

Special Meeting of Yellowstone Presbytery

November 21, 2024 at 12:00 noon via Zoom*

24-053 Special Meeting Purpose: Yellowstone Presbytery met at a Special Presbytery Meeting via Zoom on November 21, 2024 at 12:00 noon to act on the following matters:

1. To act on the Leadership Cabinet's recommendation to adopt the proposed Anti-Harassment policy.
2. To act on the Leadership Cabinet's recommendation to adopt the proposed Anti-Racism policy.
3. To act on any recommendations concerning nominations from Leadership Cabinet to the Representation & Nomination Team.
4. To act on any nominations or other recommendations that might be received from the Representation & Nomination Ministry Team.

24-054 Attendance:

Ruling Elders in Attendance: RE Cal Boyle, St. Timothy's Chapel, RE Sandi Shoenberger, Billings 1st commissioner; RE Russ Kline, LC Moderator; Cheryl Banks, LC member, RE James Tarr, St. Andrew commissioner, RE Julie Boksich, Church of the Big Hole Commissioner, John Sachman, Bozeman 1st commissioner, Chandler Joiner, Rockhaven Camp Director, RE Traci Ruschetti, Butte 1st commissioner, RE Melissa Bell, Presbytery Moderator, RE Stephanie Bergstrom, Manhattan commissioner; RE Debbie Blackburn, guest from Manhattan, RE Caroline Fleming, Stated Clerk, RE Nancy Pehl, Terry commissioner, RE Jeff Harada, Wolf Point commissioner.

Minister Members in Attendance:

Ashley Birk, Kimberly Briggs, J P Carlson, Warren (Rusty) Craig, George Goodrich, Kathy Goodrich, Doug Johnson, Karolee Larson, Jody McDevitt, Neva Rathbun, Harlan (Lanny) Rounds, Jamie Schmeling, David Thompson, Daniel Triller.

Commissioned Ruling Elder Members:

CRE Veva Larson, Margee Smith.

Absences are not noted for special meetings of Yellowstone Presbytery.

24-055 Meeting Opening: Moderator Melissa Bell opened the meeting with prayer, declared a quorum present, and read Matthew 25: 31-46. Presbyters discussed how the passage spoke to them. Thoughts included: the way we treat others is the way we treat Christ; the way we treat everyone is the way we treat the image of God since we are created in that image; do we sometimes do things to score points; it is a privilege to be with and serve the least among us; one is grateful for the opportunity to and ability to walk alongside others who need our help; kindness and compassion are important; We talk of people "on the margins," but by whose definition? Hopefully it is God's vision; physicality is prominent in the passage: food, clothes, drink; we are humbled to do better; faith without works is dead.

24-056 Docket:

- **Action:** A motion was made and seconded to move item #4, the Representation & Nomination (Rep/Nom) Team report, to the first item on the docket. The motion passed.

24-057 Representation Report (Attachment A): Rep/Nom Moderator Lanny Rounds reviewed the representation report noting that they are still seeking a person to serve and Vice Moderator of Presbytery. The presbytery's rotational system would indicate that this person should be a male minister. A question was raised about the rigidity of the rotational practice, and clarification was made that there have been times when presbytery has not been able to hold to the practice due to people's availability and/or willingness to serve. Thanks was given to all whose terms are complete and to all who agreed to serve.

- **Action:** A motion was made and seconded to accept the Rep/Nom's Representation Report with thanks and appreciation from the presbytery.

24-058 Leadership Cabinet Report:

1. Policy Against Harassment (Attachment B):

Motion from Leadership Cabinet: Leadership Cabinet recommends Yellowstone Presbytery adopt the proposed Anti-Harassment policy.

Discussion: There is a correction to be made to line 5 to remove the term "national origin" because it is repeated a second time in the same sentence. Also, with advice from Ben Thoeny at Associated Employers of Montana, the lines at the bottom of the policy about accepting or refusing a copy of the report was removed.

- **Action:** A motion was made and seconded to adopt the policy as corrected. The motion passed.

2. Policy Against Racism (Attachment C):

Motion from Leadership Cabinet: The Leadership Cabinet's recommends Yellowstone Presbytery adopt the proposed Anti-Racism policy.

Discussion: Objections were raised about triggering language in the proposed policy and about churches opposing sections of it. Leadership Cabinet did ask for input and at their last meeting incorporated all suggested changes they received into the policy. Some were confused as to what the inflammatory language is in the proposed policy. George stated one spot was in bullet #7 under "How We Respond" which could begin with "to consider" rather than "to engage." It was stated that the bullets were quite confusing to some about who they applied to. It was noted that presbytery is to provide an example to churches and failure to do that isn't helpful to churches or pastors. After discussion and confusion on the process, Sarah Tunall made the following motion:

- **Action:** A motion was made to refer the proposed Anti-Racism policy back to Leadership Council, calling for a diverse group of voices together to create a document that represents all the churches in our presbytery and God's value of all humanity, to be presented and voted on at our next stated presbytery meeting on March 7. Seventeen voted yes, 5 voted no, and 5 abstained. The motion passed.

With concern about waiting too long to adopt a policy against racism, it was suggested that

if the way be clear for a policy to be brought forward before March 7, a special meeting be called.

3. **Nomination to the Representation & Nomination Team:**

Motion from Leadership Cabinet: The Leadership Cabinet nominates MWS JP Carlson to the Representation & Nomination Ministry Team class of 2027.

Moderator Melissa asked for nominations from the floor three times. With no additional nominations, nominations were closed.

The motion passed.

24-059 Closing: At the request of the Moderator, George Goodrich offered the closing prayer.

- **Action:** A motion was made and seconded to close the meeting. The motion passed.

Respectfully Submitted,

Caroline Fleming
Stated Clerk

PART 2 – Representation Report for 2024-2025

Our analysis of those serving in elected positions in Yellowstone Presbytery follows. Recommendations are highlighted in red.

There are 5 Moderator roles currently filled. Of these, there are:

3 men, 2 women

1 ruling elders, 4 ministers of Word and Sacrament

We are still in the process of filling leadership roles, with 2 additional roles to be filled.

We recommend that the vice-moderator of the Presbytery should be a male, preferably a Minister of Word and Sacrament as this rotation has been our Presbytery's tradition, to balance these leadership roles and bring greater balance to the Leadership Cabinet.

There are 42 elected positions filled at this time. Of these, there are:

15 men, 27 women

24 ruling elders, 18 ministers of Word and sacrament

These balances tip towards women (as does the balance in most congregations) and toward ruling elders.

The 2025 Representation/Nominating Team will be;

2 men, 2 women

2 MWS and 2 Elders.

Several of the ministers of Word and sacrament in our small presbytery are serving on two ministry teams.

Geographical representation:

7 are from the eastern region of Yellowstone Presbytery (4 churches)

18 are from the central region of Yellowstone Presbytery (6 churches)

9 are from the western region of Yellowstone Presbytery (3 churches)

Leadership (MWS and Ruling Elders) come from 13 of our 22 churches.

(The boundaries between these regions could be drawn differently, yielding a different count. The central region includes the largest congregations.) We recommend seeking more

representation from the eastern and western regions, as well as encouraging participation of the 9 churches not currently represented in presbytery roles.

Age representation:

27 are 60+ years of age

7 are 40-59 years of age

8 are under 40 years of age

(Many of these ages are guesses!) This distribution is similar to one year ago. We have younger minister members who are taking on more roles in the presbytery. The time demands of presbytery service are more easily met by ruling elders who are retired than those who are younger and working full-time.

We recommend paying attention to this imbalance and encouraging young leadership, making accommodations in our time expectations, perhaps meeting times as much as possible.

Race/ethnicity/culture

To our knowledge, only one person serving Yellowstone Presbytery checks a “non-White” box. This is reflective of most of the membership of our congregations, but also a reminder that our congregations do not represent the growing diversity in the state of Montana.

We recommend increased awareness and openness to the gifts of God’s diverse people in our communities.

Respectfully submitted by the Representation/Nominating Ministry Team for 2024,

Lanny Rounds (moderator), Terry Johnson, Sandy Welch

Kathy Goodrich, staff

YELLOWSTONE PRESBYTERY POLICY AGAINST HARASSMENT

The Presbytery of Yellowstone, including all members, commissioners, committee members, and staff, is committed to maintaining a presbytery free from harassment in the workplace, at meetings of the presbytery, or at any of its committee meetings. Therefore, Yellowstone Presbytery will not tolerate any form of harassment or discrimination based on any of the following characteristics: race, color, gender, gender identity, national origin, age, sexual orientation, sex (including pregnancy), religion, national origin, disability, veteran status, or other characteristic protected by law. Such behavior can be a form of employment discrimination that violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, or the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Anti-discrimination laws also prohibit harassment against individuals in retaliation for filing a discrimination charge, for testifying, or participating in any way in an investigation proceeding or lawsuit under these laws, or against individuals who oppose employment practices that they reasonably believe discriminate against individuals, in violation of these laws. The presbytery will not tolerate intimidation, humiliation, physical or mental abuse toward one another. Those found to engage in this behavior will be disciplined, up to and including termination of employment or duties.

DEFINITION

For purposes of this policy, harassment is defined as any unwelcome or offensive conduct that targets one or more of the characteristics listed above and has the purpose or effect of creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment or that interferes with an individual's work performance. It becomes unlawful when enduring offensive conduct becomes a condition of continued employment, and/or the conduct is severe or pervasive enough to create a work environment that a reasonable person would consider intimidating, hostile, or abusive.

Offensive conduct may include, but is not limited to, offensive jokes, slurs, epithets or name calling, physical assaults or threats, intimidation, ridicule or mockery, insults or put-downs, offensive objects or pictures, and interference with work performance. Harassment can occur in a variety of circumstances, such as:

- The harasser can be the victim's supervisor, a supervisor in another area, a co-worker, or a non-employee.
- The victim does not have to be the person directly being harassed, but can be anyone affected by the offensive conduct, also known as third-party harassment.

TYPES OF HARRASSMENT

- **Physical or threatening behavior** toward a person or property. In its extreme, such behavior can be considered assault.
- **Personal/Psychological** harassment can include bullying, where the victim is subjected to unwanted remarks, insults, offensive and derogatory statements.
- **Discrimination** is directed at someone's race, age, sex, or other form of protected class (as listed above), who is subjected to offensive remarks.
- **Cyberbullying** is threatening or offensive conduct on social media. It spreads quickly and can easily get out of hand.
- **Sexual harassment** includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature including display of sexually explicit images or texts

on the part of supervisors, employees, and nonemployees. (See separate policy against sexual harassment in Yellowstone Presbytery's Administrative Manual.)

- **Third-party harassment** is when a person witnesses harassment in the presbytery and is adversely affected by it.

PROCEDURE

At the time of hire, all new employees will receive a copy of the most current presbytery Policy Against Harassment. Employees have an obligation to report any behavior that they reasonably believe violates the presbytery's anti-harassment policy. Persons who believe they have been subjected to or have witnessed harassment or discrimination are strongly encouraged to inform the harasser that the conduct is unwelcome and must stop and report their experience to either the Executive Presbyter or the Moderator of the Leadership Cabinet.

If a threat to the personal safety of a staff person or others is determined to exist, the offender can be removed from the meeting or premises. The incident must be reported to the Executive Presbyter or the Moderator of Leadership Cabinet and may be followed by an investigation and possible termination.

If serious harassment is observed or reported, such as assault, verbal or written threats, steps should be taken to separate the parties, with or without the aid of police. The incident must be reported to the Executive Presbyter or the Moderator of the Leadership Cabinet who may take immediate steps as deemed appropriate. If the harassment continues and the staff person wishes to formally document the harassment, a formal letter of complaint must be sent to the Stated Clerk who then initiates an investigation committee according to the Presbytery's policies.

The investigating committee will conduct a fair and thorough investigation into the allegations of harassment while respecting the privacy of the complaining employee and the alleged harasser to the fullest possible extent.

Yellowstone Presbytery will not tolerate any form of retaliation or retribution against any person who, in good faith, reports acts of harassment and/or discrimination or who participates in an investigation of allegations of harassment.

Intentional harassment is a major violation of presbytery policy and will be dealt with accordingly by corrective action, such as counseling, suspension, or termination, depending upon the severity of the violation.

It is the intent of Yellowstone Presbytery to provide an environment free from verbal, physical, and visual forms [e.g., signs, posters, or documents] of harassment and an environment free of harassment, intimidation, or coercion in any form. Displaying sexually explicit images or text on presbytery property or at meetings of Yellowstone Presbytery or its committees is a violation of presbytery policy. No one is allowed to download, archive, edit, or manipulate sexually explicit material from the Internet while using presbytery resources. Any sexually explicit material sent by anyone associated with the presbytery or received from outside sources should be given to the Executive Presbyter or the Moderator of the Leadership Cabinet.

All persons are expected to be sensitive to the individual rights of others.

POLICY REVIEW

This policy shall be reviewed every three years for improvements and/or updates.

I have read and understand the Yellowstone Presbytery Policy Against Harassment and agree to abide by it.

Signature

Date

Witness

Date

A copy of this agreement is available to you.

A copy was _____ **given to me** _____ **refused by me.**

DRAFT

Yellowstone Presbytery Policy Against Racism

The Presbytery of Yellowstone acknowledges the sin of racism and believes that racism, marginalization, and discrimination are sins against God and humanity that are inconsistent with our Christian values. As our PC(USA) denomination states, "[R]acism is the opposite of what God intends for humanity... [It] is a lie about our fellow human beings, for it says that some are less than others." Therefore, racism in any form is unacceptable within the Presbytery of Yellowstone.

Definition

We define racism as the combination of social power and racial prejudice to create systems that treat people differently, based on their defined racial group. Privileges are provided for some while dehumanizing, excluding, or oppressing others.

Christ breaks down all the divisions we create. As members, commissioners, committee members, and staff of Yellowstone Presbytery, it is counter to the faith we proclaim to bolster divisions between God's children, including those based on race and other social inequities. Therefore we, the people, congregations, and body of the Presbytery of Yellowstone stand against racism in any form and pledge to work toward transformation, not just within our Presbytery, but also within the communities in which our congregations reside.

We acknowledge that anti-racism work is and will be difficult, uncomfortable, and ongoing. However, as our denomination affirms: "Because of our biblical understanding of who God is and what God intends for humanity, [we] must stand against, speak against, and work against racism. Anti-racist efforts are not optional for Christians. They are an essential aspect of Christian discipleship, without which we fail to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ."

How We Will Respond

As we strive to become a more welcoming and inclusive Body of Christ, we call ourselves to action, in ways that include, but are not limited to the following efforts:

- To continually examine our practices (written, spoken, formal and informal) for influences of racism and acknowledge and remedy those practices when found.
- To continually educate ourselves about racism, through the Presbytery's leadership, congregational studies, and children's & youth programs.
- To use prayer, mindfulness, and the Spirit's guidance, to transform our hearts and souls from the inside out.
- To continue to repent of the role that we individually and collectively have played and continue to play in establishing and maintaining systemic racism.
- To work toward racial equity in recruiting, installing/hiring, training, and retaining employees and leaders.
- To encourage the management of presbytery investments and finances in ways that acknowledge the presence of racial injustice through financial systems, including support of minority-owned or minority-led businesses.
- To engage in acts of restoration and reparation where the presbytery or its churches are

- shown to have created disparities of wealth through racist action or assertion of power.
- To support peacemaking movements that address racism within a spectrum of other intersectional identities.
 - To cultivate postures of curiosity, humility, shared humanity, and delight in interactions with all people who have been marginalized.
 - To actively listen to, rather than speak at, people of all races, colors, and national origins.

PROCEDURE

At the time of hire, all new employees will receive a copy of the most current presbytery Anti-Racism Policy. Employees have an obligation to report any behavior that they reasonably believe violates the presbytery's anti-racism policy. Persons who believe they have been subjected to or have witnessed racism are strongly encouraged to inform the other person that the conduct is unwelcome and must stop, then report their experience to the Executive Presbyter or the Moderator of the Leadership Cabinet.

If serious racism is observed or reported, such as assault, verbal or written threats, steps should be taken to separate the parties, with or without the aid of police. The incident must be reported to the Executive Presbyter or the Moderator of the Leadership Cabinet who may take immediate steps as deemed appropriate. If the racist action continues and the person wishes to formally document the problem, a formal letter of complaint must be sent to the Stated Clerk who then initiates an investigation according to the Presbytery's policies.

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All persons are expected to be sensitive to the individual rights of others.

POLICY REVIEW

This policy shall be reviewed every three years for improvements and/or updates.

I have read and understand the Yellowstone Presbytery Policy Against Racism and agree to abide by it.

Signature

Date

Witness

Date

A copy of this agreement is available to you.

A copy of the policy was _____ **given to me** _____ **refused by me.**

DRAFT