

Moderator's Report  
Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area  
January 9, 2010

**The rationale for our new Presbytery meeting format**

Since July of last year we have attempted to remind ourselves that presbytery too is church, according to the Reformed tradition. If that is the case, then presbytery must not be the locus primarily of business, but of common worship and common mission. First, a word about our new focus on worship. It is as a worshiping community that the business of the presbytery is conducted. With that understanding the Presbytery Council appointed the Worship Task Force to integrate the presbytery's business into a liturgy of worship. Since July, every presbytery meeting has included both the Word, either in sermon or testimony form, and Sacrament, in the Lord's Supper, to strengthen our communion with one another as the body of Christ. We give special thanks to God for the host congregations of Church of the Master in Coon Rapids, First Pres in Shakopee and Christ Pres in Edina who have offered their hospitality and unique gifts to lead us in worship (by the way, we will also include the gifts of those congregations that do not have the physical capacity to host a presbytery meeting, like my own church). Today we continue this practice by having Church of the Way lead us once more, and we celebrate with them their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a thriving congregation. We have been enriched in sharing these mutual blessings, and are reminded that this is one of the primary reasons we exist as a presbytery: to share our gifts and blessings with one another.

The second focus has been integrating our common sense of mission into our gatherings. The Council perceived the Six Great Ends of the Church as an elegant and still relevant "mission statement" for our presbytery and its constituent congregations and ministries. Every meeting has had a theme, and this being our 4<sup>th</sup> meeting of the presbytery year means that we will be considering theologically the 4<sup>th</sup> Great End: the preservation of the truth. As before, we will gather into small groups to ask:

- What is your ministry's "best practice" in providing for "**the preservation of the truth**" that you would want to share with others?
- What can we do as a Presbytery to provide for "**the preservation of the truth**"?

These Six Great Ends appear in the first chapter of the Book of Order, and remind us that the mission of God transcends gender, race, ethnicity, ideology, orientation and culture, and therefore leads us to affirm that our common convictions are greater than our various differences. At our next meeting in March at North Como Church, the Rev. Dr. Mark Lomax of First Afrikan Presbyterian Church in Atlanta will preach on the Fifth Great End: the promotion of social righteousness, so don't miss it. As always, I encourage my fellow presbyters to bring your best ideas to any one of us on the Council.

**Rethinking the parish concept**

Did you know that within the bounds of certain presbyteries across the country formal parishes exist? It could be anywhere from two to a dozen congregations that have a special relationship and greater intimate sharing than regular presbytery meetings might provide. We are past the time when the average presbytery, as an institutional entity, has the ability to form a new church, or even to seriously help redevelop a declining church. And it's not just due to a lack of funding. I am not unaware that we tried to form smaller "clusters" of congregations a couple of years ago

after the Summit to foster a greater sense of connectedness, but many perceived this to be a top-down approach, and churches seemed to lose interest quickly until the project was completely abandoned, despite the best efforts of the original planners. What I envision is a number of congregations coming together organically, some with staff development expertise, some with community organizing experience, some with financial resources, congregations with various charisms coming together as a parish to share in worship, mission, fellowship, but the most intriguing possibility of all: helping to form vital and robust new congregations for this new century. Lest we forget, many congregations in this presbytery were started by other congregations, not the presbytery, but we have basically lost that tradition by adopting a heavily centralized bureaucratic model from the 1950s and 60s. We need to go back to the future and have churches forming new churches, and even rallying around congregations that want to redevelop and transform but need the help of more vital congregations. Of course, the input of the Church Development Team and the Presbytery Council will be an important part of this initiative. Anyone interested in deeper conversation about the parish concept is welcome to contact me as an initial step.

### **Presbyters need healing too**

In the 10+ years I have been a member of this presbytery I have witnessed some bruising battles over some of the most contentious issues yet unresolved in our denomination. But it's not just issues with an ideological or theological bent. Real people have been hurt over the many reorganizations that our presbytery has gone through, the severe staff cuts a couple of years ago, the floor maneuvers around the General Assembly commissioner nominating process, the "command and control" type ethos that some committees and staff seemed to operate under, the lack of follow up and follow through after a presbytery-wide Summit in 2006...too many to list here. A couple of years ago we attempted to have a healing service of worship during one of our presbytery meetings. It was well planned and thoughtfully arranged, but I did not have the sense that we as presbyters were ready to share our hurt with one another, nor that the time and space were conducive for such mutual vulnerability. There are some things that have changed for the better since then. As I mentioned earlier, we have been functioning much more as a worshipping community in the past year, with a common mission statement binding us together at each meeting. We also have a new leader who is not only an executive, but a pastor to us all. We are on the cusp of hosting a General Assembly, which requires all of us, regardless of our backgrounds and affinities, to join together to offer the most gracious and loving hospitality that we can muster, with a sprinkling of that famous "Minnesota nice"! The presbytery council is preparing to incorporate a healing service of worship again during our March meeting at North Como. We wonder if this is not a kairos moment to invite God's balm of Gilead and the ministry of reconciliation to a presbytery that is known more for what divides us than what unites us. Please prayerfully prepare for the next meeting, and let us try to be a high-risk, low-anxiety presbytery!

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