

Moderator's Report
Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area
July 14, 2009

I have been a minister member of this presbytery for just over ten years, and I have now officially lived in Minnesota longer than I've lived anywhere in the world! I have enjoyed the friendships and collegiality across our presbytery. I am grateful for the faith that this presbytery had in a tiny Korean-based church plant that dared to dream of becoming a multicultural church. And now, I am humbled by this opportunity to serve you as moderator. In recent years our presbytery has made some substantive changes in leadership, structure and ways of relating to one another that have generated real improvements in our life together. What excites me most is the sense I get from our presbytery of an openness to rethink our identity and mission that makes sense in our present time.

Last Friday, July 10, 2009 marked the 500th anniversary of John Calvin's birth. The Reformed movement, of which Calvin was such a major figure, gave birth to Protestant congregations which were also called "evangelical churches." This came from the Greek *euangelion*, meaning "good news," not because the Roman Church did not have access to the gospel, but the way that the established church communicated the gospel – within a Thomistic, Aristotelian, scholastic and hegemonic framework bound up in a dead language (Latin) – itself did not embody good news in the Renaissance Age.

We need to ask some hard questions not about the content of our faith – after all, Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever – but about *the way* we are communicating our ancient faith in our contemporary world. Unlike the Quran in which Arabic is enshrined as holy writ (or the Vulgate throughout medievalism), the Bible requires translation in every time and in every place, and the church is the living community of believers that does that basic work of translation, that the world might believe. Part of the reason that all of the mainline churches are experiencing massive decline is our inability to communicate our message in a winsome and compelling way in this globalized, multicultural and multi-epistemological age. In other words, 500 years after Calvin: compelling content, boring and outdated packaging. Royal Typewriter went bankrupt because they thought they were in the typewriter business, rather than the communication business. I believe that the Presbyterian Church is in the gospel business that is reformed and always reforming, not in the regulatory religious bureaucracy business.

It's not all our fault. We were all trained to lead 20th century churches in a 21st century world. The genius of our tradition though is that we are free to always reform our way to new and innovative ways of sharing our faith, remembering the hallmarks of the Reformation: *sola scriptura, sola fide, sola gratia*. As long as we have the Scriptures, our faith and God's grace, we can rethink our identity and mission to be bearers of good news to a fast-changing world in desperate need of salvation in the Ancient of Days. The content of Jesus as Lord must endure. The packaging must always be open to renegotiation. Therefore the church affirms "*ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda,*"

that is, “the church reformed, always reforming,” according to the Word of God and the call of the Spirit.

To that end, one of our top priorities must be to reform the way we gather as presbyters. I believe that every meeting of presbytery can and should reflect the Great Ends of the Church:

1. The proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind
2. The shelter, nurture and spiritual fellowship of the children of God
3. The maintenance of divine worship
4. The preservation of the truth
5. The promotion of social righteousness
6. The exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world

We can improve the quality and experience of our presbytery meetings if we gather for:

- Proclamation and **worship** (Great Ends 1 and 3)
- **Fellowship** (Great End 2)
- Theological reflection and **discernment** (Great End 4)
- The “**business**” of social righteousness (Great End 5)

If we do all these well, then we begin to live into Great End 6 and “exhibit the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.” In my next communication I will try to spell out how we can fill this vision out more fully, but this presbytery meeting is an initial attempt to move in that direction, and I’m especially grateful to the Presbytery Council’s Worship Task Force that has worked with me to generate many of these ideas. We affirm that while the local church is the fullest embodiment of “church,” that other ecclesial bodies such as presbytery are also “church,” and therefore, framing the whole meeting as a worship service makes theological sense. Having said that, I know a number of presbyteries that have tried this for many years, and it can seem just as artificial and contrived in actual practice. There is no right way, unfortunately – just our wrestling together with faith and integrity.

These are some of the questions we struggled with on your behalf:

- Can we celebrate the eucharist at every presbytery meeting, signifying sacramentally our unity that is so much more profound than anything that might hurt or divide us?
- Can every presbytery worship reflect the diversity of the global Presbyterian community, including the historic Black Presbyterian tradition, mindful of our Reformed emphasis on the sovereignty of God over ALL people and nations, and the priesthood of ALL believers?
- Can we recover the practice of testimony and include one in every service from a pastor or leader/member of one of our local congregations, that we might practice being the body of Christ AS a presbytery, living into the ethos that when one congregation suffers the whole body suffers, and when one rejoices we all rejoice?
- Can we invite, time to time, some creative, innovative dreamers, thinkers, tinkerers, risk-takers and prophets who might preach a timely word to our presbytery at such a time as this?

We have the opportunity to celebrate the wonderful people and gifts that are already part of our Presbyterian congregations and presbytery. I invite our presbyters to wrestle with me until we together wrest a blessing from God for the kingdom's sake.

Jin S. Kim, Moderator of PTCA and Pastor of Church of All Nations