church at all levels. Nelson also expressed his desire to address climate change, support small churches, and work to remove barriers to marginalized communities becoming fully involved in the church.

### **CO-MODERATORS OF THE 224TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY (2020)**

Ruling Elder Elona Street-Stewart and the Reverend Gregory Bentley were elected on the first ballot as the Co-Moderators of the 224th General Assembly (2020). They will go down in church history as the first Co-Moderators/Moderators to moderate an online assembly. Due to church travel restrictions, the Co-Moderators plan to connect with presbyteries and churches across the denomination electronically with hopes of traveling on behalf of the church when restrictions are lifted.

### **BUDGET**

Commissioners to the 224th General Assembly (2020) approved unified budgets of approximately \$80.1 million for 2021 and \$83.4 million in 2022, covering the work of the Office of the General Assembly, the Presbyterian Mission Agency, and the Administrative Services Group. In addition, commissioners authorized the two boards and one committee that oversee the work of each agency to make decisions over the next two years on each agency’s budgets due to the uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. Any amendments to the approved budgets will be reported to the 225th General Assembly (2022).

Commissioners also voted to keep the apportionment rate flat for the next two years, at \$8.98 per member.

### **RACIAL INJUSTICE**

Commissioners passed a resolution entitled “Responding to the Sin of Racism and a Call to Action.” Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, the Presbyterian Health Education and Welfare Association, and the Assembly Committee on Business Referral worked jointly on the motion that provides for the following:

PC(USA) churches and presbyteries would approve antiracism policies.

PC(USA) agencies are to review business items to be referred to the 225th General Assembly (2022) to ensure coverage under social witness policy.

A response to the COVID-19 pandemic was approved, seeking compassion and justice for the most vulnerable for the disease, including BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) individuals as well as LGBTQ+ and persons with HIV.

An eight minute and 46 second silent vigil was held before the end of the assembly to acknowledge the time George Floyd was pinned at the neck by a Minneapolis police officer.

### **COMMITTEE/COMMISSION REPORTS**

The 224th General Assembly (2020) voted that the work/reports by the Moving Forward Implementation Commission, the Special Committee on Per Capita and Financial Sustainability, and the report of the Disparities Experienced by Black Women and Girls Task Force, would be taken up by commissioners to the next assembly.

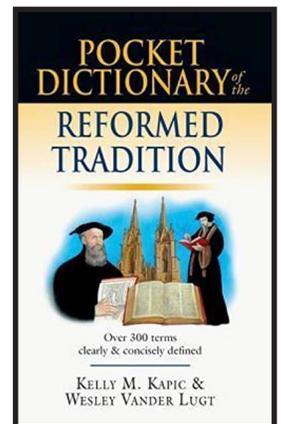
## WIFI IN THE SANCTUARY

You can now surf the internet whenever Pastor Robert gets too long winded in a sermon (once we're back to indoor worship). Thanks to Dan Wheeler for running all the wires and hooking everything up. WiFi makes it possible to livestream our worship services. The funding to pay for the equipment came from gifts and contributions a few years ago, and COVID gave us the perfect reason to move forward.



## ELECTION

Also known as predestination, this doctrine asserts that God chooses individuals and a people for salvation. Historically, most in the Reformed tradition have explained this doctrine in light of the sovereignty of God, his mercy and grace, and the total depravity of humanity [the totality of humanity's compromised relationship with the rest of creation..., every person is born with his or her entire nature corrupted by sin and enmity with God] balanced with God's universal calling to all humanity. The notion of unconditional election was clarified at the Synod of Dort [1618-1619, held in Dordrecht, Netherlands] in response to the Remonstrant or Arminian emphasis on God's foreknowledge as the basis of election. Reformed theologians usually emphasize both individual election and the corporate election of Israel and the church, although Karl Barth [pronounced "Bart"] promoted the view that since Christ is the Elect and the Reprobate One, all humanity is elect in Christ.



## SILVER SNEAKERS EXERCISE

Join us for **SILVER SNEAKERS** Strength and Balance Class!!

We meet Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11:00-11:45am in the Fellowship Hall here at First Presbyterian Church. We are practicing social distancing while getting a great workout!

During our 45 minutes together, we flow through a warm-up to prepare our bodies for functional strength work. It is a full body workout that can be adapted to meet the needs of all fitness levels. Good posture and balance are emphasized—you will love how you feel!

For questions, contact members Walt Norman or Marilyn Woods. Feel free to contact the instructor Nicolle Aukland too (701-388-2052 or [Naukland@outlook.com](mailto:Naukland@outlook.com))



**CREM Synod's Committee**

CREM, Synod's Committee on Racial Ethnic Ministry, recently awarded grants to racial ethnic students in the amount of \$17,000 with another \$1000 to tribal colleges in the synod.

The synod is committed to partner with students and schools for leadership development and quality instruction of clergy and lay persons for lifelong service. Application awards are based on personal achievement, financial need and recommendation from a teacher and pastor. Students must have a permanent residence within the Synod of Lakes and Prairies and be active members in a Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) congregation and present an essay how they are living the gospel especially during these troubling times.

CREM also supports the Minnesota Council of Churches Racial Justice program and a conference on racial justice to be held in November.

The awards are given annually and information is available through the synod or by contacting Elizabeth Swee, 701-446-7479, chair of CREM.

*SNAPSHOT PICTURE OF CHURCH FINANCES*

	2019 thru 9/30	2020 thru 9/30	Difference
Income	\$92,384	\$115,454	\$23,070
Expense	\$102,126	\$92,709	\$(9,417)
Net Income	\$(9,742)	\$22,745	\$32,487

*Thank you to everyone, your financial support makes this possible.*

**The Greatful Garden Final Harvest**



First Presbyterian Church of Moorhead  
2900 Fifth Street South  
Moorhead, MN 56560

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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