

# Synod of Lakes and Prairies meeting summary



2115 Cliff Drive  
Eagan, MN 55122  
651.357.1140

Winter Meeting - Synod of Lakes and Prairies - Mount Olivet Retreat Center - Farmington, Minnesota - Jan. 17-19, 2010

The Synod Meeting Summary is published shortly after each meeting of the Synod of Lakes of Prairies. Comments regarding the publication or requests for copies should be addressed to [dsweep@lakesandprairies.org](mailto:dsweep@lakesandprairies.org).

## Bob Bouton installed as moderator, Ardeth Kocourek is vice moderator

The Synod of Lakes and Prairies installed the Rev. Bob Bouton of the Presbytery of East Iowa as moderator of the synod for 2010 during its winter meeting Jan. 17-19 at Mount Olivet Retreat Center, Farmington, Minn. The synod also installed Elder Ardeth Kocourek, South Dakota Presbytery, as vice moderator.

A retired pastor, Bouton and his wife, Sherrie, reside in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Bouton earned his master of divinity degree from the University of Dubuque (Iowa) Theological Seminary. He also holds a doctorate from McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago, Ill.

Born and raised in Princeville, Ill., Bouton began his ministry in Christian education at First Presbyterian Church, Lincoln, Neb. He then served a 24-year call as pastor to Christ Presbyterian Church in Cedar Rapids. His last call as pastor brought him to Knox Presbyterian Church in Cedar Rapids where he served until he retired in 2003.

He has chaired several synod committees and has served numerous times as a synod commissioner. He recently served on the synod's Administrative Review Task Force on the Presbytery of Dakota, and continues to serve on the synod's Finance and Nominating committees.

Kocourek, elder commissioner from the Presbytery of South Dakota, describes herself as a "transplanted Iowan, who thinks of herself as an educator."

She has been a teacher and library-media specialist in the Bennett County (S.D.) Schools, part-time instructor for Oglala Lakota College in Kyle, S.D., a farm homemaker and operator, member of the South Dakota State Library Commission, and a 4-H and extension leader.

Kocourek holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, and a master's degree from New York University.

For the synod she serves on the Personnel and Synod School committees, and is a member of the Permanent Judicial Commission. A resident of Martin, S.D., she has more than eight years experience as a Commissioned Lay Pastor.



*Bob Bouton*



*Ardeth Kocourek*

### Find synod info online

You can find the Synod of Lakes and Prairies online at [www.lakesandprairies.org](http://www.lakesandprairies.org) and you can also find the synod on Facebook.

## Synod told: Racism still exists, indications are it's growing

Racism still exists and data show that racism's indicators are appearing more frequently.

"Hate crimes and hate groups are still around," said Rowzat Shipchandler, racial equity manager with The Saint Paul Foundation, pointing out that the number of "hate groups" in the United States has risen 54 percent since 2000.

Citing research by the Southern Poverty Law Center, Montgomery, Ala., Shipchandler said nearly 1,000 extremist groups operate in the country. Within that number, she said, are 10 groups in Wisconsin, eight in Minnesota, four in South Dakota, four in Iowa and one in North Dakota.



*Rowzat Shipchandler*

The SPLC, founded in 1971, is known for its legal victories against white supremacists and its tracking of hate groups.

Shipchandler led the educational session Monday evening during the Synod of Lakes and Prairies' winter meeting at Mount Olivet Retreat Center in Farmington, Minn., Jan. 17-19.

In her position with the foundation, Shipchandler has worked on "Facing Race: We're All in This Together," a foundation program that addresses racism at the individual and institutional levels, and provides recognition for those engaged in addressing racism, according

to information about the program distributed at the synod's meeting.

The St. Paul Foundation is Minnesota's largest community foundation that reports its mission is to "mobilize resources and be a catalyst to enrich lives and communities."

Shipchandler encouraged everyone address racism by starting "conversations in your churches and in your communities."

While sounding like a simple starting point, she pointed to the foundation's own research that showed "nearly 31 percent of people agree that they would like to get to know people of other races better, but feel as if they might be ridiculed or shamed if they say the wrong thing."

She urged everyone to "analyze your own beliefs," citing Project Implicit, a research project developed by several universities that looks at "implicit social cognitions" or those feelings that are not necessarily known or professed. Sample research questionnaires examining racial prejudice are available through Project Implicit at <https://implicit.harvard.edu/>.

Shipchandler told everyone to "look at your own organization. How diverse are they?" And she asked everyone to "take action in your civic and faith community lives."

In order to "start the conversation about race" Shipchandler recommended a program called "New Conversations About Race and Racism," a foundation program designed to stimulate discussions among "people who may not have thought a lot about race and racism."

## Racial ethnic ministry grants awards

The Synod of Lakes and Prairies' Committee on Racial Ethnic Ministry granted \$15,500 in scholarships to 12 students for the 2009-10 academic year.

More than half of the funds went to students studying at seminaries, including Louisville, Dubuque, United and Luther.

In addition, the committee distributed a total of \$2,000 in institutional awards for tribal colleges within the "boundaries of the synod and Cook College."

## Lakes and Prairies moves in new direction with Dakota Presbytery

The Synod of Lakes and Prairies moved toward responsibility for “fulfilling the constitutional requirements” that Dakota Presbytery “is unable to meet.”

Synod commissioners approved a four-step process for responding to the recommendations of its Dakota Presbytery Administrative Review Task Force, which presented its final report in September 2008.

The opening step in the process involves a consultation between the synod’s stated clerk and presbytery leadership to determine which constitutional requirements the presbytery is unable to meet and which requirements the presbytery would request the synod to meet on its behalf.



The second step states, “That the synod assume responsibility for fulfilling the constitutional requirements which Dakota Presbytery is unable to meet. This may be through an administrative commission or through referral to a standing committee.”

The third step calls on the synod to “seek to create a spirit of mutuality with Dakota Presbytery in the synod’s assumption of identified presbytery responsibilities.” It does note, however, that the “synod may act without full presbytery concurrence.”

The fourth step states the synod should “establish a regular process of communication and review with Dakota Presbytery regarding its future ability to meet these [constitutional] responsibilities itself including, as appropriate, assisting the presbytery in preparing itself and its leaders for that eventuality.”

When the synod accepted its task force’s final report, commissioners had voted to direct synod staff and its steering committee to draft an overture to the 219th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) that would restructure Dakota Presbytery in some way that removed its constitutional requirements while continuing the presbytery’s ability to ordain ministers and maintain representation at General Assembly.

However, the synod’s steering committee concluded approval of such an overture would be difficult to obtain.

When asked how long the current action would be in effect, Synod Executive Phil Brown responded, “Our hope is that this is a viable option. We don’t have a sunset on this.” He added, “It will be important for the presbytery to demonstrate its commitment to this process.”

## Synod commits funds to water efforts

The Synod of Lakes and Prairies committed the balance of accumulated receipts from the Peacemaking Offering, minus funds received from the 2009 offering, to clean water projects of the Synod of Living Waters and Synod of the Sun for the Haiti earthquake recovery efforts.

The dollar amount is approximately \$14,000.

Background information for the action stated, “We understand that long term infrastructure recovery in Haiti will take time and that clean water is a concern even beyond the immediate area of Port au Prince and the area of greatest damage.”

## SDOP funds 2 projects

The Synod of Lakes and Prairies’ Self Development of People Committee reported that it approved \$30,500 in two grants when it met last fall.

The first project, Dakota Wicohan, is designed to train Dakota language instructors. Elona Street-Stewart, synod associate for racial ethnic ministries and community empowerment and staff support to the committee, noted that only nine fluent speakers of the Dakota language remain in Minnesota.

The project received \$15,500.

Funds for the second project, Ms. Ann’s Prayer and Affirmation Beads, will purchase jewelry-making supplies and provide a craftsmen stipend for this group of women who design and make beaded jewelry for sale.

Street-Stewart described the women as “economically poor and determined to overcome domestic violence, crime and substance abuse.”

The project received \$15,000.

## Task force requests continuation of appointment to study synods

The Synod Administrative Review Task Force, put in place at the Synod of Lakes and Prairies' 2009 winter meeting, presented a preliminary report at the synod's winter meeting this week that asked for a continuation of its appointment until it prepares a final report.

The report noted, "The work of this task force is relatively simple in its description and quite an ambitious undertaking in implementation."

Presented by Cheryl Biller, elder from Northern Plains Presbytery and outgoing moderator of the synod, the report noted that the five-member task force, along with Phil Brown, synod executive and staff support to the task force, met three times since its appointment. Included among those meetings were meetings with synod staff, both as a group and individually, and a two-day meeting with the president, dean of the seminary, faculty, staff and students, studying both residentially and online.

The report stated, "We've recognized the blessing we have in beginning this work in a time when the synod is healthy and financially sound. We are able to take the time we need and to look toward the future from a positive position, not react to financial or other deficits."

It continued, "We are grateful that we can be intentional in our process, keeping you apprised of our findings and our inspirations."

When created, the task force asked to study the history of synods and their changing role in the church's ministry and mission, to review proposals in recent Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) history to dissolve or remove synods from the denomination's organizational structure, to examine the changing role and need of the Synod of Lakes and Prairies to serve as a governing body, to consider the synod's role as a supportive resource to presbyteries and to other parts of the denominations, and to make recommendations.

The preliminary report indicated "that the programmatic offerings of the synod are well received by those who engage with them, and that the synod carries out the governance responsibilities it has well and thoroughly in addition to providing support to the presbyteries in these areas."

## Synod PW work toward 2 events

The Presbyterian Women of the Synod of Lakes and Prairies spent its November meeting planning two events and conducting the usual business of its leadership, mission and communications committees.

The report prepared by Elizabeth Swee, moderator of the group, noted that the second USA Mission Experience is slated Sept. 9-16 in South Dakota.

The report stated that women from all synods and members of the church-wide coordinating team will meet with Native American women to "learn about their struggles, concerns about health, church leadership, food, farming" and other issues.

The 2010 USA Mission Experience will provide visits to reservations in Sisseton, Flandreau, Chamberlain and Pine Ridge. The journey will begin in Sioux Falls on the eastern border of the state on Sept. 9 and will end on the west side of state in Rapid City Sept. 16.

The second event noted in the report concerned the synod gathering of Presbyterian Women set June 16-19 at Buena Vista University in Storm Lake, Iowa.

## COR monitors diversity

The report of the Synod of Lakes and Prairies' Committee on Representation noted, "As we reported last year, our leadership basically has remained unchanged, in a homogenous profile, for a decade."

The report noted, "Presbytery reports describe a commitment to the principles of participation and representation ... but the challenges remain."

The report stated, "Looking ahead, the [committee] will discuss ways to utilize the data set from annual statistics as an important tool that already is routinely updated and accessible." It continued, "[The data set] can provide key benchmarks to determine how much the targeted leadership capacity can expand."

The synod's committee "will advocate for upgrading the training workshops for cultural competency and encourage search teams and nominations committees to increase diversity in leadership pools to improve recruitment strategies."