

Emergent Meeting of the Presbytery of Waterloo-Wellington  
 Sunday, November 24, 2019 – 2:00PM  
 Gale Presbyterian Church, Elmira

The Presbytery of Waterloo-Wellington was called to meet in emergent session at Gale Presbyterian Church, on Sunday, November 24<sup>th</sup> at 2pm to receive the report of the Moderator's special committee on the crisis at Knox, Palmerston.

Constitution of the Court: Mr. Gibson McIlwraith, Moderator, constituted the Presbytery with Prayer. The moderator welcomed all guests in attendance asking for them to be introduced to the court.

## **ATTENDANCE**

### **Ministers**

Rev. Brooke Ashfield, Rev. Linda Ashfield, Rev. Peter Bush, Rev. Susan Clarke, Rev. Herb Gale, Rev. Kristine O'Brien, Rev. Nick Pavel, Rev. Scott Sinclair, Rev. Frank Szatmari, Rev. Karla Wubbenhorst

### **Representative Elders:**

Andrew Foster, Pauline Hall, Henry Heidinga, Werner Kuemmling, Walter MacNeil, Janet MacDowell, Vern Platt, Ross Rowat, Sue Senior, Bonnie Street

**Appendix:** Rev. Darrell Clarke, Rev. Kees Vandermay

**Guests:** Knox-Palmerston: Lucille Seiller, Linda Heidinga, Margaret Todd, Glen Cober, Betty Lambier

## **REGRETS**

### **Ministers:**

Rev. Alex MacLeod, Rev. Mark Gaskin, Rev. John Borthwick, Rev. Glen Soderholm, Rev. Scott McAndless, Rev. Ed Charlton, Rev. Aubrey Botha, Rev. Johan Olivier, Rev. Kathy Morden

### **Representative Elders:**

Peggy Lennox, George, Janet DeGroot, Forsyth, Frank Kivell, William Cassels, Marion Hunter, Les Ferrier, David Mallet

**Appendix:** Rev. Walter MacLean, Rev. Angus McGillivray

**Treasurer:** George Myers

## **Reason for Emergent Meeting and Adoption of Proposed Agenda**

The emergent meeting was called as per the motion of the Presbytery at its regular meeting of November 12, 2019: "Move that a committee of three persons named by the moderator, meet with the two visitors and other members of the quadrant who wish to attend, to produce a three page report describing the crisis at Knox Presbyterian Church, Palmerston, and that report be dealt with by the presbytery, in camera, two weeks today, Nov 24, 2019 at 2pm, Gale Presbyterian Church, Elmira"

## **AGENDA**

Moved by Scott Sinclair/Henry Heidinga that the agenda be adopted as presented and that the meeting not be held in camera. Carried

Moved by Vern Platt/Frank Szatmari that the Clerk of the Presbytery and the members of the Session of Knox, Palmerston, be invited to sit and correspond in camera. A further amendment asked that the Rev. Kees Vandermay also be invited to sit and correspond. Carried

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**REPORT OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE** – See “Appendix A”

Moved by Linda Ashfield/Andrew Foster that the report be received and considered. Carried

Discussion followed. A request to clarify congregational options was made.

Moved by Linda Ashfield/Scott Sinclair that the Session of Knox Palmerston call a Congregational Meeting (in consultation with the Presbytery and Moderated by an appointee of Presbytery) as soon as possible to discuss and decide about a preferred future. Decisions will be brought to the January 14<sup>th</sup> meeting of Presbytery. Carried.

Dissent: Karla Wubbenhorst

Dissent:

Reasons for Dissent:

I asked that my dissent be recorded from recommendation #1 of the report presented to the emergent meeting of Presbytery, held Nov. 24. The recommendation was “that the Session of Knox Palmerston call a Congregational Meeting (in consultation with the Presbytery and Moderated by an appointee of Presbytery) as soon as possible to discuss and decide about a preferred future. Decisions will be brought to the January 14<sup>th</sup> meeting of Presbytery.”

I could not vote in favour of this recommendation as I felt, under God, that it was a woeful abdication of the responsibility of the Presbytery to this congregation, and could issue in nothing but the most uninspired, default decisions, coming out of what will be a fractious congregational meeting, given the congregation’s division and *de facto* paralysis, preventing movement toward any more creative future. At the very least the Presbytery could have resourced the congregation with people from beyond itself to aid in the construction of future-direction models for the congregation to consider. Instead by referring this decision back to an already exhausted, deeply fractured and despairing congregation, Presbytery will ensure a traditional church closure — a move in which Presbytery does not stand as a disinterested party. The kingdom of God and the people of Palmerston are the loser in this scenario, and I believe it to be reprehensible, under God, for us to act in this way.

In 8 hours of listening to Knox Palmerston individuals on a recent visitation, myself and my fellow visitor, the Rev. Johan Olivier, felt we were being appealed to, as representatives of the Presbytery, for Presbytery to take some decisive action in this matter. We also felt that certain actions which lay within the powers of Presbytery were clearly indicated. The whole Guelph quadrant with its experience of reading assessor elder reports and visitation reports over a period of 14 months, was of one mind about the needful direction. Instead of allowing Presbytery to consider the recommendations of the Guelph quadrant, a new committee was formed at the November 12<sup>th</sup> meeting, through a motion “that a committee of three persons named by the moderator, meet with the two visitors and other members of the quadrant who wish to attend, to produce a three page report describing the crisis [at] Knox Presbyterian Church, Palmerston, and that report be dealt with by the presbytery, in camera, two weeks today, Nov 24, 2019 at 2pm, Gale Presbyterian Church, Elmira” (quoted from the draft minutes). The inclusion of “the visitors” ie, the Rev. Johan Olivier and myself, as well as any from our quadrant who wished to have input, in the consultation that would lead to the creation of the new, condensed report was clearly called for in the motion, yet this was not what transpired. We were not invited to participate. In the end, the report was given in the absence of two of the three people who had created it, and the entire Guelph quadrant (save two of its members, myself and Ross Rowat) were also absent from this meeting, feeling dissed and disinvested. The single substantial recommendation the report did advance was inadequate and unhelpful.

I am deeply regretful that we could not have done better for Knox Palmerston.

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Moved by Linda Ashfield/Henry Heidinga that the Presbytery thank the Guelph Quadrant (formerly the Congregational Affairs Committee) for their ongoing pastoral support these past many years and for their diligence in creating listening and visitation teams as well as appointing Assessor Elders. Carried.

Moved by Andrew Foster/Sue Senior that Ed Charlton be the chair of the Presbytery visitation committee to Palmerston.

After discussion the motion was withdrawn.

Moved by Herb Gale/Frank Szatmari that the three members of the special committee be in attendance at the Knox, Palmerston congregational meeting and to choose from among themselves the one who will moderate the meeting. Carried.

Report as amended as a whole – Linda and Frank S

Moved by Linda Ashfield/Scott Sinclair that the report be adopted. Carried

Moved by Frank Szatmari that the meeting adjourned. Carried.

The moderator closed in prayer.

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### **Appendix “A” - Report of Special Committee re Knox Church Palmerston**

From: Rev. Linda Ashfield, Rev. Ed Charlton and Elder Janet de Groot  
*(Appointed by the Moderator of the Presbytery of Waterloo-Wellington, November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019)*

In April 2018 The Presbytery of Waterloo-Wellington became aware of conflict within the congregation. Findings were brought forward and a decision was made to the September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2018 Presbytery meeting. At that meeting the Presbytery decided to remove an Elder from the Session (as of January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2019) and three Assessor Elders were appointed to the Knox Palmerston Session (as of November 26<sup>th</sup>, 2018). Other recommendations were given, and it was at this time that the Congregational Affairs Committee (Guelph Quadrant) began to give special pastoral care and guidance to the congregation.

On January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2019 the Congregational Affairs committee gave a lengthy report with recommendations concerning the ongoing conflict at Knox Palmerston. The recommendations were passed and sent to the Knox Session. A follow up visitation team - appointed by Congregational Affairs met with the Knox Session on May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2019. Their report along with two reports (interim and final) from the Assessor Elders indicated that the division in the congregation had not improved. Congregational Affairs indicated that they would conduct another visitation in the Fall 2019.

On October 15<sup>th</sup>, two members of the Guelph Quadrant conducted a thorough and comprehensive eight-hour visit as they met with the Session and subsequently individuals from the congregation (as well as receiving eight written submissions from members who could not attend).

Findings from the visitors: The congregation and Session of Knox Palmerston continue to be polarized. Both groups agree that the division has not improved and there does not seem to be the possibility of healing or reconciliation. They concur that there is a decline in worship attendance (some have left and attend elsewhere) and that the finances are diminishing rapidly, and it looks that the congregation will not be financially viable sooner than later. These facts are not in dispute.

While it is the Presbytery who ultimately decides to amalgamate or dissolve a congregation, we believe that it behooves us to invite the congregation of Knox Palmerston to have this conversation and come to Presbytery with a decision about their future.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. That the Session of Knox Palmerston call a Congregational Meeting (in consultation with the Presbytery and Moderated by an appointee of Presbytery) as soon as possible to discuss and decide about a preferred future. Decisions will be brought to the January 14<sup>th</sup> meeting of Presbytery.
  - The authors of this report are willing to moderate this Congregational Meeting.
  - Information given by the Moderator at the meeting will be based on “Guidelines for the Amalgamation or Dissolution of Congregations” Revised July 2019 Presbyterian Church in Canada.
  - Once a decision is made and brought to Presbytery, we would recommend that Presbytery also follow the “Guidelines for the Amalgamation or Dissolution of Congregations” Revised July 2019 Presbyterian Church in Canada