

It is already known that my presidency this year will be associated with the proposal of a change in the organizational structure of MWF.

I was fairly stunned when I was nominated from the floor and elected to the office of President at the 2023 retreat in Sterling. I had already served in most of the officer and coordinator positions (including president) and wasn't thinking about a repeat. That business meeting had been particularly uncomfortable with a pronounced reluctance among women present as well as others not in attendance (who had been approached by the nominating committee prior to the retreat) to serve as officers. As we were leaving the meeting, someone—I don't remember who—said to me in a low voice, "Perhaps you were elected 'for such a time as this.'"

It was obvious that something needed to change, and although ideas on the subject had floated around in my head for several years, I hadn't owned it as my responsibility, nor did I want to. After being elected I just wanted to kick the can down the road a bit further, but after a few weeks decided that the buck should stop here.

In the summer I asked a couple of women from my home church who I respect and whose opinions I value to talk through ideas and brainstorm with me. During or soon after that meeting an idea began to gel to change the organizational structure to more closely resemble our presbytery camp committees which oversee all aspects of the camps behind the scenes.

Throughout the year, I have been keenly aware that I am just one individual and should not be making major decisions unilaterally that impact so many people. Phrases like "Don't throw the baby out with the bath water!" and "decently and in order" have been reverberating through my head. I have prayed for guidance and wisdom.

In early October I shared my thoughts with the Executive Committee via Zoom. It was agreed by consensus to survey the women of the presbytery regarding a change in structure. It was suggested that a Facebook post might not be an appropriate means of initiating such communication, but rather, to speak to a designated contact at each congregation and ask them share the survey with the women of their congregation. During the last half of October I compiled a list of contacts for every congregation in the presbytery, then called most of those individuals personally before emailing them an introductory letter and survey link for them to distribute. Included in the survey was a question asking women if they would be willing to serve on a standing committee. We also solicited feedback on the use of coordinator reports as program segments. A follow up email with the survey link encouraging participation was sent November 6 via the MWF distribution list.

90 women representing 23 congregations responded to the survey. 87 of the 90 were in favor of the proposed change. 10 women expressed interest in serving on the committee.

After reviewing the responses during a Zoom meeting December 4, the Executive Committee decided to move forward with transition. A subcommittee drafted new bylaws which were approved by the Executive Committee at a January 26 meeting for distribution.

Survey responses regarding the use of various reports as program segments were across the board and will be provided to the new standing committee for consideration going forward (assuming the bylaws are passed at the upcoming meeting).

I don't think I can overstate how grateful I am for the patience and cooperation of the current Executive Committee who accepted their positions last spring, not knowing what lie ahead or of the several Zoom meetings they would be asked to attend. And although the changes in bylaws and the slate of committee members have not yet been voted on at the time of this writing, I am also grateful for each of the women who volunteered to be a part of the standing committee and am looking forward to—by God's grace—getting the new system established.

I am also extremely grateful for the rich history of MWF and the tremendous examples of women who have worked diligently to serve the Lord and the RPCNA through our 100+ years of retreats and presbyterials. I pray and trust that the changes in structure will refresh and enhance the ongoing fellowship of the women of the Midwest Presbytery.

“Fear not, O Jacob my servant, Jeshurun whom I have chosen. For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.” Isaiah 44:2-4

Regarding the usual duties of the MWF President:

In the fall, I was in frequent communication with Elizabeth Reed and Bessie Van Kirk regarding the transfer of the treasury from Bessie to Elizabeth.

I was also in frequent communication with our 2024 Vice President and Program Coordinator, Julia Mann, and occasionally with the Stillwater ladies regarding the 2024 retreat. Julia and I decided not to put an ad in the Reformed Presbyterian Witness, but utilized the MWF Facebook page and the MWF email distribution list for publicity in late January. Reminders were sent late February when we also communicated via MW-Net.

In the first months of 2024 I communicated several times with Nominating Committee Chair, Jean Stewart.

I asked Lori Hemphill and Mary Lou Patterson about continued service as technology and assistant technology coordinators, with Rachel Borg and Laura Wallace about continuing to serve as Facebook administrators, and with Mitzie Van Horn about continued service as historian. Karen Copeland asked about the role of the assistant treasurer under the

proposed changes. All these women have agreed to continue serving in their respective roles.

At the time of this writing I have not yet secured a parliamentarian for the upcoming business meeting, but I have it on my to-do list with a month to go.

Per a vote at the 2023 retreat, our 2025 retreat is to take place in the western region of the presbytery. Colorado Springs has graciously accepted the honor and the responsibility of hosting the 2025 retreat.

It has been a full year. I thank the Lord for His many mercies in approaching change and in providing willing workers, and am looking forward to another MWF retreat and further service, however the Lord sees fit.

Respectfully submitted,

Rita Lyon
2023-2024 President