

GENERAL PRESBYTER'S REPORT
October 22-23, 2010

Jesus said, "All Authority in heaven and on the earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And remember I am with you always, to the end of the age."

As congregations and individuals, we are all called by God to be "making disciples." In order to be "making disciples," we ourselves have to be growing as disciples and being disciples. As Stan Ott often says, "We have to be the people of God before we can do the work of the people of God."

A large part of our October Presbytery meeting is going to be about growing in faith, being and making disciples. This theme will be reflected in worship, in time with John McCall about "Growing in Faith" and "Being Sent." Becca Young will share her call to teach at the seminary in Jakarta, Indonesia and to help with disaster relief. You will have time to reflect and discuss together how you understand your own growth and being sent, along with that of your church. We will also hear about opportunities within our Presbytery to learn, grow and serve.

We used to think about "making disciples of all nations" as going across the ocean. We followed God's call to do that and are still sending out mission co-workers today. The good news is that many places where missionaries from our churches took the gospel are growing fast. In fact, they are growing faster than we are. Often, I talk with dedicated Presbyterians whose children and grandchildren are not attending church. There are new people moving into our communities who do not go to church. We have become a mission field. We have more in common with the early church in some ways than the good old days of the 50s, where if we built a church, people would just come and fill the pews. How do we become missionaries for God in our own communities?

First, we need to be growing in our own faith. When I was a child in Black Mountain, I heard Billy Graham challenge my parents that if they spent time at home studying to become a better teacher or businessman, they were to spend the same amount of time studying to become better Christians. Then he challenged us young people, to read the entire Bible. I found it so exciting. When I watch students in the School for the Laity studying scripture, theology, worship and more, I see people transformed in their faith. It is "spiritual energy." We and our churches need to be challenged to grow in God's grace, joy and energy. We need to pray for ourselves, each other, our churches and the world. God will give us the energy to "go and make disciples." We are to be doing the work of the people of God.

Some of us will reverse this process and be about doing before we are about growing and being. It is on Mission trips or through the voice of others that we see God's face and God's work in the world. But it can't end with just doing, we must nurture the revelation and grow in the faith.

God calls us all to "Go and Make Disciples." We worship a God who sends. It is not just about "me and Jesus." It is about being God's disciples in our everyday world. That means we reach out to those who do not know Jesus or have a faith community and we demonstrate God's love to a hurting world. It means we are to be welcoming to the visitors and strangers. We are not to be just friendly, but to be places where people can make friends and be invited to dinner.

Maybe it is my previous business career that says that if we are in a growing area and we are about inviting, welcoming, and making disciples, we should have an overall growth as a presbytery in worship attendance and membership. 13 Presbyteries in the PCUSA showed growth in 2009. We had about 43 large, medium, small and very small churches in our presbytery that grew in membership and worship attendance. In 2009 in our presbytery we lost 324 people in worship attendance (about 3 per church) and 197 in membership. With God's help we could be more about inviting and sharing God's love. We might even become one of those presbyteries that is growing as we reach out to make disciples. I pray so.

Being a disciple means opening our eyes to see what God is doing in our midst, through us and others in our churches. I am praying that God will bring renewal for all our churches. I believe God is powerfully at work in our lives and the lives of our churches. I could write pages of ways I see God at work in our churches and this Presbytery.

- Banner Elk started a new Sunday evening contemporary worship for college students and others. Worship at 6:05 is now in its second year.
- Buladean had a "Pig Picking" and invited their neighbors. The youth group from Spruce Pine came to enjoy the celebration with a youth from Buladean, who had been included in the Spruce Pine Mission Trip. Spruce Pine youths were a witness to God's grace to the congregation at Buladean.
- Third Street started an outreach to a local school that was struggling. They have tutors and special programs for parents and are helping folks deal with health issues in the area.
- The Waldensian Presbyterian Church sponsored a community-wide music festival. The festival highlighted a major recording artist of children's music, Thomas Moore, and a major recording artist of social justice music, Bryan McFarland.
- Shelby Presbyterian has a group of people participating in 90 days of prayer.
- Warren Wilson and First Hickory hosted events where Luis Perez, the International Peacemaker for Bolivia, spoke.
- Highlands First and Lowell both hosted Presbyterian Women's gatherings this fall.
- Marshall Presbyterian hosted an event for the Presbyterian Home for Children.

Share your good news at the Speak Out. Come, learn and grow at the Presbytery meeting. We are challenged in all our churches. As First Church Morganton would say, "*Grow and Go Deeper in Faith.*"

BE ABOUT GROWING AND GOING, AND MAKING DISCIPLES!