

2020 Living Water Association Ohio North East
Annual Meeting
NEOSOM Dean's Report

This year has seen several changes to our program, some intentional, some necessitated by COVID-19.

Kelly Gerstenberger, member of NEOSOM's Steering Committee, resigned due to other obligations, and Karen Adolphson joined the Committee as its newest member. The other members of the Steering Committee are Susi Kawolics (chair), Bertrice Wood, Diane Smith, Karen Brocco-Kish, Elizabeth Goodin, Tina Green, and Gene McAfee (dean).

The Steering Committee is always eager for new members. Anyone interested in serving a renewable two-year term is invited to contact the chair (susi.kawolics@gmail.com) or the dean (deanofschools@eoawraucc.org).

In August, NEOSOM received a grant from the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation of Radnor, PA, to cover a portion of the dean's salary and professional expenses for the next two years. This grant is the latest from the Carpenter Foundation, which has provided valuable financial assistance to our program over the past several years.

All of NEOSOM's courses are being taught online now, joining such peer programs as the New York School of Ministry, which has been an almost entirely online program for some years. Under non-COVID-19 conditions, there are occasional in-person gatherings for students in such programs, but course content is delivered entirely online. Given the large geographical area served by NEOSOM, online course delivery is clearly our future.

We had originally planned to offer UCC History and Polity, taught annually in the fall term, as a hybrid course, with three of the five sessions being held in person, and two being online. (Taught as a five-session Saturday course.) Working with Rip Noble, we've revamped polity into a regular eight-session course of 16 contact hours (the length of our basic courses -- polity was formerly a course and a half), all taught online. This is a first for polity.

We are offering five courses this fall, an unusually large number, in part due to the need of some students for specific courses, in part due to the demands of the regular three-year course rotation, in part to introduce a new course into our curriculum, and in part to reach out to a broader constituency with our program. The courses for the fall term are:

1. History and Polity of the United Church of Christ (team taught, coordinated by Gene McAfee);
2. Homiletics (an Accreditation/advanced course taught by Jeff Nelson);
3. Introduction to Biblical Studies (being taught by David Cleaver-Bartholomew as an Independent Study course for two students who need it to proceed with further Bible courses);

4. Old Testament 3A-B (a double course -- another first -- taught by Gene McAfee and is the first of our Ordination Track courses to be offered); and
5. Personal Ethics (taught by Sharon Alberson).

So far, our enrollment figures don't indicate that we've been especially successful drawing in new participants to our program who are not seeking any kind of credentialing. Intro to Biblical Studies has only two students, Personal Ethics has four, Homiletics has six, Polity has eight, and OT3 has nine students. We had hoped that an entirely online curriculum would increase our numbers; that may happen eventually, or people may be suffering from screen fatigue (or, worse, loss of employment). Publicity remains an ongoing challenge, which we are attempting to address by working with a video-production company used by the Northwest Association's Lay School for [their promotional video](#)

Work with peer programs from the Heartland Conference to coordinate our programs has slowed, but I continue to make our course offerings available to the deans and directors of the Conference's other education programs. We have had a few students cross-register from Northwest Association (and from us to them), but the numbers remain modest at this point.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gene McAfee". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Gene McAfee
Dean
September 16, 2020