

April 15, 2008

TO: Commissioners, Youth Advisory Delegates, Corresponding Members and Friends of the Synod of Lakes and Prairies

FROM: Phil Brown
Synod Executive

SUBJECT: The Meeting of the Synod Assembly
April 27 - 29, 2008

F-1.01 God's Mission

The sovereign mission of the one triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – gives substance and form to the Church's activity in the world....As the Church responds to God's gracious call, it participates in the divine mission....In its faithful mission, the church is assured of God's blessing and filled with hope in the fulfillment of God's purpose. Along with Christians everywhere, Presbyterians have no higher goal in life or in death than to live in covenant fellowship with the triune God, to embrace and serve God's mission, to glorify and enjoy God now and forever.

(Proposed Foundations of Presbyterian Polity)

This past weekend I participated in the installation of the Reverend Ken Gibson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as Vice-President of Mission Advancement at Hillcrest Family Services, a mission agency of the synod partnering with the United Methodist Church. I joined with the Methodist Bishop of Iowa and the ELCA Bishop of the Northeast Iowa Synod to help celebrate this very special occasion.

I would like to share with you some of my comments I expressed to those gathered in Dubuque because I believe our capacity and willingness to focus our energies on the mission of the church will make a hopeful and miraculous difference within the church and our lives.

Following my introductory greetings I offered:

Just a word about one of the significant challenges we all face today in our churches and in our communities...our nation and our globe. It is the challenge of fragmentation. Then, a word about the mission of the church and the vital opportunity it provides us to discover a new unity in Christ that appears at the moment to be beyond the realm of possibility. I believe we have a desperate need in our time to demonstrate the unity made possible in Jesus Christ and this issue is not just a Presbyterian concern.

In the current issue of Christian Century magazine (April 8th) Martin Marty provides some amazing statistics about the expansion of the number of denominations on this planet.

The article indicates that in:

1800 – 500 denominations existing

2000 – 33,700

2008 – 39,000

2025 – 55,000 denominations or 2 – 3 news ones each day.

*One of the nine ordination vows made by Presbyterian ministers, elders and deacons reads like this: **Do you promise to further the peace, unity and purity of the church?** We have allowed the emphasis of that vow, I believe, to become narrowed to the word “purity”. Who’s right? Who’s wrong? Who’s in? Who’s out? Who’s faithful? Who’s evil? Those who are like us we treat with love and generosity. Those who are different, we seem to give permission to treat with disdain, with disrespect, with acrimony. We build walls. We readily apply labels, we walk away from...we form new churches and new denominations.*

*The question: **Where is it that we discover...where do we live out and bear witness to the unity to be found in Jesus Christ?***

*The response: **The unity of the Church is a gift of its Lord and finds expression in its faithfulness to the mission to which Christ calls it. (G-4.0201)***

In recent years as the Presbyterian Church seems more and more fragmented by endless, divisive debates around hot-button issues, there has been a faithful emerging image of unity quietly bubbling up from those engaged in the mission of the church.

The response to the disaster caused by Katrina is one example. How many stories are being told by those who have made the trip, spent a week or two with persons from neighboring churches or states...persons with whom they never thought they would share a ride or work along side...persons of divergent perspectives. Yet, serving together a common mission, barriers are overcome, relationships are built, and the unity of Christ is discovered and celebrated. I am certain you can identify similar experiences of the power of mission that leads to a new unity.

So, Ken...as you seek to fulfill your calling to “advance the mission” of Hillcrest Family Services, I hope and pray that you will be mindful, not only of expanding this vital mission of the church and growing its resources to serve the incredible needs of youth...but that you will do so in ways that encourage the staff, the volunteers, the partners, to engage in ways that build also a visible expression of the Body of Christ...so that in the end, people will experience and bear witness to a new unity made possible in Jesus Christ. amen.

(Ken Gibson joined us during the January meeting of the synod and will be with us at the spring meeting as well.)

Regarding this mailing...

This is the second mailing in preparation for the spring meeting of the synod. Only a few papers are included:

- The **Financial Statement** for the first quarter
- The **Stated Clerk's Report**

The **Minutes** of the winter meeting of the synod were sent by email to all of you for whom we have an address. A hard copy will be made available at the synod meeting. Also, a copy of the **2007 Audit Report** will be available at the meeting.

The written report from Manley Olson, the synod's representative to the **General Assembly Council**, will be distributed at the meeting

The **Administrative Review Task Force for the Presbytery of Dakota** will make a progress report. Members of the Task Force are scheduled to host an open meeting for members of the Presbytery of Dakota at Devil's Lake, N.D. prior to their spring meeting, May 2nd. They will be preparing a final report and recommendations for the fall meeting of the synod.

Please consider matters that will be help you continue to prepare for your role as a synod commissioner or Youth Advisory Delegate.

- **Prior to the April meeting, check out the synod's Web site, www.lakesandprairies.org.** Continue to explore this site. It is a helpful refresher for everyone. you to learn what you can about the synod, its ministry and mission in order to serve as a faithful interpreter to your presbytery.
- Don't forget to check out the blog (www.myspace.com/synodoflakesandprairies) and the interactions. Check out the music – the result of Duane's searching for Christian musicians from within each presbytery. (Please be aware that categories posted at the top of the synod's page are not a part of or under the control of the synod.)
- If you are not currently receiving the synod's e-newsletter, **Keeping in Touch**, please let Mary Taaffe know during the synod meeting.

We have yet to receive a response from the following regarding participation in the spring meeting:

Commissioners

- Burke Landrum, CN
- Rogene Crawford, D

YAD

Ashleigh Star, MRV

PW Representative – Elizabeth Swee

Presbytery Staff – Bart Brenner