

Southwest Ohio Reformed Presbyterian Church Elder Visitation Report to the Great Lakes – Gulf Presbytery, January 2024

Introduction

The elder visitation committee, consisting of Jeff Brotherton (RE – Belle Center), Dave Schisler (RE – Columbus), and Adam Doerr (RE – 2nd RP in Indianapolis, chair) was thankful for the opportunity to meet with the Southwest Ohio Reformed Presbyterian (SWORP) Church over the weekend of January 13th and 14th. We are thankful to the elders at SWORP for answering the presbytery visitation questions, which familiarized us with the congregation and their ministries prior to our visit.

Schedule

We met with the Session on the afternoon of Saturday, January 13th at the home of Tim Vincze (RE) and with the rest of the Session – Dick Knodel (TE), Scott Damerow (RE), and Steven Work (RE, TE). Steven has preached for the congregation on several occasions over the past year and has filled the pulpit for other nearby Reformed Presbyterian churches. Pastor Knodel serves as a hospital chaplain in addition to his pastoral responsibilities.

During this afternoon meeting, we learned that each one of the session members is caring for a family member to some degree. Scott is serving on the ad interim committee. Tim Vincze is active in elder visitations with families in the congregation. During this time, we discussed the health of their spiritual lives and the congregation. The Session was able to describe how they support each other and how they share in the challenges of the ministry.

We concluded our time in prayer and went to a local restaurant for dinner. At dinner, Pastor Knodel shared his moving, personal testimony of how the Holy Spirit drew him to faith in Jesus Christ. We, as a visitation committee, enjoyed our time of fellowship around the meal getting to know one another.

On the Sabbath, we worshiped the Lord together. Pastor Knodel preached from I Kings 18:30-40, where the Lord clearly demonstrated that he is God to the people of Elijah's day. To aid the congregation in following the sermon, Pastor Knodel pointed out from the text the three ingredients, the two results, and the one way of salvation.

After light refreshments Pastor Knodel led the Sabbath School time with a church history class focused on the Puritans from a study by Joel Beeke of Reformation Heritage. This is a unified class time with all ages present. After a video, the class discussed their answers to the prepared questions for mutual edification and sharpening.

The visitation committee met one more time with the Session over lunch. Susan Knodel prepared a wonderful, warm meal for us before we departed for home.

Church Life

The core families at SWORP are deeply committed to the teaching and doctrine of the church. The Session described this body as a “commuter church, not a community church” as the families converge from different directions around the Cincinnati area and some from quite a distance.

The Session gave thanks to the Lord for the overall peace of the church. Some fellowship well into the afternoon after the Sabbath School is completed. The visitation committee witnessed congregants talking, laughing, and fellowshiping after class. The congregation used to enjoy a weekly Psalm sing and hopes to start it back up again soon.

Worship

In 2023 Pastor Knodel finished preaching through Genesis. Now, he is preaching through I Kings. Pastor Knodel is thankful for Steven Work filling the pulpit when he is gone, as Steven, “preaches with authority, because he loves God’s word and the Lord.”

Session

The committee had the opportunity to discuss a number of items with the Session and are pleased to offer a positive report of these discussions. The meeting itself was a well-organized and thoughtful gathering. The session demonstrated a deep dedication to their faith and their role in guiding the congregation. Their commitment to addressing important matters, both spiritual and practical, was clear, and they approached discussions with a genuine desire to listen and understand the perspectives of everyone present. They desire for the church to be “distinctively reformed” in its practice and teachings.

One of the most commendable aspects of the session is the emphasis on spiritual growth and education. Later discussion with members of the congregation showed that the Session’s interfaces with the congregation were enlightening and thought-provoking, encouraging members to reflect on their faith and its relevance to their daily lives. The Session’s commitment to nurturing the spiritual development of its members was evident and inspiring. Furthermore, the strong sense of community and support within the congregation was a truly uplifting exhibition of the leadership of the Session. It was evident that the Session endeavors to make SWORP not just a place of worship but also a tight-knit family where individuals genuinely care for each other's well-being.

The committee noted that because the Session is so aligned in vision, theology, and doctrine, and thankfully having no major controversies, much of Session business is conducted after worship on an informal basis with constituted meetings only occurring a couple times a year. While this is not out of order, it does result in much of the work and decision making not being recorded in minutes. While the committee is not aware of any problems arising from this informal practice, the lack of records could cause issues if any of the decisions are challenged by a member or appealed. Additionally, formal records helps the session keep track of major decisions and holds the elders accountable for actions taken. As a result the committee would encourage the Session meet more regularly in constituted court and keep minutes of their meetings and decision-making.

The committee was encouraged to hear that Dr. Knodel is still passionate about ministry and that TE RE Work has been able to help supply the pulpit. During the meeting Dr. Knodel commented on how his role has changed as he has devoted more time and energy to caring for family. The committee recommends, that some time and effort be focused on developing a plan to support an orderly succession of the role of Teaching Elder for the church in the event that Dr. Knodel decides to retire, whenever that should occur. While Dr. Knodel has no retirement plans at this time, developing a succession plan for when the Lord calls Dr. Knodel to step down from the ministry is a wise way to promote the peace and prosperity of the SWORP congregation.

In conclusion, the committee's visit with the Session of SWORP left the committee with a profound sense of connection and spiritual enrichment. The welcoming atmosphere, the dedication of the Session, and its commitment to spiritual growth all contribute to making the SWORP Church a place of warmth, inclusion, and personal growth.

Diaconate

Pastor Knodel's son, Chris, is the only deacon. The church currently meets in a Christian school, so the cost of building maintenance is non-existent.

Youth Work

There are approximately four families with children of varying ages. This is an item for prayer that the Lord would bring more families to this congregation of his people.

Discipline – There has not been a need for a case of church discipline, thank the Lord.

Outreach

The congregation has been involved in multiple community outreach efforts, including tract and pen distribution, street preaching, and witnessing as part of Pastor Knodel's chaplaincy work. He is currently contemplating a new tract on the topic of worship.

Finances

The Session informed us that the congregation was generous, the church had no issues meeting its expenses, and the Knodels were well provided for financially. They support the work of Presbytery and Synod.

Summary

The committee was encouraged by the Lord's work in Southwest Ohio. We commend the Session for their faithful labor in shepherding the congregation and in caring for their own families. We pray with them that the Lord would bring more people to this body and to share in worshipping the Lord with them. May God build his church in Cincinnati, in Dayton, and to the ends of the earth. Psalm 98:3, "He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God."

The visitation committee recommends that the committee be dismissed, having concluded its work.

Sincerely in Christ,

Jeff Brotherton, Dave Schisler, Adam Doerr (chair)