

**PRESBYTERY OF BLACKHAWK ASSEMBLY MEETING MINUTES
IN-PERSON MEETING AND VIA ZOOM
NOVEMBER 18, 2025**

The Presbytery of Blackhawk convened on Tuesday, November 18, 2025, at 9:35 A.M. in a Stated Meeting held in person at First Presbyterian Church of Dupage in Bolingbrook, IL and on the Zoom platform. This was a joint meeting of the Ecclesiastical body, the Presbytery of Blackhawk, and the Corporate body, the Presbytery of Blackhawk, Inc.

WELCOME/OVERVIEW OF THE ZOOM MEETING PROCESS

Moderator Pastor Lisa Lopez-Meyer welcomed all participants. She gave an overview of how the meeting would be conducted and instructed attendees on speaking and voting on Zoom during the meeting.

WELCOME FROM THE HOST PASTOR

Rev. KJ Wester, the host church's pastor, welcomed the attendees.

CALL TO ORDER AND OPENING PRAYER

Moderator Lisa Lopez-Meyer called the meeting to order at 9:35 a.m. and opened with prayer.

The moderator introduced and seated the following corresponding members. Pastor Alan Willadsen serves as the Commissioned Pastor at First Presbyterian, Fairbury. He is a member of the Great Rivers Presbytery and Rev. Dr. Sara Dingham, the Synod Executive for the Synod of Lincoln Trails, was welcomed via Zoom. Sara is a minister member of the Presbytery of Whitewater Valley.

First-time minister member, Rev. Nikelle Johnson, Dixon, First was recognized and welcomed.

First time commissioner, Karen Pillion, Utica, Waltham was welcomed.

Moderator Lopez-Meyer declared that a quorum was present. All attendees are listed on the meeting roll call (attached). She presented the proposed docket for the meeting.

	<u>Item</u>	<u>Leader</u>
9:00	Gathering with coffee	
9:10	First time commissioner orientation	Eric Heinekamp
9:30	Call to order and opening prayer	Lisa Lopez-Meyer
	Welcome and overview of meeting	
	Quorum/Minutes/Docket/Corresponding Members	
	Nominating Committee Part 1	Eric Corbin
9:45	Worship	
	Scripture and sermon	Lisa Lopez-Meyer
	Installation of New Moderator	Lisa Lopez-Meyer
	Commissioning of Presbytery Leaders	Mike Engle
	Communion and Offering	
10:45	Break	

11:00	Learning Opportunity – Intentional Authentic Evangelism	
Noon	Lunch	
1:00	Council Actions	Ray Lantz
	LANA Report	
	Committees of Council	
	Personnel	Mike Selburg
	Finance and Property	Scott Vandermyde
	Mission	Thea Kornelius
	Visioning and Assembly Planning	Lisa Lopez-Meyer
1:45	Committees / Commission of Assembly	
	Commission on Ministry	Laurie Walker
	Committee on Preparation for Ministry	Lauren Patrus-Betzel
	Nominating Committee Part 2	Eric Corbin
2:00	Reports	
	General Presbyter/Stated Clerk	Eric Heinekamp
	Presbyterian Women ?	
	Synod Report	KJ Wester?
	Stronghold Camp ?	
2:15	Corporation/Trustees	Lisa Lopez-Meyer
	Trustees	
	Treasurer report	Alan Willadsen
2:25	New and unfinished business	
2:30	Adjourn with prayer	Mike Engle

The next stated meeting of the Presbytery Assembly will be Tuesday, February 10, 2026 at 5:30pm. This evening meeting will be on the Zoom platform only.

The moderator moved that if there were no objections, the corresponding members be seated, the docket be approved, and the minutes of the September 18, 2025, Regular Assembly meeting be approved. The motion was **Approved by Unanimous Consent.**

NOMINATING

Moderator Rev. Eric Corbin **moved** to approve the following nominations in bold print. Coming from the committee, no second is needed, and it was **Voted** to accept the slate of candidates.

Presbytery Assembly Officers

2026 Moderator
Mike Engel- CP

Committee on Preparation for Ministry
2028- Rev. Nikelle Johnson- MWS
2028- Rev. Eric Corbin-MWS

2026 Vice Moderator
Rev. Lauren Patrus-Betzel- MWS

Permanent Judicial Commission
2031- Rev. Deb Roberts- MWS

2026 Moderator of Council
Lisa Lopez-Meyer- MWS

Presbytery Council

Synod Commissioner

2027- Jan Chandler- MWS

2027- Position Open- RE
2028- Position Open- MWS
2028- Position Open- RE

2028- Rev. John Walker- MWS

2028- Ray Lantz- RE

Nominating Committee

2028- Rev. Bo Mircea- MSW

2028- Phil Thompson- RE

Vision and Assembly Planning

2027- Position Open- MWS
2027- Position Open- RE
2028- Rev. Lauren Patrus-Betzel- MWS
2028- Position Open- RE

Mission Committee

2026- Position Open- RE
2028- Rev. Rothea Kornelius- MSW
2028- Position Open- RE
2026- Position Open- CM

Personnel Committee

2028- Rev. Clinton Roberts- MSW

Finance and Property Committee

2028- Position Open- MSW

Commission on Ministry

2026- Position Open- MSW
2026- Position Open- RE
2028- Rev. Richard (Skip) Shaffer- MSW
2028- Rev. Katie Ricks- MSW
2028- Position Open- MSW
2028- Position Open- RE (3)

OPENING WORSHIP

Moderator Lopez-Meyer moved the assembly into a time of worship. The service opened with music led by Romellus Wilson. Rev. Clinton Roberts led the Call to Worship, Prayers of Confession, Declaration of Forgiveness, and the Passing of the Peace. Rev. Martha Langford read scripture from John 1: 35-50 and Matthew 28: 16-20. Rev. Lisa Lopez-Meyer preached a sermon titled "Come and See."

INSTALLATION OF MODERATOR

Moderator Lisa Lopez-Meyer thanked those who were commissioned and served the Presbytery in the past year.

She installed Pastor Mike Engle, Elwood Community, as the Moderator of the Blackhawk Presbytery and presented him with the gavel, the two crosses, and the moderator stole. He assumed the moderator role and thanked Lisa for her service as the Moderator of the

Blackhawk Presbytery. He installed the Vice-Moderator, Moderators of the Commissions and Committees, and the Treasurer.

Alan Willadsen gave the prayer for the offering, and it was taken via cash, check to the presbytery office, or online through the website, and will be used to support the Shared Mission Giving.

Rev. KJ Wester led the assembly in the sacrament of Holy Communion.

LEARNING OPPORTUNITY- The Seven Marks of Vital Congregations

Rev. Lisa Lopez-Meyers led the assembly in the study of Intentional Authentic Evangelism from "8 Habits of Evangelism." The videos used today are on the 8Habits.org website. The habit of Radical Welcome was the focus today.

The assembly was dismissed for lunch.

COUNCIL ACTIONS

Moderator Mike Engle called Moderator of Council, Ray Lantz to give the Council actions. He invited Eric Heinekamp and then Laurie Walker to present motions to the assembly.

Eric Heinekamp personally **moved** that the Blackhawk Presbytery authorize allocating \$10,000 of additional funding to the Mission Committee to be used for food insecurity grants in the presbytery. The funds will come from the Blackhawk Foundation Account. The motion was seconded and **VOTED** to approve.

Laurie Walker, representing the Land and Name Acknowledgement (LANA) Team, shared the final four proposed names selected renaming the presbytery: Illinois Heartland Presbytery, Illinois Prairie Presbytery, Prairie Land Presbytery, and Stronghold Presbytery.

It was **moved** from the Council to disqualify the name "Stronghold Presbytery" from consideration. Coming from the council, no second is needed, and following a discussion it was **Voted** to approve not including the name "Stronghold Presbytery: in the choices for the final voting.

It was **moved** to postpone voting on the name change of the Blackhawk Presbytery today for additional deliberation by a new subgroup (consisting of three LANA team members and three additional people), with the task of generating three additional proposed names, along with the final three names still in consideration. The motion was seconded, and following discussion it was **Voted** to not approve the motion to postpone the vote on the name change.

The assembly proceeded with voting on the new name for the Blackhawk Presbytery from the following names: *Illinois Heartland Presbytery, Illinois Prairie Presbytery, and Prairie Lands Presbytery*. There were two rounds of voting. The first round of voting determined the top two vote getters: *Illinois Heartland Presbytery and Illinois Prairie Presbytery*. For the second round, assembly members voted from those top two choices, and the new name **APPROVED** by the assembly of voting members was *Illinois Prairie Presbytery*.

The next steps for the approved name change to *Illinois Prairie Presbytery* is to first submit the request to the Synod of Lincoln Trails for a vote by February 13, 2026. If approved, the motion then goes to the General Assembly Administrative Commission for Mid Councils for a vote on March 13, 2026. If approved, the General Assembly meets the last week of June, where the final vote for the name change will be acted on. Until these steps are acted on the name of the presbytery remains Blackhawk Presbytery.

COMMITTEES OF COUNCIL

MISSION

The Mission Committee did not have a written report. Committee moderator Rev. Thea Kornelius reminded the assembly to see Claire Brennecka or Laurie Walker if you are interested in being considered for the Kenya trip. There is \$1250 left in the general 2025 mission budget. \$10,000 more dollars will be allocated to help fund those churches who have food pantries or distribute meals to those in need. The form is on the website under resources.

VISIONING AND ASSEMBLY PLANNING

Committee moderator Lisa Lopez-Meyer highlighted several items from the committee's written report. The group is being split into two separate groups: one for visioning and another for assembly planning.

COMMISSIONS AND COMMITTEES OF ASSEMBLY

COMMISSION ON MINISTRY

Commission moderator Pastor Laurie Walker called attention to the committee's written report.

ITEMS FOR PRESBYTERY ACTION

The COM **moved** for the approval of the 2026 minimum terms of call for Ministers of Word and Sacrament, which includes a 2% increase. Coming from the committee, no second was needed; it was **VOTED** to approve.

The COM **moved** to approve the new minimum terms of call policy that was presented at the September 2025 presbytery meeting. Coming from the committee, no second was needed; it was **VOTED** to approve.

The COM **moved** to approve an Administrative Commission for the installation of Rev. Karen Katie Ricks, Sterling, First on November 23 at 2:30 pm. Coming from the committee, no second was needed; it was **VOTED** to approve.

Laurie Walker welcomed Rev. Nikelle Johnson, at her first presbytery meeting, and requested prayers for the churches in our presbytery that are in transition.

REPORTING ON ACTIONS TAKEN BY COM:

New Calls

1. **Approved** terms of call, if the way be clear, for Nikelle Johnson to serve Dixon, First as their next installed pastor, effective September, 2025. She is coming from Flint, Michigan and will be ordained in her home church before being installed at Dixon.

Effective Salary	\$ 58,000
SECA	\$ 4,437
Reimbursable Expenses	\$ 12,980
Medical Coverage	\$ 9,280
Pension, Death, & Disability	\$ 5,800
Automobile Expense	\$ 1,500
Business/Professional	\$ 1,500
Continuing Education	\$ 1,500
Medical Reimbursement	\$ 3,480
Moving Expenses (in 2025)	\$ 5,000
Study Leave time of 2 weeks, Vacation time of 4 weeks	

New Commissions/Covenants*

*Note: Covenants with ordained pastors may now be for as long as 3 years just the same as for commissioned pastors.

2. **Approved** temporary pastor covenant between Dekalb, Westminster and Deb & Clinton Roberts (MWS couple) effective October 1, 2025 – January 15, 2026.

Part-time-	15 hours/week
Cash Salary/ Total Effective Salary	\$ 3,000.00/month
Professional Expenses:	\$ 350.00

Renewal of Covenants and Contracts

3. **Approved** renewed covenant between Winnebago, Middle Creek and Phil Thompson (CP) effective December 1, 2025 – November 30, 2026.

Part-time-	20 hours/week
Cash Salary/ Total Effective Salary	\$20,564.40/year
SECA Supplement	\$ 1, 573.17
Health Care Reimbursement	\$ 1,233.86
Automobile Expenses	\$ 2,400.00
Professional Expenses	\$ 1,250.00
Continuing Education	\$ 750.00

4. **Approved** renewed covenant between Princeton, First and Colleen Lawrence (CP) effective July 1, 2025 – January 15, 2026.

Part-time-	20 hours/week
Cash Salary	\$10,000.00/year
Housing	\$12,000.00
Effective Salary	\$22,000.00
SECA Supplement	\$ 1,683.00
Health Care Reimbursement	\$ 6,000.00
Additional Compensation/Allowance	\$ 2,200.00

Automobile Expenses	\$ 2,700.00
Continuing Education	\$ 750.00
Vacation:	4 weeks (including 6 Sundays)

Approved Moderators

5. **Approved** Marengo, First- Claire Brenneka (CP)
6. **Approved** Dixon, First- Eric Heinekamp (MWS)
7. **Approved** Utica-Waltham- Spencer Lawrence (MWS)
8. **Approved** Waterman- Eric Heinekamp (MWS)
9. **Approved** Dakota, Community- Phil Thompson (CP)
10. **Approved** Crystal Lake, Ridgefield- Barbara Bundick (MWS)

Ministry Discernment Profiles (MDPs)

11. **Approved** MDP for Dekalb, Westminster for a solo pastor
12. **Approved** MDP for Rochelle First for a transitional pastor
13. **Approved** MDP for Joliet, First for an associate pastor

Miscellaneous

14. **Approved** the sabbatical agreement between Ottawa, First Presbyterian and John Walker (MWS) effective April 13, 2025 to August. 9, 2026
15. **Approved** Nicole Melara serving outside our bounds (AK), in Yukon Presbytery, from 10/1/25 to 11/24/25

OTHER INFORMATION

- A big welcome to Nikelle Johnson (MWS) serving Dixon First. She started October 1st so this is her first presbytery meeting.
- Savanna, First -Voted to merge with Community Church and now forming a Merging Committee with equal representation elected by each congregation.
- The PCUSA 1001 Worshipping Communities is offering \$10k with matching grants available for any small group that wants to start something new outside of an existing church body. Please contact our New Communities Committee with ideas or for more information.
- A Presbytery Liaison is meant to be assigned to every church in the Presbytery. Their job is to build a supportive relationship with the church and serve as a go-to person for questions or assistance about church ministry. Please let Kathy Pearson or me know if you are interested in serving as a liaison. Elders are perfect for this special calling.

ELECTION OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY COMMISSIONER

The Nominating Committee **moved** to elect the following people to serve as Commissioners to General Assembly June 2026 at the General Assembly: Ministers of Word and Sacrament- Rothea Kornelius, Elgin, First and Katie Ricks, Sterling, First; and Ruling Elders- Ray Lantz, Piper City, First and Jeannette Sheehan, Rockford, Third. Coming from the committee, no second was needed; it was **VOTED** to approve.

General Presbyter

Rev. Heinekamp presented his report (see attached).

“See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?” (Isaiah 43:19, NIV)

The Synod of Lincoln Trails hosted 50 newly ordained pastors at Wellspring in Harmony, IN. The meetings focused on leadership, resilience in pastoral life, encouraging church sessions, and so much more. Four of our newer pastors attended and Eric facilitated classes on church and pastor finances.

The annual Midcouncil Leadership met in Louisville, KY. Work was started three years ago to merge the Office of the General Assembly and the Presbyterian Mission Agency into a unified agency with the new organization structure beginning on November 17, 2025. There are four offices within the the unified agency. One is the new Office of Innovation which has been established to determine a new vision for our denomination to move forward.

STATED CLERK REPORT

It was **moved** that the following meeting dates be approved. (*Noting there will be no hybrid meetings.*) It was **VOTED** to approve.

February 10, 2026	Evening by Zoom
May 19, 2026	In Person at Stronghold
September 15, 2026	Morning by Zoom
November 10, 2026	In Person at location TBD

It was **moved** that it be approved to celebrate the Lord’s Supper at each assembly meeting in 2026. It was seconded, and **VOTED** to approve the motion.

Eric noted that each congregation is required by The Book of Order to have their record books and minutes for the year reviewed. The following dates are available to complete the reviews. There are resources online to support completing these tasks.

- Saturday, November 29th - 10:00 am Saturday- First Presbyterian Church of Sterling
- December 6th - 10:00 am- Church of Hope Presbyterian Gardner Saturday
- December 6th - 2:00 pm Saturday- First Presbyterian Church of Galena
- December 13th - 10:00 am- Fox Valley Presbyterian Church, Geneva

Churches are encouraged to review their rolls and reach out to members that have not been active to engage them again. Statistical reports will be completed soon.

The presbytery has authorized three active administrative commissions to complete their designated work. The commission for First Presbyterian of Kankakee is finalizing the sale of the former church property and hopes to close the sale this year. The commission for First Presbyterian of Wenona has been unable to find a buyer for the property and is now looking for options to raze the former church building. The administrative commission for United Presbyterian Church of Somonauk is continuing to work with the congregation as they discern their future and the possible disposition of their church property.

It was **moved** to waive the limitations of terms of Wheatland Presbyterian Church in Plainfield for their Clerk of Session, Joel Craig. As clerk, Joel is finishing his 6th year of service as a ruling elder and would like to serve another 3-year term. Book of Order section G-2.0404 states a

presbytery may waive the 6-year term limit by majority vote. The motions was seconded and **VOTED** to approve.

In our presbytery there are 62 congregations, and each church is entitled to elect one ruling elder commissioner to attend presbytery meetings in 2026 as a voting member. There are 49 active minister members and these are separate from the ruling elder commissioners.

SYNOD REPORT

There was no written Synod report but KJ Wester reported for Sarah Dingman. 2026 Synod commissioners representing Blackhawk Presbytery are Ray Lance, John Walker, Derek Sherman, and KJ Wester. The Synod offers support to pastors, and support for presbyteries. They are waiting to hear if they received a grant.

STRONGHOLD REPORT

Executive director of Camp Stronghold and Retreat, Dr. Danny Pierce thanked the presbytery for their ongoing support. He reported that 120 people attended the Youth Fall Retreat at Stronghold Camp with 14 churches participating in worship and service work.

The last five years Stronghold has paid \$20,000 each year to the presbytery to pay off their debt, which will be completed this year. They have a new relationship with a development consultant to build fund raising. They have an individual who will match funds raised up to \$5000. They are looking ahead to a capital campaign to replace the roof on the castle in 2030. Ryan Anderson gave out flyers for the 2026 confirmation retreat.

CORPORATION AND TRUSTEES

TREASURER'S REPORT

Treasurer Alan Willadsen reported the presbytery is in good financial standing. The treasurer's report was received by **UNANIMOUS CONSENT**.

NEW AND UNFINISHED REPORT

A new location for the collection of World Service kits will be determined per the World Service organization.

ADJOURN WITH PRAYER

Moderator Mike Engle called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. It was **moved**, seconded, and **VOTED** to adjourn the meeting of the day. Pastor Mike Engle closed in prayer, and the meeting adjourned at 2:36 pm.

Rev. Eric Heinekamp
Dorene Tieche

Stated Clerk
Recording Clerk